

Philippians 4:6-7

The Way of Wisdom **SM: Phil 4:6-7**

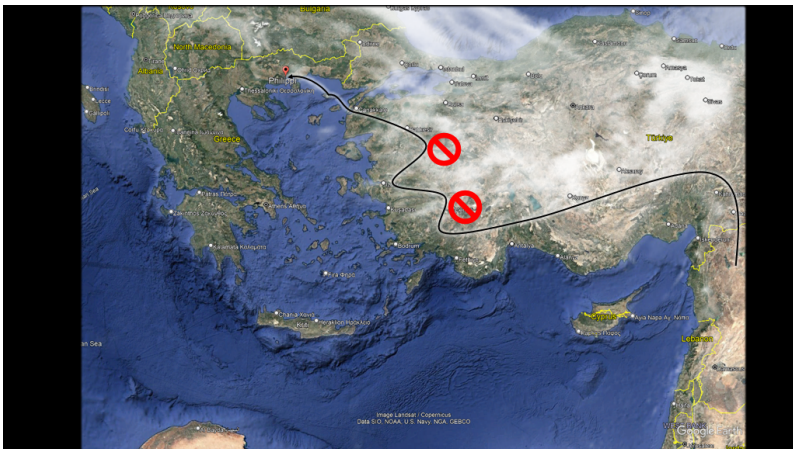
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July 12, 2025

I am a long-term member here and occasional teacher; teaching, however, makes me very nervous. And that is appropriate because the topic of today's sermon is anxiety! I am living out this verse. As a congregation, we are memorizing the Navigator's Topical Memory System this summer.

The verse for this evening is the famous anxiety verse which I will recite now:

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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.

Some context for this verse:



This is from a letter from Paul to the church in Philippi. Paul wrote it from Rome while he was in jail. It's important to understand this church, which started when Paul went on a missionary journey to Asian Minor (today's W. Turkey) which you can see here on Google maps. The Spirit kept stopping him (we don't know how this happened) but we know that God didn't want him in W. Turkey. When he got near Greece, he veered to the

city of Philippi, where he met Lydia (trader of purple cloth) who believed the Gospel. They started a group of believers. However, the city of Philippi was not happy with this and they put Paul and Silas in jail and then ushered them out of town. Even though Paul wasn't there very long, it became a vibrant and supportive church to his ministry. It was also a wealthy mining city on a well traveled trade route. Roman soldiers would move to Philippi when they retired so there was a strong military presence; Philippi was sometimes called the "Little Rome."

Keep in mind that these people saw what happened to Paul and therefore felt anxious. Paul speaks to this.

What is anxiety? We know it's connected with fear, a physiological experience of something **dangerous** nearby.

It's not a pleasant feeling and we all feel it differently in our bodies:

- In the stomach
- In the chest
- cold sweats
- shakiness

Anxiety can be disconnected to fear even though they may have the same bodily sensation. Our church community here at the Village encourages us to be aware of these feelings.

The root word for anxious means **caring about something so much that it divides your attention**

Anxiety **distracts** us from the present and **paralyzes** us. ***It keeps us from making future plans and addressing things from the past that need to be addressed.***

We have plenty to be distracted and concerned about: money, health, relationships, jobs, school, relationships. Some of us are very aware of this, but, more commonly, ***it probably happens and we don't realize it.***

Do not be anxious about anything, . . .

- What do you think about too much?
- What do you avoid thinking about?

Two questions:

1. **What do you think about it a lot?** Overthinking can manifest in this way. For me, I think about my garage: it needs to be organized and I want to protect it from potential flooding when it rains. But I don't make any decisions about it: I just think about it a lot. I have a clear picture of what I want it to look like.

Another way of overthinking is **rehashing past events**: things in the past that may have made me look bad or make people feel uncomfortable. I feel this in my gut and project negative social consequences from what I did. To compensate for my discomfort, I will often reframe it in a way that makes me look good: this makes me feel **more in control** and that maybe I won't say this again in the future. This also **distracts** me. This can be big or little things.

2. **What do you avoid thinking about?** I don't want to think about the things I believe are too much for me, either my intelligence or my skills. **These are places where we encounter lies of the enemy.** When we face this fear, we hear lies like

- “you’re alone”
- “it’s all up to you”
- “God must not care about you”

I often avoid thinking by

- scrolling on my phone
- finding something more engaging
- watch things: Youtube is a place to avoid anxiety,
- snacking
- sleeping too much
- creating a different problem in our minds that is easier to solve: video games are a good example of this.

I turn to whatever might take the place of the fear or anxiety. For example, when I’m overwhelmed, I might stay up too late because I believe if I go to sleep, I have to face the day which is overwhelming. Recently, I stepped into a new role at work which is overwhelming and so I would stay up late.

Our subconscious helps us deal with our anxiety that manifests problems by making smaller problems, even physical things like headaches or indigestion. When I was in middle school in Phoenix I liked to climb mountains and run. There was an annual event where we would run up a mountain: I was very concerned about this and had a lot of adrenaline the day of the race. On that day, my diabetes also kicked in: I didn’t know if I had low blood sugar or anxiety but I suspect it wasn’t low blood sugar.

We believe the lie that the world is more than we can face. This dates back to Adam and Eve who were afraid when they sinned and hid: anxiety is part of living in this world. Paul wants us to know we don’t have to hang out here. He presents us with an alternative which is approaching God.

...but in every situation, ...

- God created and owns everything in the world
Genesis 1, Psalm 50
- God chose you
Ephesians 1:4
- God loves you
John 3:16, Romans 5:8
- God is close to the brokenhearted
Psalm 34:18
- God triumphed over all worldly powers
Colossians 2:15

I want to pause on the phrase “**in every situation.**” We hear from the world a lot: **the enemy wants us to believe he owns every situation.** He took Jesus to the top of the mountain and offered to give all to Jesus AS IF IT WAS HIS TO GIVE! But this isn’t in the Bible!

The enemy wants us to continue in our anxiety because he doesn’t want us to encounter the truth, which is

that **God created the world and everything in it.**

He chose you, loves, you sustains, is close to the broken hearted. He literally embarrassed the powers of the world by his power (Col 2:15) .

...by prayer and petition, with gratitude, present your requests to God.

- If you don't schedule it, it doesn't happen
- Matthew 6:
 - Go to your room and close your door
 - Pray coherently, concisely
- Pray authentically
- Name your anxieties

I love that we ask the kids "what is prayer" and that the answer is talking and listening to God. Prayer involves listening!

The mechanics of prayer: **How should you pray?**

- Go to your room
- Close the door
- Pray in secret
- Be concise (keep it short)
- Keep it between you and God

There is something significant to getting alone with God.

Many years ago, we had a personal trainer at this Village. She said if you don't schedule exercise, it doesn't happen. I didn't like hearing that but it turns out that it's very true. Prayer is also like this: ***you need a place and a time for this to happen.*** There is a [Healing the City Podcast](#) about writing out your prayer in an intentional way. .

When Elijah invited the prophets of Baal to the altar, they took half of a day to pray but Elijah took about 25 seconds: he **acknowledged God** and **asked for what he needed**. You are praying to a person with reason and feelings. We don't have to be anything other than what we are: we can be authentic before God. He won't be disappointed or threatened.

I was on vacation last week, we went to a theme park and then went out for dinner and I was feeling anxious about spending so much money. My son wanted a drink and I said No. I didn't respond lovingly and when we sat down and then saw another boy gives orders to his dad to get him a Mountain Dew and the dad said "OK." How is that possible? I don't know the context but I do know that kid felt safe with his dad. We can be this way with God: he is like a loving parent.

Writing out prayers is powerful: naming your anxieties before God is important and saying it or writing it. Without this, It can feel like a fog of not knowing why you are being held back. This can be a familiar **feeling** but we **aren't able to identify it**. Also, naming things hands **control** over to God: **Anxiety is usually about things we want control over**. Giving them to God leads to **experiencing peace**.



The word I like here is **GUARD**: it's a military term that Paul uses from prison. This conjures up images of a Roman garrison like the picture here: This picture that comes to mind when we present our requests to God. This garrison takes shape through the listening part of prayer. The peace of God is his response.

God **DOES respond** when we pray and come to him with our requests. The voices in the world are loud: God is a person who thinks and feels and responds on his own terms. He is not like an AI chatbot which responds immediately. God is there to be in power in your life.

How God responds is very different in various situations:

- A still small voice
- Scripture
- people around us who know and love Jesus.

He is consistent in reminding us about his **love** and wants us to have **confidence** in his love. He aligns our desire with his: **he will steer our desires to his desires**.

He also gives us **PURPOSE**: We are God's representatives.

These three things give us **peace**:

- reminder of his **love**
- aligning our **desires**
- giving us **purpose**.

This doesn't mean we can go inside his garrison and cower behind a wall. It may mean going out and planting a field. **Peace is an invitation to action in contrast with the paralysis of distraction.**

One thing that fear does for us is motivate us but this is not the way things are supposed to be. Instead, we can be **motivated by love**. When preparing this sermon, I got so many other things done because I was anxious. I had to ask why I was doing this: was it out of love for God and his leadership? This felt different and this is how we're called to act in God's upside down kingdom.

This kind of motivation sounds beautiful, right? But it still doesn't feel good...I know because that is what my week was like.

When I was young, my dad bought me a "rad" bicycle from WalMart. He took me to a construction site where people ride their BMX bikes: My dad was with me and he was telling me with his eyes that I didn't have to go down this particular precipice that looked dangerous. I knew my dad was scared for me but I also knew he loved me and was with me. I accomplished the ride because **I was motivated by the love of my dad**, even though things could have gone badly.

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It can still be difficult to escape anxiety: we see cruelty, dishonest people, suffering, undeserving people, and we know that we will die someday. This is where the peace that transcends all understanding comes in: There is power in seeing and hearing from God.

Jer 9:23, 24

²³ This is what the LORD says:

"Let not the wise boast of their wisdom
or the strong boast of their strength
or the rich boast of their riches,

²⁴ but let the one who boasts boast about this:
that they have the understanding to know me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,"
declares the LORD.

