

Philippians 4:4-7
Anxiety in the New Year
WRCoB 1.8.23

We all know . . . we've all been told
That worrying is a waste of time.

It is counter-productive!

Yes, and as Christians we know we shouldn't worry
Because God is in control . . . right?

And yet, we fill our days with worry.

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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 true faith is the end of anxiety.*

So, we people of faith should never worry right?

Then why is it that a lot of us suffer from anxiety?

C. H. Spurgeon reminds us that

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

We worry over things we have no control over!

We know that, and yet.

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

An average person's anxiety is focused on

40% -- things that will never happen

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

12% -- criticism by others

10% -- about health

8% -- about real problems that need to be faced

Someone once said

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

Since 2007, the American Psychological Association
Has conducted a survey entitled *Stress in America*.

The Stress in America™ survey
Measures attitudes and perceptions of stress
Among the general public.

Its summary of 2022.

Concerned for the future, beset by inflation, the October 2022 report shows a battered American psyche, facing a barrage of external stressors that are mostly out of personal control.

The survey found a majority of adults are disheartened by government and political divisiveness, daunted by historic inflation levels, and dismayed by widespread violence.

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There are real concerns that can cause worry and anxiety
As we face 2023

But we need to be clear about something!

Worrying and being anxious about these things
Has no impact on anything except our well-being!

Faith in a Sovereign and Loving God
Should free us from fears and anxieties.

Mark Galli, of Christianity Today writes

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 an association between faith and fear.

The correlation being
That the more fear one experiences
The less faith one possesses.

Let's also be clear I'm not talking
About a clinical diagnosis of Anxiety Disorder.

Clinical anxiety is a mental illness.

It requires a more multi-pronged response
Using therapy and medication
Alongside of faith in God!

But 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?

You bet he did!

Did he have reason to worry?

Of course!

Was he afraid! It is certainly hard to tell!

I mean, when you read his letter to the Philippians
You'd think Paul is writing from a beach in Jamaica
Sipping from a glass with a little umbrella in it.

You'd think the sound system from the hotel
Was playing Bobby McFerrin's *Don't Worry Be Happy!*

Just listen to Paul.

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

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

The context in which we find Paul is not good.

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

But it's from that perspective
He writes this letter of joy and encouragement.

How does he do that?

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Well, that's the lesson for us today.

Our inward attitude
Doesn't need 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, Jesus Christ!

Faith that whatever happens
Jesus Christ was by his side!

That whatever happens
Jesus has prepared a place for him in his kingdom.

Faith that whatever happens, Paul needn't worry.

And that was all Paul needed!

Enough for him to say, not once, but twice
Rejoice in the Lord always.

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Paul writes to an anxious church in Philippi!

The Philippians worried about the very things
Churches throughout the ages worried about!

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

Paul reminds them not to worry.

Press on!

Philippians 3:13-14 CEB

¹³ Brothers and sisters, I myself don't think I've reached it, but I do this one thing: I forget about the things behind me and reach out for the things ahead of me. ¹⁴ The goal I pursue is the prize of God's upward call in Christ Jesus

This much I do know, Paul wasn't crazy!

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

He knew fear.

Paul's courage came from faith in Jesus Christ.

General Patton once said

Courage is fear that has said its prayers.

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Jean-Pierre de Caussade, a 17th century priest writes

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!

I want you to close your eyes for a minute

And listen to a poem by Mary Oliver.

I worried a lot. Will the garden grow, will the rivers flow in the right direction, will the earth turn as it was taught, and if not how shall I correct it?

Was I right, was I wrong, will I be forgiven, can I do better?

Will I ever be able to sing, even the sparrows can do it and I am, well, hopeless.

Is my eyesight fading or am I just imagining it, am I going to get rheumatism, lockjaw, dementia?

Finally, I saw that worrying had come to nothing. And gave it up. And took my old body and went out into the morning, and sang.

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When the world closes in on you
And seeks to overwhelm you with anxiety

When fear is the over-riding emotion in your life

Let Jesus come to you.

Jesus is here, waiting!

Jesus is our salvation.

But we don't have to die to experience it.

Christ's salvation is for daily living.

The root word of salvation is the Latin *salvare*.

The same root as the word salve.

And like salve, Jesus heals those wounds
Unhealed wounds festering in our lives.

Jesus offers us wholeness . . . now!

Jesus replaces our fear, our concern, our worry
With the peace that surpasses understanding.

He replaces our sorrow, our despair, our anxiety
With bright hope for today and tomorrow.

And Jesus replaces our loneliness, and feelings of isolation
With the presence of his abiding love.

Paul says, don't worry about anything
And in everything by prayer
Let your requests be made known.

God will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Jesus is the healer of our every ill.

As the great spiritual loudly proclaims

Can't nobody do me like Jesus.

Why not let Jesus have his way with you, right now!

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I invite you to consider a special prayer.

The prayer is in the form of the anointing service.

James says in chapter five, verses 14 and 15

If you need God's healing presence

Call for the church leaders to pray

And anoint you in the name of the Lord.

The prayer of faith has healing powers.

We believe the anointing service

First and foremost, is a healing prayer.

But healing is not just physical.

It is also emotional and spiritual.

It is seeking God's mercy and grace

And God's healing of body, mind, and soul

Anointing is used to strengthen faith

As we face the challenges of life.

Consider the anointing service

As an invitation for wholeness through Christ Jesus

In the silence that follows
I invite you to be in prayer right where you are.

I want you to consider what it is
That is keeping you from wholeness.

Ask Jesus to release you from those things.

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Following the silent prayer
As we stand to sing our final hymn

I invite you to come forward
I will anoint you

For the forgiveness of sin
For the strengthening of your faith
For healing and wholeness.

As you return to your seats
Please continue to be in an attitude of prayer.

Final words from Martin Luther King Jr.

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

Let us pray