

# Anxiety

## Philippians 4

Dave Powlison  
Notes from lecture  
2004 Biblical Counseling Conf. in Lafayette, IN

Almost 90% of all counseling involves 3 big issues: anger, anxiety, and escapism.

Here's some QUESTIONS TO ASK when struggling with anxiety

### 1. What Do You Worry About?

- money
- health
- past hurts
- too many responsibilities  
(too much on plate)
- Does my spouse love me?
- Will I get Alzheimer's?
- I always blow it – will God ever be able to change me?
- Could God ever forgive me?
- Will I fail? Will I succeed?
- Conflicts in church
- Career
- Distant friends, nobody cares, nobody calls

Remember – you have good reason to worry! These are all things that are tough – and you can't control them.

Sometimes it helps to write them down and remember the list is FINITE – maybe 10 things... not 10,000.

Scripture never trivializes the things we worry about. It just says you have greater reason to take them to someone who can help, rather than worrying about them. In other words, you have reason to worry, but **better reasons** not to worry. Don't get caught in the 'spin cycle' (like a dryer going round and round) – twisting, turning, driving, churning.

### 2. Who Is God?

So often we overlook v. 5 "The Lord is near."

Why did He say that? Because when you are worrying, you are caught in a universe where no one is home – it's just you and your struggle – mano a mano... but God plants a grace 'bomb' right here. You can't understand v. 6 without v. 5! The Bible doesn't expect us to deal with anxiety without a revelation of the Lord – Someone who has set His affection on you and made you His own (I Peter 4 is laid out the same way).

So what is revealed about the character of God is v. 1-6?

v. 4 Rejoice in the Lord – there is some reason to be fundamentally happy in the Lord (See Phil. 1:6 – you have a reason for joy)

v. 6 God hears- “Make your request known” – God is able to know. He’s a hearer (Isa. 59:1-2)

v. 7 God is an actor – the peace of God – but remember that being at peace in God can involve a lot of anguish (see the Psalm 30s and 50s)

v. 9 God of peace be with you

The radical God-centeredness of this passage works to destroy anxiety – because anxiety is a lonely producing agent. It isolates us.

v. 8 Is like a website “Hot Link” that sends us to a laundry list of things we need to know and consider – what is TRUE – because there’s something about anxiety that is a LIE.

### **3. Talk to God about #1 in Light of #2**

In other words, talk to God about what you worry about... in light of who He is. Frame it in the light of who you’re talking to. Otherwise, prayer itself can become just a recitation of what I’m worrying about. Some people’s prayers can actually be anxiety producing agents themselves – because there’s not enough of God in them. The problem itself overshadows everything else. But proper prayer infuses the presence of God back into the scenario. State your worries in light of who God is.

- by prayer
- and supplication
- make requests known

Most people think the opposite of anxiety is calm. Not true. Philippians 4:6 says take your worries seriously. Supplication is a CRY TO GOD! 95% of the Psalms have a cue that something verbal and out loud is going on. The Psalms seem to be out loud – “Hear my cry, O God.”

I.e. Psalm 28:1-6 hear the voice of my supplications

Phil. 4:6 captures the two great themes of “Need” and “Joy”

90 Psalms are in the key of “Need”

60 Psalms are in the key of “Joy” or gratitude

When you get stuck in the ‘spin cycle’ – spinning on our cares over and over – something does not get handed over to God. He tells us to cast our cares on Him. There needs to be a real transaction.\

There are two FAULTS or abysses:

1. Anxious, nervous, tense – my life is a self-contained psychological state that is no fun at all – it’s just me and my problems spinning and spinning.
2. Being calm – the Bible is not about calm – it’s not Khuna Matada (from “Lion King”). It’s not ‘no worries, man.’ And it’s certainly not, “Whatever!” It’s not flat lined because things really do matter. The attitude of ‘whatever’ is sinful. It’s not a studied indifference or detachment... uncaring like what Buddhism teaches.

The flesh always presents only two opposite options... but there's always a biblical 3<sup>rd</sup> option!

3. The biblical approach is a HOLY CONCERN or impassioned care based on the character of God. It's radically God relational in its concern. The opposite of anxiety is a FOCUSED, holy concern that looks to God.

Just look at the example of the apostle Paul in the rest of the book of Philippians...

Ch. 2

He was longing for you all

He was distressed

He was less concerned and relieved of my anxiety about you

Phil. 2:20 the word 'concern' is the same word used in 4:6 that is translated 'anxiety.' So he is actually commending Timothy for being anxious about the Philippians. Phil. 2:20 means a holy love that Paul commends.

2 Cor. 11 Paul talks about his trials and then says, "On top of this my 'concern' [same word] for all the churches."

We are not to be Hindus or Stoics – who try to live a flat line emotionally.

1 Peter 2 exhorts us to entrust ourselves to God in the midst of trials and concern. Entrust ourselves to a faithful Creator. Jesus is given as an example – but Psa. 22 and Heb. 5 tells us that Jesus entrusted His soul to God with loud groanings – that's how He did it.

#### **4. Where Are You Going to Park Your Mind?**

The anxious mind parks in a LIE. The trusting mind parks itself in the TRUTH. We have to fight off lies with the truth.

#### **5. What Are You Supposed to Do Today?**

What is today's task? What am I called to do today? This is the planning stage.

You realize of your 10 top worries that 5 of them will never be on your plate. They never ever materialize! Half of them will never belong to you – and of the other 5 only 1 or 2 usually belong to you TODAY. It's always a DOABLE DAY. God never gives us more than we can bear. God's call to each person each day is doable. Matt. 6:33