

Philippians 4:4-7
Anxiety Over the New Year
WRCoB 1.4.2020

We all know . . . we've all been told
Worrying is a waste of time and counter-productive!

We know this!
Because, as believers, God is in control, right?

And yet, our days are filled with worry.

Like the woman who for years
Had trouble sleeping at night
Because she worried about burglars!

One night her husband woke up to a noise in the house
And went downstairs to check it out.

Yep, sure enough, a burglar.

He said to the burglar,
"Say, am I glad to see you."

*"Come upstairs and meet my wife
She's been waiting for you for years!"*
(William Marshal).

~~

George Muller, an evangelist who lived in the 1800s
Had this to say about anxiety.

*The beginning of anxiety is the end of faith
And the beginning of faith is the end of anxiety.*

We all agree on the truth of this statement.
So why is it so many of us suffer from anxiety?

We worry over things we can do little about.

C. H. Spurgeon wrote

*Anxiety doesn't empty tomorrow of its sorrow
But empties today of its strength.*

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A recent poll concludes that most of what we worry about
We have no control over.

40% -- things that will never happen

30% -- things about the past that can't be changed

12% -- criticism by others

10% -- about health, which gets worse with stress

Only 8% -- what we worry over are real problems.

Like someone who once said

*I've had a lot of trouble in my life
Most of which never happened.*

Are you like that?

Do you find yourself fretting over stuff?

You're not alone.

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Every year the American Psychological Association (APA)
Conducts a "Stress in America" survey.

Stress in America 2019 survey

Shows some interesting statistics.

On a personal level, work and money

Tend to be constant stressors for American at 60%.

More than 7 in 10 people, 71%
Have anxiety over mass shootings.

A close second, 6 in 10 people, 69%
Stress over the cost of health care.

60% worry about terrorism.

56%, over half the population
Stress over the coming presidential election.

And the same percentage, 56%, of Americans
Are anxious about climate change.

4 in 10 equally stress over
Sexual harassment and immigration.

All of these mentioned, have increased a point or two
Since last year's survey.

The only one that has decreased has been
Anxiety concerning the national economy.

One other interesting statistic.
Over half surveyed, 56% of Americans
Feel the present time we live in
Is the lowest point in the nation's history.

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Closer to home there may be a few a bit anxious
What 2020 will bring to West Richmond.

I get that.

We have a new choir director
Which by the way is her first Sunday.

She's done marvelous, don't you think?

We have a new custodian
A new admin assistant
The very same person, Tasja.

We are looking for a new accompanist.

We have a new board.

We have ok'd a Youth Minister position

And we have discussed some major capital improvements.

All of which can be very stressful.

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But let's be clear

Worrying and being anxious about these things
Will have no impact at all on anything
Except, of course, our own well-being!

I have to be reminded as I remind you
That faith in a Sovereign and Loving God
Should dispel any personal angst.

I quote from Mark Galli, the editor of Christianity Today:

We believe those who abide in the truth of Jesus Christ can act calmly and deliberately in the face of the most troubling news and opinions that swirl around us. No need to panic; Jesus is still in charge.

There is a correlation between faith and fear.

For really, anxiety and worry originate out of fear.

The association being that the more fear one feels
The less faith one has.

Let's also be clear

I'm not talking about a clinical diagnosis
Of Anxiety Disorder.

Clinical anxiety is an illness.

It requires a more multi-pronged response,
Using therapy and medication,
Along with faith in God!

However, there is a relationship between faith and fear.

As one decreases the other increases.

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For example, look at the Apostle Paul.

Did he have cause to be anxious?

Did he have reason to worry?

Was he afraid!

And yet, look at the chosen passage for today.

When you read it you'd think Paul is writing
While lounging on a beach in Jamaica
Sipping from a glass with a little umbrella in it.

The sun is shining warm and bright.
The sand, the water, the sky all brilliantly beautiful!

The sound system from the hotel,
Is playing Bobby McFerrin's *Don't Worry Be Happy!*

You can just hear Paul saying.

Rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again rejoice!
It's all good, man!

Don't be anxious about anything! Chill out!

The reality is that Paul writes his letter to the Philippians
While under house arrest!

And it's not too long before he is executed
For being a follower of Jesus!

Nevertheless, he writes this letter of joy and encouragement.

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The key to our lesson today, then, is this.

Our inward attitude
Doesn't have to reflect
Our outward circumstances!

Paul can sing from his prison cell
Don't worry be happy
Because of one thing and one thing only
Faith in Jesus Christ!

Faith that whatever happens
Jesus Christ is by his side!

That neither death nor life nor anything
Could ever separate him from his Savior!

That was enough for Paul!

~~

Paul writes to an anxious church!

The church in Philippi worried about the very things
Churches throughout the ages worry about:

The faithfulness of its members
In the face of trials and tribulations!

Paul reminds them not to worry.

He reminds the church in Rome to do the same.

Romans 8:31-32 (NRSV)

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?

Paul wasn't crazy! Maybe a bit weird.

But he wasn't some madman
Trying to convince himself
That everything would be fine.

Paul's courage came from his faith in Jesus Christ.

Like General George Patton who said
Courage is fear that has said its prayers.

Paul says, "Church!"

Philippians 4:6 (NLT)

⁶ Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.

In other words, turn your worries into prayers!

Through prayer, let faith transform your fears.

And Paul says if you do this . . . if you pray this . . .

Philippians 4:7 (NLT)

7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Those who put everything in God's hands
Will eventually see God's hand in everything!

I don't know who said that but it's good advice.

Jean-Pierre de Caussade, a 17th century priest said this.

To escape the distress caused by regret for the past or fear for the future, this is the rule to follow: leave the past to the infinite mercy of God. The future to His good providence; and give the present wholly to his love by being faithful to His grace!

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And Martin Luther King, Jr. said this.

*Fear knocked at the door!
Faith answered!
There was no one there.*

In addition, John said this.

1 John 4:18 (NRSV)

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear

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Do we desire the peace of God
That transcends understanding?

Pray!

Do we want to be able to say "Rejoice!"
In the face of whatever life throws you?

Pray!

Do we want to live our lives calmly and deliberately
Even in the midst of the most troubling of news?

Pray!

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In the Book of James,
We are instructed on the prayer of faith:

James 5:13-15 (NRSV)

¹³ Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

At some time, every one of us—
Even the most faithful—
Will become anxious, stressed
Even to the point of despairing.

Let's begin the year 2020
Seeking God's Holy Spirit

To replace our fear with faith
Our worry with trust
Our despair with hope.

Place in God's hands everything
So that in everything we see God's hand.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

**⁵Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
⁶in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.**

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In the moments to follow
As I do at the beginning of every year
I offer the service of anointing.

What better way to start 2020
Than with an anointing from God.

During the singing of our last hymn
I will anoint you in the name of our Trinitarian God
Father, Son and Holy Spirit

For the forgiveness of sin
For the strengthening of faith
And for healing and wholeness.

Rejoice in the Lord always
I say it again, chill out!
The Lord is near.