

Over-Looking Anxiety (Philippians 4:1-9)

Philippians: Joyful Unity in the Gospel

Zionsville Fellowship | August 2, 2026 | Aaron Lewis

I have the privilege of getting to open God's Word this morning as we look at the first 9 verses of Philippians chapter 4. These are likely some well-known verses to you all, verses you may have memorized previously or hidden in your heart to combat fear, anxiety, worry, or stress. So I have good news for you today if you arrived this morning feeling particularly overwhelmed by the circumstances of your life or what the future may hold for you. The theme of Philippians has been joyful unity in the gospel, and that remains prevalent in our text today. But the emphasis is even more on how the joy of the gospel is the best weapon we have to combat anxiety. Let's read the text and then we'll pray.

Philippians 4:1-9: Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. PRAY!

If you've been following Christ for some time, then there are surely some promises God makes to us in Scripture that you hold especially dear. Looking back over the last five years of my life, one of the promises of Scripture the Lord has helped me to treasure comes from Romans 8:28, where Paul reminds us that God is working ALL things together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose. ALL things! That means not just good things are working together for my good and your good... but even hard things, sad things, tragic things. God is so sovereign, that he can even take things meant for evil and use them for his purpose. Kids, do you remember the story of Joseph in the OT? Was his story over when he got sold by his brothers into slavery? Not at all. God used his being unfairly sold into slavery by his brothers to then allow Joseph to ascend to become Pharaoh's right hand man and save his own father and his brothers who betrayed him from famine!

That same promise of God is true in my life and in yours. And in the last 5 years, I have dealt with more anxiety than I would have ever asked for. Most of it was related to Jenna being pregnant in the ICU with Reagan and really sick with Covid, and then in the months that followed Reagan's premature birth at 26 weeks. But look at us now! God has been so kind to us through all of that. Jenna recovered fully. Reagan is 4.5 years old and is a walking miracle. You'll probably see that string bean skipping around after the service with half of a chocolate donut smeared on her face, living her best life. Praise God! So I

must have nothing to be anxious about after that, right? Unfortunately, that's not the case. I've still been struggling.

And it's not just me. You don't need me to tell you that Americans are more anxious than we've ever been as a society. It's been trending that way for quite some time. Nearly 40 million adults (or 1 in 5) have been diagnosed with anxiety, and that number jumps to nearly 32% or 1 in 3 adolescents between 13 and 18 years old. 37% of Americans feel their lives are out of control, with young adults most heavily impacted. It is reported that 1 in 3 Americans is facing an existential crisis, and that number jumps to over 50% among Gen Z. Here's one more... 79% of Americans planned a significant reset for their mental, physical, or financial health at the midway point of this year. 4 out of 5! We are an anxious culture!

One of the main ways that anxiety steals the joy of our salvation is that it pulls our eyes down from the future horizon of eternity and fixes them down here to what is right in front of us. We become fixated on our circumstances, the unknowns of the future that are beyond our control. What if this outcome happens? What if that appointment doesn't go how I want? What if the test results are exactly what we fear? I'd like to ask you to identify right now in your own heart and mind what is the specific thing, person, or situation that is causing you the most anxiety (PAUSE... got it?) and then consider this question – how is my anxiety about this situation keeping me from living TODAY in light of eternity? We know Jesus is coming back... we look forward to that. So are we just supposed to grit our teeth, endure our anxious thoughts, and simply white-knuckle it through life until we die or Jesus returns? Is that what the life of following Christ should look like? Of course not. But at times that's a pretty accurate description of how I've felt at times over these last 5 years. How do we grow in that? We cannot let our anxiety keep us from living TODAY in light of eternity, in light of the joy of our salvation. How do we rightly live today before God with our eyes lifted up toward the future horizon of eternity? The answer is – water skiing.

OK, maybe not the answer you were expecting, but stay with me because I think this visual is quite helpful. Quick show of hands here, kids included. How many of you are able to water ski on two skis, meaning you have been able to get up out of the water and stay on your two skis for 10 seconds or more? Of those who just raised your hands, how many of you are able to slalom (one ski!)? Pros! Now, I'll address a different group. There may be some amongst the crowd who have tried to water ski but been unsuccessful. Don't raise your hand, but you know who you are. You may have memories of being in the cold lake water, teeth chattering in the early morning cool temperatures, trying desperately to remember the 13 things you have to remember to do at the same time to make it up out of the water. "Stay tucked, lean back, arms straight, don't stand up too early, let the boat pull you up, keep your legs bent, look up, don't shorten your arms, hold on tight, take a deep breath, count to 5 before you stand up, smile...you got this!" And this is all while eight other people in the boat all record you on their phones, telling you how close you were to getting it. It can be a humbling experience.

Let's say you miraculously make it up out of the water... well, then the fun starts. You've seen these poor souls skiing around the lake bent forward, unable to find their balance, hanging on for dear life while

their lower back is spasming after 4 minutes of trying to find balance while roller skating on an icy driveway. How do you find that balance and stability needed to not faceplant into the oncoming waves?

The difference between new skiers on roller skates and those who can slalom with sharp turns on one ski is that the experienced skier knows how to stabilize when on top of the water. Yes, the experienced skier uses the very small fin on the back of each ski to gain stability. Water skis are about 6 feet long or so. That back fin is about 2.5 inches deep and maybe twice as long. It's tiny. But keeping that back fin in the water gives the skier a stable base to work from. You can then cut and make turns; you can navigate small waves without getting off balance. The key is leaning back, which lifts your eyes to look up toward the horizon. This posture with our knees bent, a firm foundation, and eyes lifted up not on what is directly in front of us but slightly up towards the horizon is what allows the experienced skier to glide around the lake comfortably. It's also what aids our anxious hearts – stability from a firm foundation of faith and eyes lifted to the horizon of eternity.

This is what chapter 4 of Paul's letter to the Philippians helps us to find - that stability in Christ. That is Paul's exhortation to the Philippians in verse 1. "Stand firm in the Lord," my beloved. That's what we are all called to. In terms of our faith, we want to be the skier slaloming across the lake with a firm foundation of faith and balance amidst the waves of anxiety life is throwing at us. To teach us that posture, Paul doesn't begin with breathing techniques (though those are quite helpful to calm my heart when it's racing). He doesn't start with a list of 10 steps which you might find in books and blogs today. Paul handles the specifics of our anxiety with a HUGE eternal truth that actually comes from the end of chapter 3. How can Paul be a rock in the faith while he is constantly persecuted for his beliefs? He's beaten, shipwrecked, floating at sea, stoned multiple times, left for dead, bitten by venomous snakes, thrown in jail (I can keep going). And yet he's joyful in the gospel and a pillar of faith in the early church. This is possible because, as Phil 3:20 tells us, he is a *citizen of heaven*. He was not in heaven already when he wrote this letter to the Philippians. No, he was in jail! But he knew the truth, that because he was follower of Christ then he was *already* a citizen of heaven. And the result of holding on to that precious promise means you already have a firm foundation of faith that results in peace. You already have it! If you are a Christian, then your eternal salvation is secure. It's bought and paid for! It's done! Nothing can overcome the blood paid by the lamb. No debt is too big. Jesus does not lose one of his sheep. If you are a Christian, then your citizenship in heaven is secure. AMEN!

That is the secure foundation from which we build. It's the fin on the back of the water ski giving us stability. We may know that we are citizens of heaven in our heads. Holy Spirit, make it sink down further into our hearts. This truth helps us to over-look our anxiety (the title of this message!) so we can have peace. That's what anxious people want... we want peace! This text helps us to see how we can obtain that peace. As we mentioned earlier, Paul exhorts us to stand firm in the Lord in verse 1. So how do we do it? His answer starts in verses 2-3, where we begin by pursuing peace with one another (MP1). **Because we are citizens of heaven, we must pursue peace with each other.**

We don't get a lot of insight into what Euodia & Syntyche are dealing with, and I think that's by design so that you and I don't use it as a measuring stick for what's important and what isn't. No the point is that there's something going on, and they are not in agreement about it. Paul admonishes them that they

are to agree “in the Lord.” What a great phrase! Paul does not exhort them to simply agree. He isn’t telling them to keep debating until one of them “wins” the argument. No, his appeal is for unity. How can there be unity if these two believers disagree so sharply? I mean, for Paul to catch wind of their disagreement while far away and in prison must have meant this was no small thing. Perhaps it was a very significant disagreement, something that had been dragging on for months and months. So how are they supposed to suddenly start agreeing? The text gives us three clues.

The first observation is a quick one. Paul does not often name specific names outside of the introductions and conclusions of his letters. Sure, if you read through all of his epistles he does from time to time name specific names when giving exhortations. Sometimes they are to call out the unfaithful actions of people in the church. That is not the case here. The use of their specific names is evidence of friendship! He knows them personally. His call is for unity within this church body. His tone here is one of friendship as we see in how he begins this section in verse 1 of chapter 4, referring to all of them as “my brothers whom I love and long for” and “beloved.” These are familial words strategically chosen by Paul to make his appeal to unity *as a family*.

Second, Paul tells Euodia and Syntyche that they are to agree “in the Lord.” The Greek translates to something like “being of the same mind.” If they disagree so strongly about something, what can they be of the same mind about? Well, THE GOSPEL, as we see in verse 3. As my seminary professor liked to say, “the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” The gospel is the main thing. I know that word can get thrown around so much at times that we can almost just gloss over it. Resist that temptation to be callous to the gospel. It is the greatest news imaginable for you and for me, giving hope and life where apart from Christ there was only sin and death. And emphasizing unity in the gospel is not just a fad in the church today. We see it elsewhere, perhaps most famously by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 – “For I delivered to you as of FIRST IMPORTANCE what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” We may have different views on the continuation of spiritual gifts, but we can rejoice together in the empty tomb. We may have different views of church governance or baptism or other important topics, but we can together praise God that our names are written in the book of life, just like Paul writes at the end of verse 3.

Third, the way to find agreement in the Lord sometimes requires a companion, a counselor, a wise friend. In verse 3, Paul calls for a true companion to help these sisters in Christ, yet again appealing to the unity they maintain in the gospel. Euodia and Syntyche are to be reminded by this true companion that they’ve done the more important things together, namely laboring side-by-side in the gospel. Around these main things, they can and should be united. The lesser things, including whatever they disagree on, should not be cause for division.

This exhortation from Paul to pursue peace with one another has direct application in our daily lives today. When conflict arises between brothers and sisters in the church, it can be difficult to deal with. It can lead to anxiety around what used to be a close relationship now being uncomfortable. Paul’s notes here can be helpful considerations for us as we seek to pursue peace with each other. We can remember that when we are dealing with conflict with a brother or sister in Christ, we should do so with

a tone of friendship. When we have Christ in common, we seek to honor him first and foremost, above all else. And we seek to help one another arm-in-arm to grow as his disciples as well. Helping to keep the tone of our words and interactions as Christ-honoring is the fact that we have the main thing in common, the gospel of Jesus Christ. And for those occasions when we need additional help to regain our joyful unity in the gospel, you may need to bring in a true companion to help bring reconciliation. In these ways, our disagreements with other believers should look different to the world who does not have Christ in common. That may be a helpful diagnostic question to ask yourself if you are on the right track. If you are struggling to pursue and attain peace with another believer, does your interaction with that person look any different than two non-believers? If not, try implementing these three observations from Paul.

The last thing I'll mention is that the Bible does have a category for cutting off relationship with another believer. Jesus discusses this process in Matthew 18. The big difference there is that Matthew 18 is talking about when a brother or sister SINS AGAINST YOU. You respond by going directly to the offending party and seek to work it out just the two of you. That keeps rumors and misunderstandings from multiplying and keeps conflict from spreading. The objective there is restoration of the offending brother or sister back to the proper path of discipleship. 1 Corinthians 5 also talks about how to address a situation where a brother or sister in your church is committing a sin, that you shouldn't associate with an unrepentant CHRISTIAN after addressing the sin issue. Like Matthew 18, the goal of speaking the truth in love here is to restore the brother or sister to the church. But this is NOT the situation with Euodia and Syntyche. They were disagreeing about something; there is no mention of one of them sinning against the other.

So we see how our heavenly citizenship helps us to pursue peace with each other. **(MP2) Our citizenship also compels us to pursue the peace that comes from God.** We see this in verses 4-7, where Paul maps out 4 distinct commands to help us know what it looks like to pursue the peace that comes from God. Are you feeling anxious about something this morning? Have you been praying and asking God for peace? Are you longing for these anxious thoughts and emotions to be soothed in Jesus? Paul outlines four actions to take.

But wait Aaron, you said earlier that Paul doesn't give us a step-by-step guide to overcoming anxiety. This is bigger than overcoming anxiety. These exhortations from Paul are the steps taken that, by the Spirit, reorient us (heart, mind, body, and soul!) to receive the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. It comes from Him! And keep in mind, these commands are sandwiched between a truth, that if you are in Christ then you are ALREADY a citizen of heaven, and a promise in verse 7 – that if you do these things, God will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Let's look at each of these four commands.

First in verse 4, Paul tells us to rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! There aren't emojis in the Greek text but repetition is one means by which you highlight something as very important. How do you obtain the peace of God? You rejoice! Do you want to break the chains of repeated anxious thoughts that pull you down? Rejoice in the Lord! Are you struggling with the despair of thinking things may never get better or never change? Rejoice in the Lord. Is Paul suggesting that we should minimize

all feelings of worry and walk around with a big cheesy smile on our face? Whenever someone asks us how we are doing, do we always have to give a big thumbs up and say “Great!” even when we are battling grief and despair? No, of course we can be genuine about how we are doing. And yet, even our moments of raw grief, despair, and legitimate worry are held in light of our eternal citizenship in heaven. In the loss of loved ones, we mourn. We rightly mourn the fact that by sin death entered into the world and disrupted life as it was meant to be lived in Eden. We mourn being at least temporarily separated from those we love. Yet we also don’t stay in that spot forever. As citizens of heaven, we know that Jesus will return to rightly rule and reign again. He will redeem every tear that has been shed in sadness and loss. That is what it means to rejoice IN THE LORD. So that first weapon against anxiety is always rejoicing in the Lord, which grows our peace from God.

The second weapon against anxiety comes from the exhortation in verse 5. Because the Lord is at hand, Paul tells us we are to let our reasonableness be known to everyone. This word “reasonableness” is a difficult one to translate in part because of how infrequently it appears in the NT. It is meant to convey a sense of gentleness that is not self-exalting but grounding. It can also be understood as a reference to the stability we have as citizens of heaven. Because of our citizenship and the promise of eternity with God, our reasonableness and stability should be evident. Our highs in this life on earth are not our ultimate highs, and our lowest lows are not the end of our story in light of eternity. Practically, this means we don’t source all of our joy from getting a promotion at work. When our team clinches the championship game of the end-of-season tournament, we cheer and thank God for the blessing it is, but it isn’t the never-ending source of our eternal joy. In the same way, our lowest lows do not completely decimate us. Even when faced with sickness leading to our death, we know that in Christ it is not eternal death to die. Through the cross, death is made to be a doorway to eternity with Jesus. In these ways, our highest highs and lowest lows are seen through the lens of our heavenly citizenship, which gives us stability and peace in all circumstances.

The third and fourth commands from Paul in verses 6 & 7 go hand-in-hand. We are called to not be anxious about anything and to take these requests to God in thankful prayer. In doing so, the peace of God in verse 7 will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. These are some of the most familiar verses in all of Philippians. You may have them memorized so you can meditate on them regularly. It’s further proof that Paul is no self-help guru, at least not in the way our society today expects any self-help expert to talk. Are you feeling anxious? Paul says, “do not be anxious about anything!” Thanks, Paul.... I’ve tried that. What else should I be doing? We have to understand these verses further to get what Paul is communicating to us. There are two ideas here to consider briefly.

First, we should be comforted that the Lord, the God of the universe, cares enough about us that we would be invited to bring our requests to him. Consider this...when we pray, are we bringing something to God’s attention that he isn’t aware of already? God is not relying on us to be his eyes and ears in the sense that he can’t quite get to everything he wants to. He’s not some kind of overworked manager with a few billion direct reports. So why are we commanded to bring our prayers and supplication to him? What is the purpose? It is two-fold. By going to God in prayer, we profess our utter dependence on him for anything good in our life. And while bringing him our requests with THANKSGIVING, it helps

keep our lives before God in the correct posture of dependence with gratitude. It is this posture that allows us to receive the peace of God in all circumstances.

So Paul tells us not to be anxious but to instead replace those swirling, worrisome thoughts that are stuck on repeat in our heads with thankful supplication. We bring our troubles to God in prayer because he wants to hear from us. We're not making him aware of something he doesn't already know. He invites us to ask, and we are to do it with thankful hearts. This side of heaven, our hearts can both be anxious and thankful for the gospel at the same time. Isn't it true that if your life was demanded from you today, you could still give thanks to God for eternal life through Christ? Anxiety pulls down our gaze to the troubled waters in front of us. It lifts that back stabilizing fin on your skis out of the water and knocks you off of your firm foundation of faith. Bringing our requests to God through thankful prayer replaces our anxious thoughts and refocuses them so we can see our present troubles in light of eternity. That is how we obtain this amazing promise in verse 7. When we do these things, the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

I can attest to God's faithfulness to this promise, and I know many in this room can share a similar testimony. I mentioned how the last 5 years have held more anxiety for me than I ever expected or wanted. Late in 2021, Jenna was about 23 weeks pregnant with our 4th child, Reagan. I was the first one to get sick with Covid, and Jenna fell ill a few days after me. We both endured about 10 days of fever, but being pregnant she got the worst of it. The Saturday after Thanksgiving, we got a pulse oximeter and saw Jenna's blood oxygen levels were in the low 90's, not where you want them to be, especially while pregnant. She went to see our OB and was admitted to the hospital for observation. As she needed more and more oxygen to keep up her O2 levels for Reagan, she was admitted to the ICU.

To make a long story short, Jenna was able to slowly improve and would have been ready to come home after a week, but Reagan's heart monitor had been showing more frequent and severe decelerations. Jenna moved from the ICU to the high risk unit at the women's hospital. She couldn't safely be discharged, and we had no answer when asking when she could return home to be with our 3 other children. Because of Covid, they were unable to visit her. Jenna and Reagan had to be monitored 24x7, with Jenna on full bed rest – being woken up in the night whenever the monitors shifted or if Reagan had a heart deceleration. Our anxiety was constant. So many unknowns, so many questions unanswered, so many "what ifs."

Often when Reagan experienced a heart deceleration, they wouldn't allow Jenna to eat for several hours in case she needed to go in for emergency surgery. On December 16th, 2021 -18 days after Jenna had been admitted, I came to see her in the evening. She hadn't been able to eat much that day, so I went to get us Chipotle. After a heavy meal, the doctor came in to our room right after the shift change and said he had seen a significant deceleration on Reagan's monitor and wanted to take her to surgery immediately. Realizing Jenna had just eaten dinner, he told us we were going to be scheduled for a c-section the following morning at 8am, assuming no more heart decelerations from Reagan during the night. The rest of that evening was a bit of a blur. Our immediate reaction was one of heightened anxiety. I can remember my Apple watch asking me if I was doing a workout since my heart rate was so

elevated. We had doctors coming in from the NICU talking to us about survival rates, risks of complications, all of it.

And then, the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.... We reached out to our small group and to many of you in this body asking for prayer. Prayer for no more heart decelerations so we wouldn't have to have emergency surgery. Prayers for the operation, for Reagan's safe delivery, for what would lie ahead in the days, weeks, and months to come. We slept little that night but Jenna made it through without needing emergency surgery. I'm telling you all of this to paint the picture of the mountain of worry we were facing. But that's not the whole picture. Our tearful prayers, the faithful prayers of so many of you lifted us up. We had peace... peace that didn't make sense. Our circumstances were dire, and yet we had peace. Peace that could only come from God himself. Brothers and sisters – God has PROMISED that he will be faithful to guard your hearts and your minds when you are anxious. I've told you one story of many in this room. I'm sure hundreds of you could testify to even more amazing examples of God's faithfulness to this promise. When we pursue peace from God through thankful prayer, He is able to bring peace to us despite our circumstances.

That is a miracle... it's a miraculous display of God's sovereignty and power over darkness. May we all be comforted by God's power shown in this way. Even if we aren't facing dire circumstances right now, in this world we WILL have trouble. The waves on the lake always seem to find us while skiing. How does God accomplish this? How is he able to break through our circumstances to meet us in our hour of need? It's the third main point of this text. **(MP3) Because we are citizens of heaven, we must pursue the God of peace (v.8-9).**

You see how the word order changes there from the second main point? We go from pursuing peace FROM God to pursuing the God of peace. That's not me trying to be clever; this is from the text in verse 9. Paul is careful to craft his message. Whatever is true, honorable, just, pure... think about these things. "What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the GOD OF PEACE will be with you." You don't get the peace from God without pursuing the God of peace. CS Lewis famously wrote in *Mere Christianity*, "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither." The goal of Christianity is not merely to reduce your anxiety. The worries of this life are unavoidable. Being a follower of Christ does not mean you will have less troubles. That is not what God promises. But we get the peace of God by pursuing the God of all peace, and that OVERWHELMS the anxieties we face.

What does it mean, exactly, to pursue the God of peace? That is not a complicated question to answer at a high level. To pursue anyone, we need to spend time with them. We find out what a person is like when we are around them over time. We find out about their character when we hear them speak and act. This is why believers place such an emphasis on the preaching and reading of God's Word. It is the Bible that reveals the character of God, through his words and actions. We learn of his great affection for us, his heart toward us as image bearers. And we learn how we are called to live our lives in a way to honor him. Verses 8 and 9 offer us one final command with a promise. The command is to practice what we have seen Paul doing as he follows Christ.

The list of virtues in verse 8 draws our attention, with the repetition of the phrase “whatever is... true, honorable, just etc.” These are the virtues a Christ-like life will imitate and dwell on. Gordon Fee, in his commentary on Philippians, points out that the verb in verse 8 exhorting us to “think about these things” has more depth to it than we mean when we say today “I’ll think about it.” What we often mean when we say today “I’ll think about it” is that I am considering doing what you’ve suggested, but I’ve not made up my mind yet. And often, we mean it as a gentle “no, I’m not going to do that but I don’t want to admit it to your face.” That’s not the ask from Paul here. Paul isn’t sitting in a jail cell moved by the Holy Spirit to write this letter to the Philippians only to close his letter with a weak ask to “kind of, sorta, maybe think about it?” No, Paul is calling them to give their minds to nobler things. This isn’t just a call to “think high thoughts...”. It’s more than that. It is a call to take into account all of the good they have known from their lives as long as it is conforms to Christ. Let’s quickly look at these six adjectives so we can know what sort of thoughts we are to dwell on.

First, whatever is TRUE. For Paul, what is true are the things of God and the gospel. It aligns with the first of the ten commandments of having no other gods before the one true God. To put anything else as our focus would be idolatry. Thus, our focus should be on the things of God and those things only.

Next whatever is NOBLE. This is a reference to things that are honorable, sacred, and worthy of respect. The same word is referenced in Proverbs 8:6, describing the kinds of things Wisdom herself would say.

Whatever is RIGHT. Like truth, this is defined by God and his character. This is not morally relative or based on man’s opinion.

Whatever is PURE. This word is often found grouped with descriptions of things in the temple that are regarded as sanctified or holy. These are things that are not tainted with evil. That was a helpful phrase for me... it’s pretty obvious that God does not want us to be involved with things that are clearly evil. A more discerning question would be to consider if your actions, thoughts, or words are *tainted* with evil? That would be a much broader category of things we may be willing to entertain but are called to avoid.

Whatever is LOVELY. Now Paul is casting a wider net. Other translations capture this phrase as “everything that we love.” This is less about morality and can include the things that are beautiful in this world, including art, music, and other aesthetics.

Whatever is COMMENDABLE. Similar to the previous adjective “lovely,” this is meant more broadly to include all the blessings of God that are enjoyed in this world, such as a conversation with a friend, a warm fire on a crisp fall evening, or the smell of barbecue smoking on a grill. This is underscored by Paul’s next comment about “if there is ANYTHING worthy of praise...” that is what we are to be focused on. These things reflect the nature of the God of peace. When we consider these things, we are pursuing him. And when we do these things faithfully, we are reassured of a great promise given to God’s people... that the *God of peace* will be with you. That promise is a treasure to our anxious hearts.

Let’s wrap up with some implications from the text today. The first comment I’d like to say to those of us in the room who are facing significant anxiety is that feeling anxious is not by itself a sin. To have an anxious thought enter your mind does not mean you have sinned and need to immediately repent every time that happens. Martin Luther is quoted as saying, “*You cannot prevent the birds from flying in the*

air over your head, but you can certainly prevent them from building a nest in your hair.” We are called to combat anxious thoughts with the truths of Scripture as we discussed today. And we should look to direct our thoughts to the things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and commendable. This posture of thanksgiving will actually work to change our hearts and thought patterns through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is something that will require focused and disciplined effort on our part. There will be days and even long seasons where we may struggle to follow this command to rejoice in the Lord. If you find yourself stuck in this kind of season right now, my encouragement to you would be to set aside time to write down things you are thankful for. And when you think you’ve listed them all, keep going. Lift your eyes up away from your current circumstances and toward the horizon of eternity with Jesus. Consider the eternal blessings you have in Christ so that you may maintain that proper perspective. That view toward eternity keeps that back fin of your ski in the water, giving you stability for today.

Second - If you find yourself really struggling to find joy and not be anxious while you are in a season of difficult circumstances, consider that the Lord is growing you THROUGH these struggles. I pray you will be able to cling to the precious promises that are yours for eternity in Christ. I mentioned Romans 8:28 at the beginning of our time together, remembering that God in his sovereignty is working all things together for the good of those who love him. Remember also that as we work to rejoice in the Lord in all circumstances that we can be comforted knowing we are promised the presence of God of all peace. I’d encourage you to share what you are going through with a faithful friend in Christ. I’ve often found what Drew has said to be true, that godly friends double our joys and halve our sorrows.

Let me also say something to those of you in the room who may feel like right now you are NOT an anxious person or aren’t facing something particularly difficult right now. First off, praise God for this season, and I pray you store these things away for when you do have trouble in this world. If YOU have an anxious, struggling friend reach out to you to share his or her burden, here are a few suggestions on how you can support and encourage. Start by actively listening. Don’t try to explain away your friend’s feelings. He or she already knows that they have reasons to NOT feel anxious about the things that have them worried. Ask questions to better understand the circumstances your friend is facing. This will help to both grow your empathy for your friend’s struggle, and also help remind your friend that he or she is not facing this alone. Also, avoid the temptation to make it about you by immediately telling a story about a time when YOU were worried. There is a time and a place for helping your friend to not stay stuck in a pit of despair, but that is not in this first conversation. It has taken many long, perhaps sleepless nights for your friend to arrive in this spot. One conversation with you is very unlikely to get them all of the way back on the right track. What they generally need is someone to go with them on a long walk in the same direction. And the goal of that first conversation should be to hear your friend’s burden and to model the loving care of Christ in how you listen and empathize.

A third implication – living with our reasonableness evident to all, without being totally overwhelmed with fear and anxiety, able to give thanks to God during trials stands in stark contrast to most people in our post-Christian society. What an opportunity for evangelism! We are called to be ready in season and out of season to give a reason for the hope within. There are few times in our lives when friends, family, neighbors and colleagues will be willing to listen to what you have to say than when you are facing great trials. Recognizing our dependence on the Lord for daily bread is one way we can honor him and speak

truth to a world that often wonders “how will I get through today?” Our answer comes from realizing what is true for us in Christ, that we are already citizens of heaven relying on the Holy Spirit to carry us each ordained day of our life on earth or until Christ himself returns to make all things right. God uses everything for his purposes... even our trials. Let’s pray...

Benediction: Benedictions are bridges that recognize our need for the God of peace to do what only he can do. It is fitting that today’s message on anxiety conclude with the benediction from 1 Thes 5:23-24 – “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

Go in peace to make disciples.

Outline

Because we are citizens of heaven:

- 1) We must pursue peace with each other (v.2-3)
- 2) We must pursue peace from God (v.4-7)
- 3) We must pursue the God of peace (v.8-9)