

May 4, 2014 by Steve Brandon



Battling Anxiety

Philippians 4:6-7

1. Don't be Anxious (verse 6a)
2. Be Prayerful (verse 6b)
3. Remember the Promise (verse 7)

I want to begin this morning with a little quiz. It's a quiz about the popularity of Bible verses. What, do you think, are the most famous, the most cherished of all Bible verses?

Before you answer, I want to give you a bit of time to think on it and to tell you how I came up with a list of ten verses that fit this criteria. I got them from the Kindle App on my iPad. For those of you who have a Kindle or a Kindle App on one of your electronic devices, you know that you can do some amazing things. Just like a physical book, you can earmark any pages that you find memorable. You can highlight any portion of the text that you want to remember later. But, with the advantages of an electronic text, you can look up words by simply holding down on a word. You can search the entire book for some word or phrase. Additionally, one of things that you can do with the Kindle app is see the most popular highlights of others who have read the book. In fact, they are called, "Popular Highlights."

Anyway, I looked this week at the copy of the English Standard Version of the Bible (with cross references) that I have on my iPad (and iPod touch). It is free on the Kindle App. You can get it from Amazon, and download it directly to your iPad.

And so, I have recorded the top ten "Popular Highlights" by those who read this version of the book. To give you perspective, each of these verses were highlighted between a thousand and two thousand times by Bible readers across the world. Any guesses on the verses that I found? Here's the list ...

1. Philippians 4:6-7 (2124 highlights)
2. John 3:16 (1672 highlights)
3. Philippians 4:13 (1644 highlights)
4. Proverbs 3:5-6 (1605 highlights)
5. Romans 8:28 (1316 highlights)
6. Romans 8:38-39 (1290 highlights)
7. Matthew 6:33-34 (1289 highlights)
8. Ephesians 2:8-9 (1273 highlights)
9. Jeremiah 29:11 (1146 highlights)
10. Hebrews 11:1 (989 highlights)

Now, I have three observations. First of all, obviously, is that today's text, Philippians 4:6-7, tops the list. It means that there is something in these words touch the hearts of people in a special way, leading them to highlight the verse. And I trust that my message this morning will be helpful to your souls as well.

Second, two of the top three verses are from Philippians 4. Our text this morning: verses 6 and 7. And, verse 13, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," which we will get to in a few weeks. It means that there is something about this fourth chapter of Philippians that touches people as well.

Thirdly, two of these verses have to do with worry. Of course, our text this morning, has to do with worry. And so does Matthew 6:33-34: "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." These verses form a fitting conclusion to section of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is addressing the issue of anxiety.

So, why are two of the top ten highlighted verses in the ESV Bible verses about worry? I think it's because we are all susceptible to worry. It hits all of us. We all know how easy it is to worry. And I think that this is the reason why Paul included the words here in Philippians. I looked this week for a particular reason why Paul would have placed these words here. In other words, "Why did Paul bring up anxiety at this point in his letter to the Philippians?"

Certainly, those in Philippi had plenty to worry about. Their life was filled with uncertainties. They had no insurance. They had no Social Security. They had no government to fall back upon in case of disaster. In fact, if anything, their government was hostile toward them as they were facing Roman oppression. Many lived hand-to-mouth, living on whatever was earned that day. Travel was dangerous. They had no cell phones to call if they were in danger. Police presence was minimal. And yet, as much as their lives were filled with anxieties, I couldn't find anything particular in this letter about some unique circumstance that would bring them to anxiety other than the human condition.

Now, our anxieties today are different than the anxieties of those in Philippi. But, we have our fair share of them. We all have tendencies to

worry. We all have anxieties. And so, these words come straight to us.

Perhaps that's why these verses top the list of Popular Highlights in the Bible. My message this morning is entitled, "Battling Anxiety" Let's read our text.

Philippians 4:6-7

Be anxious for nothing, 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 comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The passage has two commands and a promise. Each of these form my outline this morning. So, let's look at the first command. I trust that you can see it there in verse 6, ...

1. Don't be Anxious (verse 6a)

The actual command comes in these words, "Be anxious for nothing." Again, like verse 4, we have one of those absolute commands. Verse 4 said, "Rejoice in the Lord always." That is, we ought always to be rejoicing. Anything less is sin. So likewise here. Verse 6 says, "Be anxious for nothing." There is no wiggle room in this verse. Anxiety about anything is sin.

Now, at this point, we must be careful, because there is room for a healthy concern for others, which is not sin but is really love. Speaking about Timothy, Paul writes, "For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare (Philippians 2:20).

The word translated here "genuinely concerned" is the same word that we find in chapter 4. And here in chapter 2, it is obviously not a sin on Timothy's part. I would argue that it's love. Timothy's concern and care for those in Philippi come from his heart of care and compassion for those in Philippi.

And so, this Greek word is not always used in a negative sense. In 2 Corinthians 11:28, Paul used it to describe his care and concern for the church. In 1 Corinthians 7:32-34, Paul used it to describe how the single person is free to be concerned about matters of the Lord. He also used it to describe how married couples are concerned for each other. And all of this comes under the banner of love: love for the Lord; love for a spouse; love for the brethren.

Such care and concern is only right. In fact, Paul says that this sort of attitude ought to be evident throughout the entire church. 1 Corinthians 11:25, "... that there be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another." Again, the same Greek word is used here in our text. We are all called to have "care for one another." Such a care and concern is not wrong. Indeed it is commanded.

So, what's Paul talking about here in Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing." This is sinful anxiety. You know what I'm talking about. He's talking about an over-concern for something that leads you to unease. He's talking about worry that prevents your sleep at night. He's talking about anxiety that leads you to distress. He's talking about thoughts that would lead you away from devotion to the Lord.

It's no accident that Paul's next text speaks about thinking on the right things. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things." Anxiety is a sin of the mind. It's worry over the wrong things.

Jesus said, "Do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on" (Matthew 6:25). And why shouldn't you worry about these things? Because you have a heavenly Father who cares for you. "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!" (Matthew 6:30).

God knows about the sparrow falling from the tree. Will He not care for us? God clothes the flowers of the field with more glory than Solomon. Will He not care for us?

It's no accident that Paul precedes the words in our text with a statement about the care of God in our lives. Look at the last phrase of verse 5: "The Lord is near." Now, this may be "near" in time, speaking of His return. But, it also may be near in proximity, speaking of God's care for us. God is near to us. When Peter addressed anxiety, he said it this way, "[Cast] all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

God cares for us. He is ready to help us in our need. So, don't be anxious (verse 6a). In many ways, this is the gospel. God cares for us. He loves us. He loves us enough to send His Son for us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God loves us enough to plan our lives for good. "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Now, let me reason with you a bit. You know, anxiety accomplishes nothing. Jesus said, "Which of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life?" (Matthew 6:27). Someone said that worry is like a rocking chair, it occupies your mind and gets you nowhere. That's why Jesus said, "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6:34).

Anxiety distorts reality. A Swedish Proverb says that "Worry gives small things a big shadow." Jay Adams says this, ...

Worry ... is concern over the future. Worry is concern about something that one can do nothing about, and that he cannot even be sure about. ... One who worries looks off into the future. But the future is not here yet. There is nothing to lay a hand on; there is nothing that can be done. The worrier cannot control it; he does not even know what it will look like. No

one but God knows its true shape. First, he imagines that matters will be this way, then (he thinks), they might be that way. Because he cannot know, he allows it to tear him apart. [\[1\]](#)

Anxiety can cause physical problems. One medical website I read says this, ...

Chronic worry and emotional stress can trigger a host of health problems. The problem occurs when fight or flight is triggered daily by excessive worrying and anxiety. The fight or flight response causes the body's sympathetic nervous system to release stress hormones such as cortisol. These hormones can boost blood sugar levels and triglycerides (blood fats) that can be used by the body for fuel. The hormones also cause physical reactions such as: Difficulty swallowing, Dizziness, Dry mouth, Fast heartbeat, Fatigue, Headaches, Inability to concentrate, Irritability, Muscle aches, Muscle tension, Nausea, Nervous energy, Rapid breathing, Shortness of breath, Sweating, Trembling and twitching

When the excessive fuel in the blood isn't used for physical activities, the chronic anxiety and outpouring of stress hormones can have serious physical consequences, including: Suppression of the immune system, Digestive disorders, Muscle tension, Short-term memory loss, Premature coronary artery disease, Heart attack

If excessive worrying and high anxiety go untreated, they can lead to depression and even suicidal thoughts. [\[2\]](#)

Anxiety can lead to other sin. John Piper writes, "Anxiety about finances can give rise to coveting and greed and hoarding and stealing. Anxiety about succeeding at some task can make you irritable and abrupt and surly. Anxiety about relationships can make you withdrawn and indifferent and uncaring about other people. Anxiety about how someone will respond to you can make you cover over the truth and lie about things. So if anxiety could be conquered, a mortal blow would be struck to many other sins." [\[3\]](#)

Enough about the problem; let's get to the solution. Don't be anxious. But, how? The good news is that we have a solution. It's given in the second half of verse 6.

2. Be Prayerful (verse 6b)

Look again at verse 6, ...

Philippians 4:6

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Here it is, the cure for anxiety. It is prayer.

If you go to the doctor with a fever, he's going to prescribe you Tylenol. If you go to the doctor with sore muscles, he's going to prescribe you Advil. If you go to the doctor with an infection, he's going to prescribe you an antibiotic. And if you come to God with anxiety, he's going to prescribe you some prayer.

Again, in this verse we see another one of those all-inclusive words, "but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Again, that means that there is no wiggle-room here. Whenever there is anxiety, the cure is prayer.

The hymn, "What A Friend We Have In Jesus," written by Joseph M. Scriven, gives a good picture of this, ...

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge, take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield you; you will find a solace there.

That hymn captures it so well. Jesus is our Friend, who bids us to come to Him. Whatever comes upon us, we are to bring it to the Lord in prayer.

As one commentator said, "There is nothing too great for God's power; and nothing too small for his fatherly care." [\[4\]](#) Peter said it this way: "Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). God is ready and willing to help us. We simply need to let Him know. Isn't that what verse 6 says?

Philippians 4:6

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Now, it's not that God doesn't know your needs. Psalm 139:3 says that God is intimately acquainted with all our ways. Jesus said that God has numbered the very hairs of your head (Luke 12:7). So, it's not that God needs to know about our anxious thoughts. But, it's that God wants for us to come to Him. He wants for us to acknowledge our need of Him by making requests to Him. That's another way of saying, "prayer."

In fact, verse 6 is covered with prayer. Paul uses three words for "prayer." There's the word, "prayer" and the word, "supplication" and the word, "requests." They are essentially synonyms; there is not much difference between them. They all describe the act of bringing a request before the Lord.

In many ways, you could interchange these words and the verse remains the same. "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by requests and supplications with thanksgiving pray to God." Or, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by your requests and prayers with thanksgiving make supplication to God." All of these variations would mean the same thing.

Now, one of the characteristics of these words is that they are specific. They aren't general blessings. They aren't vague religiosity. No, they are specific. They describe specific requests. They are specific requests that have come about because of specific circumstances of your life that are bringing anxiety.

This verse is simply saying this: when specific needs come upon us, turn the needs into requests, and make them known to the Lord. Give your burdens to the Lord, and release them. In other words, "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

In fact, I would encourage you to use the wrongful anxieties in your life as a sort of trigger. Let them alert you to how you need to pray. This week, as most weeks of my life, I had some anxieties. And as I was meditating upon this passage, I simply took the Lord at his word. Any time that my thoughts were leading me to anxiety, I simply turned them back into requests to the Lord, and sought to let go of my worry, knowing that the Lord was in control. I found a measure of relief in these things.

I confess, I need to make this sort of thing much more of an intentional habit than I do. I don't naturally think to myself, "Oh, I'm worrying. I should pray. I should let God know of my concerns." But, it's really as easy as that. And I would encourage you along the same path. Whenever anxious thoughts come into your mind, work hard to identify them as anxiety. Say to yourself, "That's an anxious thought." And say to yourself, "God calls me to pray when I'm anxious." Then, pray and let God know of your anxieties.

Whenever thoughts come into your mind about your insecurities, pray and let God know about them. Whenever thoughts come about the uncertainties of the future, pray and let God know about them. When you are sleepless at night because of the worries swirling around in your head, pray. When you are facing any sort of difficulty or trouble or trial, pray. When you are anticipating a difficult meeting or something that you need to confront, pray. When you are worried about your finances, pray. When you are worried about the future of your children, pray. When you have anxieties about the security of your employment, pray.

And in this way, you are acknowledging your need and dependence upon the Lord. There's one other point in verse 6 that I haven't addressed yet. It's the attitude of how we pray. It's the attitude of thanksgiving.

Look again at verse 6, ...

Philippians 4:6

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

As I was studying this passage this week, I asked myself on several occasions here, "Why is this included in the verse?" And so, I tried taking the mention of thanksgiving out of the verse and I came up with this, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication let your requests be made known to God."

And what's the difference? I think it's subtle, but I think that it makes all the difference in the world. Without thanksgiving, this verse seems to be a bit more mechanical, as in, "When you are anxious, just let God know about it. He will change things for you." But, with thanksgiving, the attitude seems to be more along the lines of submission, as in, "When you are anxious, just let God know about it with a spirit of thanksgiving, whether God changes things or not." The focus isn't answered prayer.

I think that this comes up in our final point this morning.

3. Remember the Promise (verse 7)

The promise comes in verse 7, ...

Philippians 4:7

And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

What's the promise? God will bring His peace into your life. His peace will guard your hearts and minds.

In other words, when you are anxious and you pray to God with thanksgiving, God doesn't promise to change your circumstances. But, God does promise to care for your heart and mind, the very realm around which anxiety germinates. And I believe that this attitude of thanksgiving is everything! One commentator said it this way, "Prayer without thanksgiving is like a bird without wings: such a prayer cannot rise to heaven, can find no acceptance with God." [\[5\]](#)

And so, let's think about the process. Something in your life is causing you anxiety. You see it and notice it and make your anxiety known to the Lord. And with thankfulness, you pray about the matters. And God gives peace of mind to your soul. And the anxieties disappear.

And when the anxious thoughts come up again, you take note and say, "I'm anxious." So, you let that trigger your prayers to the Lord with a thankful attitude. And God gives you His peace according to the promise of verse 7. And your anxiety is gone. Perhaps this process is repeated a hundred times. That's how you battle anxiety.

J. C. Ryle said, "This was the practice of all the saints whose history we have recorded in the Scriptures. This is what Jacob did when he feared his brother Esau. This is what Moses did when the people were ready to stone him in the wilderness. This is what Joshua did when Israel was defeated before the men of Ai. This is what David did when he was in danger in Gethsemane. This is what Hezekiah did when he received the letter from Sennacherib. This is what the church did when Peter was put in prison. This is what Paul did when he was cast into the dungeon at Philippi."

When Paul was in Philippi, on the brink of death and with many others against him, He prayed with thanksgiving. You find this heart in many of the Psalms. Even a cursory reading of the Psalms will lead you to see how often they faced the trials of life and cried out to the LORD, who comforted them in distress.

Psalm 3:3-5

But You, O Lord, are a shield about me,
My glory, and the One who lifts my head.
I was crying to the Lord with my voice,
And He answered me from His holy mountain. Selah.
I lay down and slept;
I awoke, for the Lord sustains me.

Psalm 4:1,8

You have relieved me in my distress;
...
In peace I will both lie down and sleep,
For You alone, O Lord, make me to dwell in safety.

Psalm 7:1

O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge.

Psalm 11:1

In the LORD I take refuge.

Psalm 23:1, 4

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want.
...
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

Psalm 28:7

The LORD is my strength and my shield;
My heart trust in Him, and I am helped;

Psalm 37:1, 4-5

Do not fret because of evildoers,
...
Delight yourself in the LORD;
And He will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD,
Trust also in Him, and He will do it.

Psalm 55:22

Cast your burden upon the LORD and He will sustain you;
He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.

We could go on and on and on and on. Such is the pattern of the godly who have come before us. In their trouble, they cried to the LORD, and He answered them (Ps. 120). This is how we are called to battle our anxiety as well. When anxieties come upon you, seek the Lord.

Do you want to battle anxiety? Be prayerful (verse 6b) and remember the promise (verse 7).

Philippians 4:7

And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

God's peace will come and take over your hearts. He will come in and give your peace and calm your anxious thoughts. And you may not fully understand it. Those around you may not fully understand it. Paul says that this peace "surpasses all comprehension." But, this peace will prevail in your hearts, if you but pray with thanksgiving to the Lord.

With thankful prayer in the face of anxiety, many of the physical ailments that I mentioned at the beginning of my message may well go away, right? If anxiety causes dizziness, dry mouth, fatigue, etc., then when the peace of God enters and anxiety leaves, these symptoms may well disappear as well. But, it comes through prayer.

And when it comes to anxiety, I would say this: prayer and anxiety cannot coexist. You are always on one side or the other of the concerns that are in your life. And when anxiety is in your life, genuine prayer is absent. And when genuine prayer is in your life, anxiety is absent.

So often, prayer gives perspective. I close with this illustration from history.

When Bulstrode Whitelock was preparing to embark as Oliver Cromwell's envoy to Sweden in 1653, he was feeling anxious about the tumultuous state of his nation. England had recently gone through civil war, and--for the first and only time in its history--executed its own king (Charles I). The army and the government were at odds with each other. So were the Presbyterians and Cromwell's Independents, two branches of Puritans (spiritual heirs of the Reformers from the previous century). It was difficult enough figuring out which direction the country was headed, let alone representing it to another country.

The night before his journey, Whitelock nervously paced about. A trusted servant, noticing his employer was unable to sleep, approached him after a while. This exchange took place:

"Pray sir, will you give me leave to ask you a question?"

"Certainly."

"Pray, sir, do you not think that God governed the world very well before you came into it?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And pray, sir, do you not think that He will govern it quite as well when you are gone out of it?"

"Certainly."

"Then, sir, pray excuse me, but do you not think you may trust Him to govern it quite as well as long as you live?"

The question left Whitelock speechless.

He headed for bed and was soon fast asleep. ^[6]

Psalm 139 reads, "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. ... Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way" (Psalm 139:1, 23-24).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on May 4, 2014 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Jay Adams, "What do you do when you worry all the time?" (pamphlet).

[2] <http://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/how-worrying-affects-your-body?page=2>

[3] John Piper, Future Grace, p. 53.

[4] William Barclay, quoting an unnamed source, p. 77.

[5] Hendriksen, p. 196.

[6] Walter B. Knight, *Three Thousand Illustrations for Christian service* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947], p. 740, cited in John MacArthur, in *Anxiety Attacked*, p. 58