

Philippians 4:4-9: A Prescription for Anxiety

by Harvey Bluedorn

A. Rejoicing in the Lord Who is Near (4:4-5)

χαίρετε ἐν Κυρίῳ πάντοτε·

4:4 Be {continually} rejoicing in {the} Lord in every circumstance [every time /at all times /always /on every occasion /at every event];

πάλιν ἐρῶ, χαίρετε.

b I will say {it} **again**: be {continually} rejoicing.

τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν γνωσθήτω πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις.

4:5 Cause **your gentle-kindness** [fair and considerate manner] to be made known to *all* men.

ὁ Κύριος ἐγγύς.

b **The Lord** {is} near [close by (in time, space, or thought)].

4ab ▪ *Circumstances should not distract us from our joy in the Lord. Genuine and lasting joy is in only Him.*

5a ▪ *Paul would never tell us to be a show off about our virtues. In an indirect and passive way, Paul is telling us to let the gentle-kindness which is in us to come out in every circumstance. This should prevail over the nervous anxiety of our carnal nature which Paul is about to discuss.*

5b ▪ *This is not talking about Jesus returning to earth. It is a reminder that the Lord is close by, not in the sense of a Judge watching our every move, but as the One upon Whom we can rely upon in every circumstance – He is in the circumstance.*

B. Praying to the God of Peace Who Guards the Heart (4:6-7)

μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε,

4:6 Be {constantly} anxious [concerned /fretful /worrisome] **about not one** {circumstance [concern]} [Stop being anxious about anything],

ἀλλ' ἐν παντί

b but rather, **in every** {circumstance},

τῇ προσευχῇ καὶ τῇ δεήσει μετὰ εὐχαριστίας

c by the {act of} prayer and by the {act of} pleading [supplication /petitioning /requesting] along with thanksgiving

τὰ αἰτήματα ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθω πρὸς τὸν Θεόν·

d {continually} cause **your** {specific} **requests** [petitions] to be made known to God directly,

καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Θεοῦ,

4:7 and then **that peace** [well-being /harmony /tranquility] {which comes} **from God**

ἡ ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν,

b – {that peace} **which holds** {protective authority} **over** [rises above /surpasses /protects] **every mind** [thought] –

φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν

c shall keep guard over [keep in custody /... under control /protect]

your hearts and your thoughts [mental activities /minds /understandings /intellects]

ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

d in Christ Jesus.

6a ▪ *In Greek, there is a way to say “Don’t start being anxious,” and another way to say, “Stop (don’t continue) being anxious.” This verse is closer to the second, yet it is not quite the same. The idea here is as if we have buckets labeled “anxieties” and we are commanded to keep those buckets empty by doing the following things.*

6bcd ▪ *Here is the first part of a “treatment” for anxieties, a formula or method of sorts. Of course, the whole matter of treating and curing anxieties cannot be reduced to a spiritual formula for faith – do this and live. Rather, it requires faith, and it exercises faith, and faith thus strengthened displaces anxieties – live and do this.*

1. Anxiety will rob us of our joy, hence Paul began with the command to rejoice in the Lord in every circumstance. There is no joy in trying to anticipate everything, to know more than one can know, to control what cannot be controlled. So we should cast our cares upon the Lord, Mt 6:25; 1Pt 5:7, for there is nothing which we can need which He will not supply.

2. We should bring out our gentle-kindness in every circumstance, displacing the nervousness of anxiety.

3. We should be self-aware that the Lord is close by – He is in the circumstance, and we can rely upon Him in every circumstance.

4. We should keep our anxiety bucket empty by continually identifying our anxieties and bringing them before the Lord, talking to Lord about them in prayer, pleading with the Lord about them, thanking the Lord for them, and bringing specific requests directly to the Lord for help in them – in other words, laying your cares on Him Who cares for you.

7ab ▪ “Peace from God ... holds {protective authority} over every mind.” What would otherwise be an anxiety-inducing circumstance – whatever it is, whenever it comes, however it may appear to us – is actually a blessing from the Lord. The circumstance cannot dissolve union with Christ, nor remove God’s forgiving love, nor revoke one’s reservation in heaven. The circumstance will always work together with all other things for the good of those who are “the called” according to God’s eternal purpose. This is not apathy, complacency, indifference, nor stoicism, but tranquility.

7cd ▪ This peace shall keep guard over the heart and the thoughts. This refers to the soldier standing on guard duty on the inside of the city gate controlling who goes out. The heart is the center of inner life from which thoughts flow. This peace keeps the heart and mind from straying outside of Christ Jesus, preserving the enjoyment of union with Christ, a union which itself secures this peace.

C. Putting Living Examples of Virtue into Regular Practice (4:8-9)

τὸ λοιπὸν, ἀδελφοί,

4:8 As for what remains {to be done}, brethren:

ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ, ὅσα σεμνά,

b as many {things} as are true [/genuine /honest] {in character},

as many {things} as {are} honorable [/respectable /dignified] {in reputation},

ὅσα δίκαια, ὅσα ἀγνά,

c as many {things} as {are} just [/upright /orderly] {in judgment},

as many {things} as {are} pure [/chaste /undefiled] {in behavior},

ὅσα προσφιλή, ὅσα εὐφρημα,

d as many {things} as {are} endearing [/amiable /admirable /attractive and pleasing] {in demeanor},

as many {things} as {are} commendable [/reputable /appealing] {in conduct},

εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος,

e if {there is} anything {else exemplary of} moral excellence [/virtuousity /manliness],

and if {there is} anything {else worthy of} praise [/commendation],

ταῦτα λογίζεσθε·

f {then continually} take an inventory of [/collect and count up] **these** {virtues}.

ἃ καὶ ἐμάθετε καὶ παρελάβετε καὶ ἠκούσατε καὶ εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοί,

4:9 – the very {virtues here listed}

which you have learned {through instructive practice [/disciplining]},

and you have received {by transmission},

and you have {personally} heard,

and you have {personally} seen in me –

ταῦτα πράσσετε·

b **these** {very virtues} be practicing {regularly},

καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἔσται μεθ’ ὑμῶν.

c and then {as you do this} **the God of that peace** [verse 7] shall be with you.

8a ▪ The remainder of the “treatment for anxiety” follows.

8bcd ▪ Six items are listed which may be divided into three pairs of virtues.

8e ▪ The first four items are examples of moral excellence, the last two items are examples of things praiseworthy. Paul hereby makes clear that this list of virtues is merely suggestive, not exhaustive.

8f ▪ The word translated “take and inventory” might elsewhere be translated “reckon” or “calculate” or “think” “consider” “ponder” “meditate on,” but in this context the idea would be to take a full accounting or inventory.

9ab ▪ Paul instructs the Philippians to follow his example in these things, which suggests that we should find living examples which “flesh out” each of these virtues. Seeing someone doing something often helps us to understand how to do it ourselves.

So the final part of the treatment is to recognize and to put into constant practice the virtues which we recognize in others.

9c ▪ The Lord is near (verse 5), and God of the peace is with us (verse 9).

Notice that the treatment for anxiety has nothing to do with analyzing problem circumstances any further than to know how to present our concerns to the Lord in prayer. The focus is instead upon maintaining a strong spiritual life. Anxiety attacks faith, so the treatment is to do those things which nurture faithful living. If we stop to focus on the problem, then we take our eyes off the solution. The solution is to move ahead in faith.