



Stand Firm in the Lord, Part 4 – Do Not Be Anxious, PRAY!

Series: Philippians – To Live Is Christ

Philippians 4:5b-7

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I was thinking as I was preparing for this sermon this morning that we live in an age and in a society that is a uniquely fertile ground for anxiety and fear. DA Carson says in one of his books that, “There is a sense in which our society demands that we worry on a broader scale than any other society in the history of the human race.” And I find myself agreeing with him. He makes the point that if we were to go back to 800 years ago in Europe, for instance, we would discover that people worried about nothing more than local matters. That is not to say that those local matters were not severe -- high mortality rates, lack of medical care, need for food. Life could be harsh and brutal. But communication with other parts of the world was minimal and often late and far removed. What was going on in the next county was often as foreign as what was going on in another country. Even national news was somewhat alien. But then came the printing press, the telegraph, the telephone, radio, satellite communications, email, and cell phones. We became a global village. Our advances in communication demand that we worry about a whole host of things that were foreign a few hundred years ago – world economics, warfare in Syria, ISIS, the military advance of Russia, a kook in North Korea with the bomb, whatever you believe about global warming and the fate of the snail darter.

He points out that our worries are not limited to international affairs. Personal and cultural problems are constantly polled, statistically analyzed, and paraded in our newspapers and our televisions. The economy changes and suddenly very few have permanent jobs and some do not have jobs at all. Then add in the everyday issues that we face -- conflicts with colleagues at work, impending exams and the expectations that family and friends impose, competition at work, marriage and family troubles, a rebellious teenager, bereavement, financial insecurity, our plans for our future, health issues or irrational fears. Carson says, “Pressures mount and surround us, and bully us, until even the Christian who hears the injunction of this passage – ‘Don’t be anxious about anything’ -- smiles half bitterly and mutters, ‘You don’t understand; it can’t be done.’”

But, beloved it can be done and it must be done if we are going to stand firm in the Lord. The Philippians to whom Paul was writing were facing much that was producing anxiety in their hearts. Think about what this church was facing. They were facing the opposition of the unbelieving world with its values and godlessness, the coming of very real persecution for their faith in Christ, the encroachment of false doctrine, cracks in the unity of the church, and people leaving their fellowship who were once in the ranks of the church. Add that to the real pressures of living, and like our own age this was a fertile ground for paralyzing fear, for discouragement and despair, and for peace killing anxiety that could cause them to disintegrate. And Paul addresses this situation with pure theological gold. This is one of those passages that give steel to the troubled soul and one that we need to receive with gladness and fullness of confidence and hope. In the swirl of issues and troubles that could crush their hearts, Paul applies the life-giving truth of God and he begins by reminding them of the defining reality that superseded everything that they saw or felt.

The Defining Reality – The Lord is at Hand (5b) Paul begins by saying to the Philippians these words: ***“The Lord is at hand;” (Philippians 4:5b, ESV)*** In the midst of everything that they were facing – all the threats, all the challenges, all the situations that could produce worry and fear – they were to remember this fact, this unchanging, unalterable, defining reality – “the Lord is at hand,” nearby, with you. This is the foundational reality, the bedrock truth, for everyone who is a child of God, is it not? It has been all along. ***“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10, ESV)***

They needed to be reminded of the promise of God. Promises made to Israel and to us. ***“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.” (Isaiah 43:1b–3a, ESV)***

We are not orphans in this world. We have a God who loves us, who through Christ has saved us, who through His Spirit is with us. He is not far off, but sticks closer than a brother. He is a refuge and fortress for us. ***“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my fortress, my God, in***

whom I trust.” For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.” (Psalm 91:1–4, ESV) The Lord is at hand; He is near to us. He is with us to care for us, to shepherd us, to strengthen and comfort us, to surround us with affection and sympathy, to cause us to endure, to fashion us more into the image of Christ and train us for righteousness, to confirm in us the salvation that He has so graciously given, to carry us and to assure us of His unfailing presence.

I know I need to hear this. There are times, more than I can recount, when my eyes have been filled and my heart has been torn by only what I see around me, things in my own life, things in the church, hardships and trial, troubles in the lives of my brothers and sisters in Christ whom I love, the situations in this country, the uncertainties of the future, that threaten to overwhelm me and blind to me to the reality of God’s faithful presence. I need to hear, “The Lord is at hand.” I need to be reminded of this bedrock reality.

This is the foundation of everything else that Paul has to say. And it is the underlying reality of God’s nearness to His people, to me and to you, that should be a source of comfort and peace, of calm assurance, and of confidence in Him, who loves us with an everlasting love. Our God is with us and He is unquestionably for us. **“The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them. The Lord preserves all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.” (Psalm 145:18–20, ESV)** So it is with this divine reality, plainly stated, that Paul moves to the divine command of this text.

A Divine Command – Do Not Be Anxious About Anything (6a) Paul says to us: **“Do not be anxious about anything...” (Philippians 4:6a, ESV)** Now the first thing that we need to come to grips with is that this is a command from the Lord. God commands us not to worry or be anxious. This word speaks of fretting, of worry, of angst, and fear, of being pulled in different directions. From a spiritual point of view, worry and anxiety is wrong thinking and wrong feeling about circumstances, people, and things. Now, there is such thing as proper concern, one that arises from love for another. In fact the same word that is translated as “anxious” in this verse is used to express proper concern in other places. For instance, Paul speaks of **“the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches,” (2 Corinthians 11:28, ESV)** speaking of the legitimate concern he had for the churches under his care. And earlier

in Philippians, he says: ***“For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.” (Philippians 2:20, ESV)***

There is such thing as legitimate concern, as loving concern, say, for someone else, but the kind of worry that forgets the sovereignty of God, his immutable love for his people, Christ’s finished work, the certainty of our salvation, the glories of heaven to come, that kind of worry is simply sin. It is ingratitude for what God is and has done for us. It is forgetfulness of his immeasurably great gifts. It’s a sin because it demonstrates a lack of faith, a lack of confidence, a lack of trust in God’s love, in His sovereignty, in His wisdom and in His power. It doubts his goodness toward His people. Worry and anxiety are an indictment of the character of God and it is damaging to us.

Barclay says: “There may be greater sins than worry, but very certainly there is no more disabling sin.” Anxiety consumes our spiritual and physical energy on nothing. It is unhealthy and unproductive. It saps our energies and focuses our thinking on all the ways can go wrong, probing possibilities that many times never occur. I’ve been guilty of it. I have been twisted up and out of sorts for days or weeks or months only to have God gently rebuke me by graciously meeting my need or working a situation out, and as a result my thanksgiving for his faithfulness is mixed with regret that I failed to trust Him as I should. I have to admit that my anxiety is sinful and unworthy of the character of God. To be anxious as if God were not on his throne, or if His promises were not yes and amen in Jesus Christ; as if the Lord were not near, or to want to be in control, or to be gripped by some fear or worry as if Christ were not trustworthy, really is the fruit of some seed of unbelief in my heart, pure and simple. Spurgeon says: “The indulgence of this evil habit of anxiety leads to its getting dominion over life, till life is not worth living by reason of the care we have about it.” If we try to excuse anxiety and worry by saying, “it’s just my nature,” or “It’s only human,” or “Anyone would be anxious if x,y,or z...” we will not overcome it because we are not confronting the root cause of it, namely our sin of not trusting God.

This is a sin that must be continually faced and fought and put to death. And the key to defeating anxiety is prayer. This is the divine weapon that God has given us to defeat anxiety in our lives. That is important for us to see.

The Divine Weapon (6b) Paul does not just tell us, “Hey, stop worrying.” He tells us how to put this worry to death by the grace of God, by the grace gift of prayer. He says: **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Philippians 4:6, ESV)** The temptation to fear and worry is real in all of our lives, in some more than others. Paul isn’t denying the reality of that. There are many situations in which we all find ourselves that can breed irrational fear, anxiety, and worry. Paul isn’t telling us to pretend they don’t exist. He’s telling us how to defeat it. Paul compiles a rich inventory of prayer vocabulary – prayer, supplication, thanksgiving, requests – to emphasize the freedom of access we have to bring every sort of concern to our Father.

He uses first the word “prayer” which has the tone of reverence. When Paul tells us to make our requests known to God, the word has the idea of being “face-to-face.” It gives us an idea where to start, with the right thoughts of the one before whom we are coming. That means that when we pray, we must stop to remember that we are coming before the Holy God, the One before whom the angels cover their faces, and we are being welcomed as His children. We are coming before the throne of the universe. The glory of God is not an after thought when we come to Him in prayer; it is the central thought. Whenever we find ourselves worrying, our first response must be to get alone with God and worship Him. Adoration is what we need, We need to see the greatness and majesty of God. Martyn Lloyd-Jones says: “Before you make your requests known unto God, pray, worship, adore. Come into the presence of God and for the time being forget your problems. Do not start with them. Just realize that you are face to face with God. The idea of being face to face is inherent in the very word ‘prayer.’ You come into the presence of God and you realize that presence and you recollect that presence – that is the first step always. Even before you make your requests known unto God you realize that you are face to face with God, that you are in his presence and you pour out your heart in adoration. That is the beginning.”

The word “supplication” speaks of our need and our dependence upon the Lord. It reminds us of our own weakness and God’s great providence and power to meet our needs. It puts us in the place of dependence upon every good gift that comes from His hand. The idea here is an earnest sharing of our needs and problems – no half-heartedness but earnest and sincere asking. Strive in your praying.

The word “thankfulness” reminds us that when we are in a place that causes the temptation to be anxious and to worry, in those times a spirit of gratitude is neither automatic nor spontaneous. This practice of thankfulness calls to mind three things. Remembrance of God’s supply in the past. You think back over His faithfulness to you up to this point and realize that He never abandons or forsakes His children. It moves us to submission to God’s sovereignty in the present. To thank God in the midst of a crisis or trial is to say, “Lord, I don’t understand, but I submit to Your sovereign purpose in this situation. I trust that You know what You’re doing and will work it together for good.” And then last, it moves us to trust in God’s grace for the future.

The last word, “requests,” calls us to plain speaking in our asking. Charles Spurgeon comments: “In plain English, say what you need, for this is true prayer. Get alone and tell the Lord what you need—pour out your heart before Him. Do not imagine that God needs any fine language!”

Do you see God’s wisdom in this? Prayer is a powerful and divine weapon, an immense gift from God, fashioned for a number of purposes in our lives, but here it is revealed as the destroyer of anxiety and fear. It is perfectly fashioned for just this thing. Calling upon the Lord is an act of faith and so it is the perfect weapon against the faithlessness that produces worry. Supplication is asking prayer, pleading prayer. Again it is the perfect weapon against the worry that says, whether we verbalize it or not, “God does not love me. He does not see my plight. He is not for me. He is not wise in His dealings with me. God is not mighty for me.” He does care for us and He is mighty!

The key in all of this is thankfulness. Thankfulness expresses the confidence that what God has ordained for me, what I face in this life, is for my good, for my salvation, for my becoming more like Christ, for my closeness and intimacy with Him. Thankfulness expresses the confidence that in all things, God is working for my good, whether I see it or not. When we pray like this, we have this divine promise.

The Divine Promise (7) The promise of fighting anxiety with prayer, Paul says, is this: **“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:7, ESV)** The peace of God which defies all natural explanation,

will garrison our hearts and minds, our emotions and thoughts, as we keep our hearts resting in Christ. **“You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock.”** (Isaiah 26:3–4, ESV) This isn’t the product of some clever psychological technique, not something we work up on our own, not some product of yoga or eastern meditation. It’s the shalom of God which describes a deep sense of tranquility and well-being, the contentment and the security that comes with being the people of God. And it is peace that is found in clinging to Christ. It doesn’t mean that all of the trials or troubles will just vanish, but it does mean that regardless of what we are facing, we can have a quiet confidence within us that God is at work and that the words of Romans 8:28 will be etched on our lives: **“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”** (Romans 8:28, ESV)

The peace of which Paul speaks is a rich and immensely strengthening gift of God’s grace. The idea of peace, divorced from its NT context, is sort of a spiritual marshmallow – full of softness and sweetness but without real substance. But peace, the peace of God, is a real thing. It is the first fruit of Calvary, the end of enmity between Holy God and repentant sinner through the atoning blood of Christ. They are the first words spoken to His gathered disciples by the risen Christ. **“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”** (John 20:19–20, ESV)

It is associated with real power. **“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”** (Hebrews 13:20–21, ESV) It is spoken in context of victory over Satan. **“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”** (Romans 16:20, ESV) this is far more than a spiritual marshmallow – it is the gracious gift to every child of God. Peace is a solid, real, tangible thing.

The peace that we can enjoy through prayer is far superior to anything that the world has to offer because it has a superior source. The peace that we can enjoy through prayer comes from God. It is His peace.

The peace that we can enjoy through prayer is far superior to anything that the world has to offer because it is superior in quality. What passes for peace in this world is very fragile. It's here today and gone tomorrow. The peace that the world offers, is fragile and transitory but God's peace is perfect and forever and always readily accessible. It is there for us to lay hold of, if we will.

Daniel 6 is a great illustration of this. It is a familiar story, one that our kids learn in Sunday School. ***“It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom 120 satraps, to be throughout the whole kingdom; and over them three high officials, of whom Daniel was one, to whom these satraps should give account, so that the king might suffer no loss. Then this Daniel became distinguished above all the other high officials and satraps, because an excellent spirit was in him. And the king planned to set him over the whole kingdom. Then the high officials and the satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom, but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, “We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God.” Then these high officials and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him, “O King Darius, live forever! All the high officials of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an injunction, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the injunction and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and the Persians, which cannot be revoked.” Therefore King Darius signed the document and injunction.”***

(Daniel 6:1–9, ESV) Daniel had reasons to be anxious. His enemies were gunning for him. They knew he was a man of prayer and that was exactly how they chose to attack him. But take note of how Daniel responded. He didn't fret and worry, didn't go to the King of the Medes. He went to the King of the Universe.

“When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.” (Daniel 6:10,

ESV) He prayed, he gave thanks to God. He came before the Lord and made his supplications known.

What happened? *“Then these men came by agreement and found Daniel making petition and plea before his God. Then they came near and said before the king, concerning the injunction, “O king! Did you not sign an injunction, that anyone who makes petition to any god or man within thirty days except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions?” The king answered and said, “The thing stands fast, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked.” Then they answered and said before the king, “Daniel, who is one of the exiles from Judah, pays no attention to you, O king, or the injunction you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day.” Then the king, when he heard these words, was much distressed and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him. Then these men came by agreement to the king and said to the king, “Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians that no injunction or ordinance that the king establishes can be changed.” Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, “May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!” And a stone was brought and laid on the mouth of the den, and the king sealed it with his own signet and with the signet of his lords, that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace and spent the night fasting; no diversions were brought to him, and sleep fled from him. Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.” (Daniel 6:11–23, ESV)* God delivered him, brought him through the trial. While Darius could not sleep, Daniel was able to spend the night with the lions in perfect peace.

Why We Need This Command Why do we need this command? Because we are so tempted to worry, to be anxious over so many things – things over which we have no power and for which we are not responsible. In times of trouble or uncertainty, the default reaction, our fleshly reaction, is to be afraid, to worry, to be anxious, to withdraw into ourselves, to forget the character of God and to despair. It is far too easy for our peace in Christ, the peace of

God, to be shattered. Paul is not dismissive of the temptation to worry, as if the truly spiritual never struggle in this respect. They do. We do. For Paul true peace is not being anxious no matter that there are all sorts of problems, difficulties, sorrows, and disappointments that you must face in life. This peace, God's peace, is a condition that fills a heart *in defiance of what might be naturally expected*, regardless of the presence of fears and even crushing disappointments.

Our life in Christ is a continual and daily battle to rest the whole of our confidence and hope gladly and thankfully upon Him. It is the constant battle to refuse to lean upon our own understanding and instead ***“with confidence (to) draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*** (Hebrews 4:16, ESV) It is a constant battle to trust in the promises of God over the uncertainty in our hearts. It may be more of a challenge for some of us because of our past, because of physical infirmity, because of present circumstances, because of the need in which we find ourselves, because of our family situations, whatever to be anxious for nothing – but, beloved, either God's commands are true, either prayer is a divine and powerful weapon against anxiety and fear or it is not, either God can be trusted or He cannot. Our circumstances are not the measure of truth – God is.

We have to learn to reason from the lesser to the greater. ***“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** (Romans 8:31–39, ESV) We must learn to reason from the love that saved us to the love that will certainly keep us. If God has taken care of our greatest need – salvation – we can be sure that He will certainly sustain and keep us.

He knows how to care for us as a Father, the greatest of fathers. Jesus said: **““Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:7–11, ESV)**

Do you see, beloved, how this gift of prayer is so vital? In prayer, anxiety over troubles is destroyed by trust in the God who will act for His people. In supplication, the very things that are causing anxiety are brought to the all-wise, all-loving, all-powerful, sovereign God who has power over those very things. In thanksgiving, anxiety is banished by the deliberate acceptance of the anxiety provoking circumstances as something which the God who loves you has willed for your good. It removes the focus from “What shall I do?” to the great doer of good to our souls. Anxiety cannot continue to breathe easily in an atmosphere that is filled with prayer. The heart that unburdens itself to God and has been returned to spirit of praise cannot remain permanently anxious.

What do you do if you are tempted with a load of care, tempted to worry, tempted to be anxious? You take it to the Lord in prayer. That’s Paul’s message to us. Take it to Christ. Take it to the God of all creation, who delights to answer the prayers of His people.

What do you do if you are anxious right now, worried right now, fretting and forgetting God? Repent. Repent and believe the truth about God. Trust in God’s love, in His sovereignty, in His wisdom and in His power. Trust in His goodness toward His people. Reason from the greater to the lesser. If God has taken care of our greatest need – salvation – we can be sure that He will certainly sustain and keep us, no matter the trial.

Resolve not to **“be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:5b–7, ESV)** Nothing will be so effective in strengthening your soul, in increasing your spiritual

stamina, and in giving you grace never to give up your walk with Christ. It is true for us individually and it is true for us as the corporate people of God.

Let me close, however, with this. If you are here today and you are not a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you do have something to worry about – your sin that has separated you from God and made you enemies with Him. But the answer for that worry, that fear is exactly the same as what Paul says in this text to Christians. Instead of turning your back on Christ, turn to Him, trust in Him for salvation as He is offered in the gospel, you can have your greatest need answered – the need for forgiveness. Your iniquities have separated you from your God. Only the mighty grace of God can remove it. Cry to God in Jesus' name. That is the beginning of prayer. Ask him to save you from your sin and open a way for you to come to him by Christ. Plead for his mercy and don't stop until you have an inward assurance that he has heard you.

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