

Winning the W.A.R. Over Anxiety • Philippians 4:6-8 • By Dr. David O. Dykes.
Seeing Stars Through Prison Bars

INTRODUCTION

My wife was reading a health magazine not long ago. And she said, “Listen to this. This describes you exactly.” She said I have “TUI”—the newest syndrome in the 21st century. It stands for Time Urgency Impatience syndrome. There are four symptoms of TUI. Number one, you feel upset when you have to wait for anything. I admit I'm guilty there. I don't like to wait in line at a restaurant. I don't like to wait, at a traffic jam. I'll go 10 miles out of my way just to keep moving. Number two, you gobble meals too quickly. Number three, you feel pressured no matter what you're doing. Number four, you often feel extremely pressed for time at the end of the day. If you have any or all of those symptoms, chances are you have what is now called TUI syndrome in a study done by Northwestern University. If you suffer from TUI, your odds are twice as high for being a candidate for high blood pressure, which increases your risk factor for heart attack and for stroke.

We need to understand that this syndrome is not just confined to the 21st century. It's something that has been around as long as people have been around. In Philippians 4:6-8, we hear some encouraging words from the apostle Paul:

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

And so in this passage we find four keys that will help us to deal and win the war with anxiety.

I. WORRY ABOUT NOTHING (4:6)

Our English word “worry” comes from the German word “worgen,” which means “to strangle.” And there are times that we become so concerned and so anxious about issues in our lives that we are emotionally strangled. The word that is often used in the Bible for worry or anxiety is the word that means “double-minded.” One moment you're putting your faith in God. And the next moment there's doubt or fear.

The apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit penned these words in prison. At any moment he could have had his head removed from his body. He wasn't luxuriating on the French Riviera, sitting on the beach with the waves licking his toes. He was in prison, but he was able to look through the bars and see the stars. Let me give you three words that describe worry.

1. Worry is wasteful

It is just wasting your time. It brings about nothing good in your life. It is wasteful. Of course, one lady told me one time, “Don't you tell me that worry doesn't work, because I'm here to tell you that those things I worry about never happen.”

Somebody else said that worry is like rocking in a rocking chair. It doesn't really get you anywhere, but it gives you something to do. Calvin Coolidge was one of my very favorite of all the presidents, because he always was brief. A group of journalists once made a bet that this one particular newspaper journalist could not get more than three words out of Calvin Coolidge during a press conference. So, the journalist worried about what was going to happen, but he decided to get to the point and said, “President Coolidge, I have a bet with some of the other journalists who don't think you'd give me three words if I asked you a question. Would you help me out?” So President Coolidge said, “You lose.”

When you see 10 problems coming down the road at you, you can be sure that eight of them will run into the ditch before they get to you. And so why do you worry about those things that are ahead of you? So many of those things are going to take care of themselves. Jesus said, “Sufficient is this day.” So don't worry about yesterday. There's nothing you can do about yesterday. Don't worry about tomorrow. There's nothing you can do about tomorrow. And don't even worry about today; trust God for today.

2. Worry is harmful

It's not good for you. Dr. Charles Mayo, the founder of the Mayo Clinic, wrote, “Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the digestive system, and the entire nervous system. I have never known a person to die from overwork, but I've known many who died from worry.” Worry is like an acid that eats its own container.

3. Worry is sinful

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Don't worry about what you're going to eat. Don't worry about what you're going to wear. If I take care of the flowers and the birds of the air, my heavenly Father is going to take care of you. So do not worry.” A favorite little poem I've known for years talks about two birds that were discussing human nature.

Said the Robin, to the Sparrow, “I'd really like to know why those anxious human creatures rush about and worry.”

Said the Sparrow to the Robin, “I guess that it must be that they have no heavenly Father such as cares for you and me.”

You don't do anything good when you worry. Worry is when you are emotionally strangled for fear of what might happen. I came across another little poem recently about a cow.

The worried cow would have lived 'til now.
If she had only saved her breath.
But she feared her hay wouldn't last all day.
And she moo'ed herself to death.

Does that describe your life? You're just afraid of what's going to happen next? And you're afraid that whatever it is, it's going to be bad? That's what worry is. The truth is that you don't have to worry. There was a man whose brow was always furrowed, and he never had a smile on his face. He worried about everything. In fact, if he didn't have something worried about, he found something in somebody else's life to worry about. He was a habitual worrier. And one day he showed up for work totally changed. There was a smile on his face and a spring to a step, like a burden had been lifted off his shoulder. And one of his coworkers said, "Man, what's different about you? You always seem to worry about everything. And now you seem to be so happy and carefree." And the guy who used to worry replied, "I have found the greatest thing. I've hired a man to worry for me." And his coworker said, "That's a great idea. How much do you pay a guy like that?" He said, "I pay him a thousand dollars a week to do my worrying." His coworker said, "You don't even make that much money. How are you going to pay him?" The guy said, "That's not my worry. That's his!"

Wouldn't it be good if you had somebody you could hire to worry for you? Well, the truth of the matter is there is somebody who does more than worry for you. The Bible says he carries your burdens. That's why Peter says you can cast your cares upon him because he cares for you.

II. PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING (4:6)

Paul uses several words for prayer. He says, "prayer" and "petition." The first word is a general word for prayer and includes praise, adoration, worship. But then that word "petition" is a word that means "to request of God." The Bible says we should pray about everything. You should pray about the big things in your life. And you should pray about the little things in your life. Dr. G Campbell Morgan was a great Bible expository who was once asked if God is as interested in the little things in our lives as he is in the big things. Dr. Morgan gave a classic answer. He said, "My friend, compared to God, I can't think of anything in our lives that appears big to him. Everything compared to God's greatness is insignificant." And so, yes, God is interested in the little things that we think are insignificant, as well as the big things in our lives. And I say that because some people almost go to God and say, "God, I apologize for even bringing this issue to your attention..." The Bible says that the very hairs of your head are numbered, so God is interested in every single area of your life. And so that's why the apostle Paul says to pray about everything.

I love the passage of scripture in Psalm 37:7 where the psalmist writes these words: “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him. Do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.” Now, if any of you ever play any instruments, especially stringed instruments, you understand what a fret is. A fret is the little lines on the neck of a guitar. Whenever you put your finger on a fret, it makes the string shorter. So it makes the pitch higher. And the more frets you go down on the string, the higher the pitch goes. If you're playing a string on a guitar and you put your finger down on a fret, it's going to go higher and higher because the string gets tighter and tighter. If you tune a stringed instrument too tightly, that string will pop and break. And that's what the Bible says. Sometimes there are things in our lives that are like frets on the neck of a stringed instrument. Our patience gets shorter and shorter. Our endurance gets tighter and tighter. And the pitch of our life grows higher and higher until it seems like you can't hardly stand it. And the Bible says, “Do not fret. Be still. And know that I am God.”

I love that hymn that says, “What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer. Oh, what peace we often forfeit. Oh, what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.” Is there some issue in your life right now that you think is too minor to bring to God's attention? It's not too minor, so pray about everything.

Do you know why praying is a good antidote for anxiety? I'll tell you why. When you're praying, you cannot be worrying. And when you're worrying, you cannot be praying. The two are totally mutually exclusive.

III. GIVE THANKS FOR ALL THINGS (4:6)

In verse six, again, he says by “prayer and petition.” Here he adds another kind of prayer: “with thanksgiving.” The first kind of prayer asks God. The first kind of prayer says, “please.” But this kind of prayer says, “thank you.” It really takes faith to thank God for something you've asked for, when you haven't gotten it yet. But that's true faith. By the way, anybody can say thanks when God has already delivered. But the Bible says we're to pray and petition, with thanksgiving. Those two are together. It's not saying to pray and ask God for something. And after the answer comes, then you say thanks. It's all part of the same package.

Have you ever asked God for something? And then immediately after asking him for it, you thanked him for it before you had any evidence that it would be answered? It takes real faith to do that. Maybe you think, “I don't really know if I should thank God for some of the things that have come into my life.” In 1 Thessalonians chapter five, verse 18 the apostle Paul signs off on that first letter to the church at Thessalonica by saying, “Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God concerning you in Christ Jesus.” Did you catch that second part? Sometimes people are rushing around saying, “I want to know God's will for my

life. If only I knew!” There are several places in the Bible that it says in black and white: “this is God's will.” And that's one—to give thanks in all circumstances. How can you give thanks in all kinds of circumstances because not all circumstances are pleasant? Not all circumstances are good. You may be in the midst of a circumstance right now and that's why you're full of worry.

But Romans 8:28 says that in all things...pleasant things, positive things, perplexing things, painful things...God is at work for the good to those who love him, to those who are the called according to his purpose. Sometimes, when you're going through a painful circumstance, you don't thank God for the circumstance. You just thank God that he is good. Can you do that? Can you just say, “God, I thank you that you're good”? And that's how you give thanks in all things. One of the greatest men of faith who ever lived was George Mueller of Bristol. He wrote, “The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith. But the beginning of true faith is the end of anxiety.” It takes faith to thank God as soon as you ask for something.

IV. THINK ABOUT THE BEST THINGS (4:8)

Do you know where worry really occurs? It's in your mind. It begins as a drip, drip, drip...thinking what all could go wrong. If it's not dealt with, and it's not turned off at that moment, the drip, drip, drip becomes a steady flow, flow, flow. And if it's not dealt with, it becomes a flood, flood, flood that becomes a raging river, river, river! Before you know it, you have a literal Grand Canyon of worry coursing through your mind. And that's why the Bible says to think about good things. I like the scripture in Proverbs chapter 23, verse seven. I like it in the King James, because it's the version that says it best: As a person thinks in his heart, so is he. I heard about a Sunday school teacher that was telling this to his fifth grade and sixth grade boys. He said, “What you think about the most, that's what you become.” One of the boys said, “Well, I'm going to become a little girl.

Somebody said you are what you eat. But the truth of the matter is that you are what you think. And if you think about the wrong things, if you allow the wrong kind of images and the wrong kind of thoughts to enter your mind, it creates worry. There's a lot of stinking thinking going on today in the minds of Christians. I believe that worry is the number one sin among Christians, because they allow stinking thinking to enter their mind. In 2 Corinthians chapter 10, verse four, the apostle Paul writes about how the devil tries to build strongholds in our minds. The weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but they are mighty in God's power to pull down these strongholds. And then he talks about bringing captive every thought to the obedience of Christ. In other words, we need by an act of our will, we capture thoughts and keep them focused on Christ.

Someone has said that your brain is an amazing organ. It starts working the moment that you're born and doesn't stop until you stand up in front of a crowd to speak! The brain is a more powerful computer than scientists will ever invent. But there is one thing about the brain—it can't multi-task. In other words, you really

can only think about one thing at a time. You can go back and forth real fast, but you can only think about one thing at a time. If I told you to visualize an elephant, you could do that. But what if I then told you to picture a sundae? You could do that, but you wouldn't be concentrating on the elephant any longer. Your brain does not allow you to focus on an elephant and an ice cream sundae at the same moment. Oh, you could visualize an elephant eating an ice cream sundae. Can you see that right now? Yes. But you can't think of both of those images at the same moment as separate images.

When you try to visualize the worst things that could happen, it's impossible for you to visualize the good things that could happen. But as long as you try to visualize these things that Paul talks about (noble and pure and lovely and beautiful and praiseworthy), you won't have negative, stinking thoughts at the same time. It'll be one or the other. And that's what it means to bring your mind captive to Jesus Christ.

Corrie ten Boom wrote, "Worry is a cycle of inefficient thoughts, swirling around a center of fear." The words in Philippians 4 are a biography of Jesus. They describe the character of Jesus. In fact, let me just substitute the name, "Jesus." Jesus is true. Jesus is noble. Jesus is right. Jesus is pure. Jesus is lovely. Jesus is admirable. Jesus is excellent. And Jesus is praiseworthy. And so my friend, if you will discipline your mind to visualize Jesus, you can't worry at the same moment.

CONCLUSION

These four keys will help you to win the war over anxiety and what is the result?

1. The peace of God will guard you (4:7)

Remember the apostle Paul is in prison when he wrote these words. There was a Roman guard assigned to him, perhaps even shackled to him. For eight-hour shifts, 24 hours a day, a new Roman guard would come in and shackle himself to the apostle Paul. And so he knew what it was for someone to guard him. A group of rabid Jews were trying to kill Paul every step of the way, so even in prison, he had to be protected. So he uses the imagery of a guard protecting him to say the peace of God will guard your heart and your mind through Christ Jesus.

2. The peace of God will guide you (4:9)

Paul writes, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put into practice and the God of peace will be with you." Not only do we have the peace of God, which nobody else can understand, but also we have the God of peace who guides us. And the Bible says to trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not upon your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him. And he will direct your paths. Jesus said, "When the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."

If you wanted to travel to San Antonio, I could write out directions to you to guide you. But what would be so much better is if I rode with you and I guided you every

turn of the way. Not only do we have the Scriptures as God's roadmap to guide us, but also we have the Holy Spirit who dwells within us to guide us every step of the way.

My wife and I once went on a Bible study cruise. And it was a great experience. I thought of a poem while I was out at sea: "I met God in the morning when the day was at its best. And his presence came like sunrise, like a glory to my breast. All day long, his presence lingered. All day long he stayed with me, and we sailed in perfect calmness across a very troubled sea. Other ships were blown and battered. Other ships were sore distressed, but the winds that seemed to drive them brought to us a peace and rest. Then I thought of other mornings with a keen remorse of mine. When I too had loose the moorings with his presence left behind. So I think I know the secret learned from many a troubled day. You must seek him in the morning if you want him through the day." Peace is not the absence of trouble. Peace is the presence and power of Jesus Christ in the midst of the storm. And with him to guide you and his peace to guard you, you can win over anxiety.

OUTLINE

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