SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

November 1, 2026

Pathway to Contentment
"Pray About Everything"
Philippians 4:6-7
Rev. Mike Fordham

There is a story about a mother and son who lived in a forest. One day when a tornado surprised them, the mother clung to a tree and tried to hold her son. But the swirling winds carried him into the sky. He was gone. The woman began to weep and pray: "Please, O Lord, bring back my boy! He's all I have. I'd do anything not to lose him. If you'll bring him back, I'll serve you all my days." Suddenly the boy toppled from the sky, right at her feet a bit mussed up, but safe and sound. His mother joyfully brushed him off. Then she stopped for a moment, looked to the sky, and said, "He had a hat, Lord." This poor mother did not get exactly what she wanted from God and thus she missed out on the contentment, peace, and joy of what she did have. Finding contentment and peace in our lives is very difficult not only because of the many daily trials we face, but also because we live in a world where no matter how much God has blessed us it is never enough. We always want more. In this sermon series leading up to Thanksgiving we are diving into a portion of *Philippians 4* to discover the path to experience contentment. We begin with just two short verses that call on us to pray about everything and as we do God will flood us with His peace through which we experience true, inner contentment.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

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

DON'T WORRY ABOUT ANYTHING

First, Paul tells us ***Don't Worry About Anything***. A very important step to finding contentment in life is to not worry about anything. Don't you hate it when you are overwhelmed with worry or struggling with anxiety and someone comes along and says "Just stop worrying? Don't worry, be happy!" You might respond, "I wish it were that easy to stop the downward spiral of worry, fear, and anxiety." Yet here in Philippians the Apostle Paul is not giving us a suggestion, but this is a command to stop doing it. Paul

is not writing this as someone who never struggled with being overwhelmed with life's concerns. Paul is actually writing this from prison. As a matter of fact, about a quarter of Paul's ministry was spent in prisons. Paul also wrote four books of the Bible from prison: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. Because of Paul being so outspoken for Jesus, his life was one of great hardship where he constantly had to wrestle with worry, fear, and anxiety. When Paul says do not be anxious about anything he is not implying a complete lack of concern, nor does it mean Christians are to be happy-go-lucky or careless. Paul is calling on us to not allow our lives to be crippled by all the concerns and worries of life. Worry and fear are the primary enemies of true contentment and peace.

In an article from March of 2025, in a publication called, *Study Finds*, it reports what we all know, that anxiety has become an unwelcome companion for many, creeping into everyday life with relentless persistence. The most striking revelation is the pervasive nature of worry among younger Americans. An overwhelming 62% of Gen Z and millennial respondents, those that are between the ages of 30-45, report feeling constantly anxious, compared to 38% of older generations. On average, people spend two hours and eighteen minutes each day caught in the grip of worrisome thoughts. This is a significant chunk of time that could otherwise fuel productivity, creativity, or personal growth. The timing of these worry periods reveals interesting patterns. A third of respondents find themselves most anxious when alone. 30% are plagued by worries as they prepare to fall asleep. Another 17% are tormented by anxious thoughts upon waking. Twelve percent experience peak worry while getting ready for bed. When it comes to specific concerns: 53% of respondents cite money as their primary source of anxiety. Forty-two percent worry about their loved ones. Forty-two percent fret about pending tasks and to-do lists. Thirty-seven percent have health concerns. Twenty-two percent have sleep anxiety. Nineteen percent are concerned by political uncertainties. For parents, the concerns extend far beyond personal anxieties. Seventy-seven percent express profound worry about the world their children are inheriting, with 34% specifically calling out climate change as a significant concern. How many minutes a day do we spend worrying? We are experiencing today in our world a pandemic of worry and anxiety. It is found in every person and in every culture around the world. The Bible tells us not to worry as worry destroys our spirit and erodes our relationship with God. It infects our spiritual life, a virus that drains life from our souls. Worry and anxiety robs us of the life God wants us to experience. As Corrie ten Boom said, "Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength." God wants us to be free from carrying the overwhelming burden of the cares of this world.

Pray About Everything with Requests and Thanksgiving

Thankfully the Apostle Paul here in *Philippians 4* does not just say stop worrying or being overwhelmed with anxiety and leave it at that. Paul continues saying instead of worrying we need to ***Pray About Everything with Requests and Thanksgiving***. The answer to our fears, worries, and anxieties is prayer. Why prayer? When we pray, we are bringing our needs to the expert in everything. God always knows what is best and always does what is best. God is also unlimited in power as the Creator of all that is. When we pray, we are talking to the One and Only God about whom *Ephesians 3:20* says, *"Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within*

us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think." God is able to do infinitely more, above and beyond what we might ask or even could imagine. There are no limits to what God can do. In addition to all of this, God truly loves and cares about us. *First Peter 5:7* says, *"Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you."* God longs for us to invite Him into the details of our everyday lives so that we are not carrying the burden alone. God wants us to bring to Him in prayer the difficult conversation we need to have, a decision we need to make, our financial concerns, our children and grandchildren, the doctor's appointment, our health, and so much more. If it matters to us it matters to God and God longs for us to bring it all to Him. When we are overwhelmed with the concerns of life, the first step for God's children should be to bring every detail of our lives to this all wise, all knowing, all powerful, all loving God. There is no better place to turn for all our concerns.

Not only are we to turn to God and give Him all our burdens, requests, and details of our lives but equally important is our need to articulate to God our thankfulness for who God is and all He has done for us. That can do wonders for transforming our perspective of life and overcoming the worries and cares of life that pull us down to only focus on what we do not have. Instead, we now focus on all that God has done for us which, if we do so daily, will build up our faith and the power to overcome anxiety. The Greek word used here in *Philippians 4:6* for thanks is the word, *eucharistia*, which means not just a quick routine thanks, but one of deep gratitude. The antidote to anxiety is coming daily to God with deep, sincere thanks. Maybe that is why the Bible tells us in *1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*, *"16 Always be joyful. 17 Never stop praying. 18 Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus."*

Ken Shigematsu in his book, *Survival Guide for the Soul,* shares about Shawn Achor, a psychologist who teaches at Harvard, who suggests that we can train our brains to become more grateful by setting aside just *five minutes* a day for practicing gratitude. He cites a one-week study in which people were asked to take five minutes a day, at the same time every day, to write down three things for which they were thankful. They didn't have to be big things, but they had to be concrete and specific, such as, "I'm thankful for the delicious Thai take-out dinner I had last night." Or, "I'm thankful that my daughter gave me a hug." Or, "I'm thankful that my boss complimented my work." The participants simply expressed thanks for three specific things at the same time every day. At the end of one month, the researchers followed up and found that those who practiced gratitude—including those who *stopped* the exercise after one week—were happier and less depressed. Remarkably, after three months, the participants who had been part of the one-week experiment were still more joyful and content. Incredibly, after the six-month mark, they were still happier, less anxious, and less depressed. The researchers hypothesized that the simple practice of writing down three thanksgivings a day over the course of a week primed the participants' minds to search for the good in their lives. Basically, the researchers discovered what God has already guided us to do to overcome all our anxieties, to daily and regularly pray with thankfulness. When the concerns of this world become overwhelming leading us to worry and be filled with anxiety, it is time for us to stop, bring our specific concerns to God, and then remember all that God has done for us and to articulate to God our thankfulness for His goodness and faithfulness.

GOD WILL GIVE US HIS PEACE WHICH PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING

What is especially beautiful about this passage in Philippians is the promise that says if we will pray about everything with all our requests and thanksgiving to God, ***God Will Give Us His Peace Which Passes All Understanding***. What a beautiful promise! God promises that if we will bring to Him every detail of our lives with requests and thanksgiving, He will flood our entire lives with His peace. Paul tells us that this peace that God will give us is ***Independent of Circumstances***. This peace is not some surface, temporary peace that we can only experience when everything is going good in our lives. This peace from God remains even when all is going wrong around us. This peace from God is ***Beyond Human Logic*** as it "surpasses" (or transcends) human reasoning and comprehension. God will give us peace when we should be falling apart. God gives us peace and contentment even when life's storms are raging around us. This peace also ***Acts Like a Guard***. Paul says that it will stand over and guard our hearts and minds against attacks of fear, panic, and distress. This peace is also then ***An Internal Gift***. This peace is a deep, unshakeable internal steadiness or sense of contentment that comes through turning to God and trusting that God is at work even in the most anxious circumstances of life.

It was reported on *6ABC.com* back in January of 2023, about the time when Molly Lee was a passenger on a flight from Charlotte to New York when another passenger made it clear she was not comfortable. She said it was at that point the woman began crying. One of the flight attendants overheard the woman and immediately went to comfort her and help her overcome the anxiety she was experiencing. Lee said, "[the flight attendant] just was so reassuring, so calming and said, 'You know what? I got you. I'm gonna be there for you, just anything you need to let me know.' With every little noise, she'd be like, 'What's that?' He's like, 'That's okay. That's just the jet bridge pulling away' or whatever the case may be. And that really helped her. He didn't have to do that, you know, and to just see someone extend their heart in that way to a stranger was just beautiful to me, and I wanted to capture it." Lee said the flight attendant, Floyd Dean-Shannon, sat next to the woman for nearly 10-minutes just holding her hand and reassuring her that she was safe. ***Notice that this woman's circumstance didn't change but the presence of that flight attendant helped her to find peace through it.*** God may not change your circumstances, but He can change your experience of those circumstances through His peace. I love that picture of God who is with us through every moment of our lives. As such God invites us not to carry all the burdens of life on our own but to bring every detail to God with thanksgiving and as we do God will see us through whatever we are facing with an inner strength, peace, and contentment that will defy all logic. God doesn't promise to take all our problems away, but He does promise to be with us every step of our lives, and that is the key to finding true, inner, lasting peace that our circumstances cannot touch.

Some of you may ask, is it wrong that after turning to God with my prayer requests and thanksgiving that I still struggle with worry and anxiety? Does this make me a bad Christian? No, it just means we live in a broken, hurting world and we feel the consequences of that brokenness. The question isn't whether worries and anxiety will come into our lives, but what will we do with those worries when they come. Will we allow them to consume us, or will we continually bring them to God? If we will

not give up bringing everything to God in prayer, in time we will experience more and more of God's supernatural peace. We are on a journey of continually turning all the details of our lives over to God and as we do so God will in time give us the peace and contentment in every circumstance.

Corrien Ten Boom once said something we all need to remember, "I looked on Jesus and the dove of peace entered my heart. I looked at the dove of peace; and lo … off he went." In other words, the key to finding and experiencing this kind of peace is not found in searching for peace. It is only found in the presence of the author and the Prince of Peace, Jesus. This peace from God is not found in the absence of trouble but only in the presence of God in the midst of our troubles. That is why Jesus said in *John 14:27, "'I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.'"* Jesus also said in *John 16:33, "'I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.'"* This supernatural peace is only found in the presence of Jesus.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES: (Books marked with * are available to be checked-out in the Asbury Discipleship Resource Center)

- *Anxious for Nothing: Finding Calm in a Chaotic World,* Max Lucado
- *Trusting God: Even When Life Hurts,* Jerry Bridges

Icebreaker Questions

1. What is something small or unexpected that brought you joy or made you feel especially thankful recently?
2. When life becomes stressful or overwhelming, what is your natural first response? Do you tend to problem-solve, seek advice, distract yourself, or turn to God in prayer?

Sermon Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between having legitimate concerns and allowing worry to control our thoughts and actions? How can we recognize when our concerns are beginning to interfere with our trust in God?
2. Why do we sometimes hesitate to bring certain concerns to God? What might change in our daily lives if prayer became our first response rather than our last resort?
3. How does intentionally remembering God's faithfulness change our perspective on present challenges? What are some practical ways we can develop a consistent habit of gratitude?
4. How is the peace Jesus promises different from the peace the world offers? Can you share a time when you experienced God's peace even though your circumstances had not changed?
5. What does it practically look like to continually surrender our worries to Christ? Identify one concern you are carrying today and one intentional step you can take this week to entrust it to Him.
6. What impacted you most from the sermon?
7. How might this group pray for you this week?