

Everything to God in Prayer

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[0 : 0 0] Will you turn with me now tonight to the letter of Paul to the Philippians, Philippians and chapter 4, and we'll read from the beginning of that chapter a few verses.

My brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. I beseech you, Odias, and I beseech Syntyche that they be of the same mind in the Lord, and I entreat thee also, true yoke fellow, help those women who laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow labourers whose names are in the book of life.

Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving that your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good and report. If there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.

Those things which ye have both learned and received and heard and seen in me do, and the God of peace shall be with you. But I want just for a moment tonight for us to think of the words there in the middle of that reading, verses 6 and 7, Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

[1 : 5 7] And the peace of God that passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. We are living today in a society where there is increasing anxieties, concerns, plain and simple fears.

They are part of our environment in which we live. They are sometimes even part of the character that we bring with us. These anxieties and fears are felt by every one of us.

But increasingly so, they are coming down through the years. And younger and younger people, young boys, young girls, are exhibiting these fears and causes of these anxieties.

They have to face. They have to face. Most of us in here as parents and grown-ups, we've never had to face. But they've got to face them today.

They face peer pressure. They face what others might think of them. And these are dominant, vital thoughts and factors in their ordinary, everyday life.

[3 : 2 5] And their anxieties are, what will so-and-so say about me? And what will such-and-such think of me? These anxieties we find today, how are we going to cope with them?

We feel a care coming upon ourselves. We feel a care coming for others. That care can sometimes be so heavy and hard. We know it at times.

From times it squashes almost every drop of joy out of our lives. Today, today we have become dependent more and more and more so on antidepressants.

Tranquillisers. Trying to buck that trend and to overcome that problem. Walls, they tell us, are closing in about them.

They're walking day after day under an increasingly dark cloud. Anxiety is with us. We might even know something about it ourselves.

[4 : 41] How are we going to cope? Well, we read there in Matthew chapter 6 that some initial answer might be that we've just simply got the wrong perspective.

We've got the wrong balance in the way in which we look out on life today and we were thinking this morning were we not about the way in which the pressure of society is bearing down on young people.

Well, we're not exempt from that pressure either because that very pressure that is running about us in society gets at us also and changes the way we think and we've got to be more and more vigilant to make sure that our thinking runs in a gospel Christian channel.

We've got to be more and more vigilant that the factors that we use and implement in our thinking are Christian standards and principles rather than the things that are around about us today.

Oh yes, every one of us, we have concerns for the ordinary things of life, living. But we've always got to keep our mind focused on the thought that the Lord, our God knows all there is about us and our needs and he loves us as we were thinking last Sunday night with a love that is astonishing and amazing.

[6 : 01] He has sent his son to deal with the biggest problem ever that we can confront and if he's dealt with that problem, he will deal with every other lesser one. We will never ever be poverty stricken as we walk with and trust in the Lord.

That's what we've got to do. We've got to think through our faith. We've got to think through our faith. We spend, and it's a Christian failing to me and to you, we spend so much of our time in the company of men and we let their thinking and their standards infect us.

And we've got to get the balance that we've read of there in Matthew 6. The Lord is saying to the disciples, he was speaking to the disciples and he said to them, listen, the Lord provides for the flora and the Lord provides for the fauna.

He provides for the birds and he provides for the lilies. Will he not also provide for you, O ye of little faith? Anxiety, yes, because we've got the wrong perspective.

We let things slip. Sometimes we've got anxieties because we're concerned about the future. What's going to happen tomorrow? Pretty well every one of us is thinking that at some time tonight.

[7 : 37] What have I got to do tomorrow? Or this coming week? And sometimes that can breed and breed anxiety. And we've got to remind ourselves, my time, my time is in God's hand.

That's what we're told in the Psalms. My times are in God's hands. God's concern over us is so meticulous he numbers the very hairs on our head.

The future. He sets it and he will carry us through it. What about people? So and so and such and such thinking about me.

Again, there's a very simple corrective that is given to us by Elijah. I gave that reference deliberately, so perhaps at the beginning of the service about Hiel in 1 Kings 16 verse 34.

Because when you go into the very next chapter, 1 Kings 17 verse 1, you're introduced to Elijah on the stage of scriptures. And what does he say? The very first thing he says to the king is, As the Lord God liveth before whom I stand.

[8 : 56] And that's the important corrective that he had to dispel every kind of anxiety and concern what mission he was engaged in. He wasn't caring tuppence about what King Ahab or Jezebel thought about him.

What was more important to him was what the Lord God thought about him. He was standing before God. And that's the great corrective that he had and shares with us.

How we can best cope with peer pressure and what people think of us today round about. Well, anxieties.

What's the problem in the church in Philippi? The problem that they had there was there was a kind of party spirit developing.

There was a degree of separation and fragmentation coming into the congregation. And Paul, being a great preacher, he was also a very sensitive and delicate pastor.

[10 : 08] And as you go to the beginning of that first chapter, when he starts to put pen to papyrus, when he starts to write things down, he starts in a great positive way.

I remember you. I pray for you. I think of what fellowship we had from the gospel until now. He goes on and he speaks about them in that great positive way.

He then goes on and he speaks about the positive qualities about his own providence. I've been in prison, but it wasn't a setback. It was an opportunity to share the gospel with the guards there.

And not only that, but others who were engaged in preaching, they were strengthened by me. So there's the positive dimension to what he had to say. And then he keeps on coming until he comes down to chapter 1 and verse 27.

And he says to these people, yes, I'm going to come and visit you. I'll come and I'll visit you. Well, maybe I won't get there. But he says in verse 27, only, it's the focus that he's got, only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you or else be absent, that I might hear of your affairs, that you stand firm in one spirit and one mind, striving together for the faith of gospel and in nothing, terrified by your adversaries.

[11 : 47] There it is in a nutshell. They were underneath opposition, they were underneath some kind of persecution by their adversary. And it was having an effect upon themselves or in their own congregation and community.

and they were beginning to wobble a little bit in their stance, in their Christian perspective, either in the truth or in the commitment or whatever about the Christian gospel. But that's what was concerning Paul.

The terror that was created with them, the fear, the anxiety that was developing. And so he says and he gives us these words in chapter 4, 6 and 7, be careful for nothing.

So let's come to it then tonight. We might not be underneath that same level of persecution as they were, but we've all of us got to fight the battle. We all of us know the way in which people will not take kindly to our Christian conversation or our Christian living.

And in ways that perhaps are small just now, but who knows what the future might hold, life can just simply be made that little bit difficult for us because of our Christian position and perspective.

[13 : 03] And for them and for us, we need to take these words on board. Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God will keep you.

So let's break it down very briefly tonight then. The first thing I want us to think of is the framework. What is it that Paul is addressing?

Where is he directing his counsel? He says, the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and your minds.

that's where the anxiety was growing, that's where the doubt was being bred, that's where the trouble was in their hearts and in their heads.

And if that's where the problem is, then that's where it has to be addressed. In your Christian perspective, in your Christian position, in this love that you have for the Lord, you're under attack.

[14 : 19] you're telling people that this is the Christian truth and this is the Christian teaching about you and your problem and sin in your soul and you're under attack. The problem is anxiety in your heart and in your mind.

And so Paul is saying, that's where it is, that's where we've got to deal with it. So, how does he do it?

if the problem is in the heart and the head, he says very simply one thing, so beautiful that we can take ourselves and apply. He says, the Lord is at hand.

The Lord is near and close by. He's close by, first of all, in space. God is not devoted, God is not divorced or not at a distance from his creation and especially not from his people.

We can see it, we've already sung several of these psalms which bring home to us the way in which the Lord looks upon his people, the way in which he values them, they are the apple of his eye.

[15 : 37] That's the way he looks upon them, he's close by them. Not at a distance, not apart, not away from them. Paul, when he went to Athens, and he was waiting there for some of his colleagues to catch up with him, go to Acts chapter 17, and he went for a walk round the city, and he came to a meeting place and a marketplace, and there were so many things going on, and he saw a marker, and he saw a temple, and it was to the unknown God.

And Paul says, look, you've got a marker there to the unknown God. I'll tell you about the unknown God. I'll tell you about the Lord Jesus Christ. And he says this, in him that is in God, we live and move and have our being.

that's how close God is to every one of us. That's how God is close to you and to me, especially if we are his children and his believing people.

And we've got to take it and think it through in our heads. We've got to take it and keep it in our hearts.

we must not allow anyone or anything to rob us of these basic foundation teachings about God, our Lord, what he means and what he's done for us and to us.

[17 : 19] The Lord is near. Yes, in space, but there's another way in which we can take that very same phrase, the Lord is close in time. He is drawing close.

In his return. Soon, all these things that you're thinking about, they will be in the past. You will then be taken to be with the Lord in an environment that is perfect and prepared for you, where nothing but nothing will disturb you.

There you will be with the Lord's people to enjoy that fellowship which you have a foretaste now on this earth and a fullness later on to come. But in the meantime, you're on a journey to that place.

And on that journey, the Lord is with you. He is the one who has made the path. He's the traveling companion. He's the provider and the defender of every one of his people.

So often you won't notice it. So often you won't be aware of it. Paths going up hills.

[18 : 26] Those of you who like mountain climbing, you know the way you can go up a path and you get a point where you can stop and you can look way down the valley that you travel and you can see all the bends that you've taken and you can think back.

I remember being there. Yes. Look at that point and that bridge where we had to step across that waterfall where we were on a narrow ledge. All of these are the paths or at least the experiences in the path we've traveled.

and the Lord has never once left you down. Never once have you been deprived of anything that is good. So therefore take all of these things, these past blessings, these promises he's given, these past experiences at the hand of the Lord, take them all into your head as well as into your heart and pray and ask, Lord, as you've been there and done this for me then, I'm concerned and I'm anxious about ourselves, myself, about others.

Lord, I bring all these things before you. Don't box the Lord in. Rather, let the knowledge that you have of your God overflow and spill out into every corner of your life.

Paul, when he was an old man and he was thinking of handing over the mantle to Timothy, he said something to Timothy that applies to us now.

[20 : 02] God hasn't given us the spirit of fear, but he's given us love and he's given us a sound mind.

God, he's given to you and to me the ability to think things through. And if the problem is there in your head or there in your heart, take the teaching that you've got and apply it to the problem and where you are, the framework that he gives.

The second thing I want us to think about, not only the framework, but he also goes on and says something is forbidden. He says, be careful for nothing.

Again, a very quiet, a very acceptable phrase, but it comes with greater intensity. He says, don't be anxious.

don't be overly anxious about anything. If we go through scripture, there are legitimate concerns for many of us, maybe not all of us, but for some of us here.

[21 : 22] Husband, 1 Corinthians 7, 33, a husband is concerned about his wife. 1 Corinthians 12, 25, we have a concern for believers.

Paul himself had a concern for this church in Philippi. He especially marks out Timothy. Chapter 2 and verse 20, he says, for I have no man like minded who will naturally care for your state.

That was Timothy's concern for the church in Philippi. So there are legitimate concerns like that. But what are we going to do with them? We've got to gather them all together. And we've got to bring them before the Lord.

But, but, we must not allow these concerns to get at us. And the best illustration I can think of is a drip on a stone.

Constantly dripping on a stone. after a long time it begins to wear a hole even in the hardest of stone.

[22 : 37] That's what anxiety, that's what constantly anxiety does for us. It makes us sour in our soul.

It clouds the face of God. In a degree it paralyzes our Christian living. robbing us of delight in God and in his word.

And the Lord is quite deliberate when he says don't allow that anxiety to get into your life in that way and to that extent. It can be a wedge between you and God.

So therefore we've got to check ourselves constantly about yesterday. things that we've done did I do them right?

What did I do at all? Things about tomorrow is not yet with me. These are the kind of anxieties that are with us day after day and we've got to deliberately keep them at arm's distance from us because of the effect that they might have upon us.

[24 : 03] Yes we're to bring them before the Lord and pray but remember what Habakkuk said. Habakkuk he had big problems. Habakkuk had a problem about the way in which God's people were behaving.

They were so riotous they weren't paying attention to the law of God. and Habakkuk had a real problem. Why is the Lord not doing something about this? And the Lord did something about it.

It didn't solve the problem for Habakkuk because what the Lord did was he raised a nation, another nation against God's people and that caused even greater concern for Habakkuk and he brought it all to the Lord. And in chapter 2 verse 1 Habakkuk tells us this, I'm going to go into my watch tower and I'm going to wait and I'm going to listen.

for what the Lord is saying in answer to my problems. I brought them before the Lord and I'm leaving them with him and I'm going to watch and wait until he gives me an answer.

He is not going to allow that anxiety to be drip, drip, drip upon his soul constantly. Nor should we.

[25 : 14] We are forbidden here. Be careful for nothing. So if that's what's forbidden, what then, thirdly, is the way forward for us? How do we get out of this dilemma?

The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything. The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything.

prayerful prayerful We've already mentioned it, we've said it, the Lord knows who we are, where we are and what we're like. And we can bring all our problems before the Lord who knows everything about us.

We're told the way out in everything, everything by prayer. It's a common, general word that is used.

coming into God's presence, bringing with us all that we have as a burden in our life. But prayer, prayer isn't an emergency channel.

[26 : 25] Prayer is not our last option. Prayer is our first choice. We need to cultivate more and more that dependence upon the Lord.

That habit of seeking his company and his face along a well worn path. I've heard it said, you've heard it said, we don't have them today, but I've heard it said, and it's a lovely Christian quality to develop, the old bottocks, the saints of old, and they would have a path well worn round to the back side of the peat stack, where they would be alone with their God and speak with him.

That well worn path of prayer with a familiarity, clarity, and again, we've got to be very careful about how we say it today, because people can come and they're so familiar, and it offends, but you're entitled as a child of God to come with a familiarity that is reverent, with a boldness that is rightfully yours on the basis of scripture, but it has to be very carefully nurtured unbalanced, to come before the Lord in prayer, carrying with you everything, and you come, we're told here, with your supplications, we ask for things.

John Newton said this, Thou art coming to a king, Lord, petitions with thee bring, for his grace and power are such that none can ever ask too much.

we come aware of the one before whom we come and what he's done for his people, we come to our father in heaven, we come to our Lord, we come to our savior, and each one of these descriptions carry with them great consequences and applications for us, which we are entitled to dissect, break down, and apply to ourselves.

[28 : 50] There's a lovely phrase sums it all up. Genesis 48 and verse 16, Israel was praying over Ephraim and Manasseh, and this is what he says, bless the lads.

Now, you'd hardly reckon that to be authorized version vocabulary, but that's exactly what he says, bless the lads. so specific to the point, so practical.

That's what he wanted, and that's what he asked. The same with ourselves. We simply come and ask. Sometimes, yes, the Lord might take us into a tight corner before we do so.

Psalms 119, I think it's verse 71, says, I was thankful, I'm paraphrasing it, I was thankful that I was afflicted, because it was when I was afflicted that I turned my feet to the Lord and I sought him.

sometimes that's the way the Lord brings us in prayer, through these very anxieties that bear down upon us, that make us turn to him in prayer.

[30 : 11] We come with our requests and we set them out, just as we've said there about this prayer, bless the lads. We've got to get down to specifics.

We've got to get down to specifics. The Lord knows us, and the Lord knows everything about us, even to the smallest of details.

Bring them to him. So yes, we pray, that's the way forward and we do so with thanksgiving.

We come and pray, we wait with expectation like Habakkuk, we have our hands filled with the blessings which the Lord gives. But that's not the end.

We've got to come full circle and back to thank the Lord for what he's done and what he's given to us. Even to thank him for the very circumstances, hard as they were, that made us go to meet him and speak with him.

[31 : 21] The way forward, what's forbidden, the framework. one last thought. What's the fortification that the Lord now gives to his people?

He says, and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. peace of peace of peace of peace of God.

Keep. Keep. The word actually is the image of a sentry on duty, guarding the camp, watch out for the enemy to approach.

And that's exactly what we're told here. That's what the peace of God does. That's what God himself does. peace of God shall keep your hearts and minds.

We're under attack constantly using the illustration of a house or a home. Yes, the way in which the devil can so often put temptations through your eyes, through your mouth, the way in which he can draw you through the front door of your living.

[32 : 37] And all the while he skips round to the back door and into your mind he plants just a little seed and leaves it to grow. And we need to be defended and we need to be constantly vigilant.

We can't do it all the time everywhere. But we're told here the Lord does and the Lord will. What is it that he poses? We're told, it's quite a remarkable phrase this.

It's said the peace of God. This is the only place in the whole of the New Testament where we have that phrase, the peace of God.

We have phrases like peace with God. We have peace from God. But this is the only occurrence, the peace of God.

God. It's that astonishing quality that belongs to God alone, the peace of God. There is an unruffled serenity.

[33 : 50] There is a harmony of peace within the Godhead. nothing disturbs, nothing troubles, the peace of God.

And that's what he posts guard around every one of his people. He will keep us as calm as that, despite all of the turmoil around about us.

I remember an advert. It's a bit old now, but it still stands time to be repeated. Nissan cars.

And there was this car parked in a square, and there was the town around about it, there was the noise, the coming and the going, and so much activity.

And then somebody comes and gets into the car and closes the doors. And suddenly silence comes upon the advert.

[35 : 01] There's a peace and a quietness. And that's exactly what the Lord does to his people when he posts guard round about his people.

That peace that is his quality of life, that peace he bestows upon his people. He keeps us at peace.

That's the fortification then that is rightfully and the proper entitlement of every one of his own people, but only his own people.

He is our guard only if he is our Savior and our Lord already.

He is our guard only if he is our Savior and our Lord already. There is that impregnable fortress into which nobody can enter, from which no Christian will be dislodged.

[36 : 12] there is that peace which is the bestowing of God through Jesus Christ upon each and every one of his believing people.

That peace and quietness of the death of his son upon the cross spared not, we were thinking of it last week, that we might be spared.

the way in which he died taking every drop from the cup that's got your name or mine on it so that we might never have to drink anything of the wrath that is due to the contents.

The way in which everything about us, our sin that's marked in our book, has been overwritten with the blood of Jesus Christ to cover it and to put it away. the sin of every one of his people put away out of sight.

There's a beautiful phrase, let me just close with this possibly quickly at least. Jeremiah 31 and verse 34 and they shall, he's talking about this new spiritual Christian experience, he says, and they shall teach no more any man his neighbour and every man his brother saying know the Lord for they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them saith the Lord.

[37 : 42] And then listen to what he says, for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. It doesn't mean that the Lord forgets.

That's you and me. We forget. what that's telling us is something much stronger. It's telling us that God quite deliberately, quite deliberately God has resolved, I am not going to remember these sins.

Now that's an amazing thing. I will not remember the sins of his people because they have been dealt with through the death of his son.

that is the source of this peace that is spoken of here. It's an amazing contrast.

I deliberately went down as far as verse 9 in a reading of it because there's a contrast there. In verse 7 it speaks about the peace of God. But when you get down to verse 9 it says the God of peace.

[38 : 54] He is the one who is round about his people. He is the one alone who can keep us safe. And who deals with the anxieties and the concerns, the fear and the dread that is round about us in society.

It can break as a little wave on the path on the shore of our life or it can become as a mighty breaker breaking upon us from time to time. Anxieties dealt with by God.

There's a lovely old hymn which I think we can all identify with and repeat.

what a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

Oh what peace we often forfeit. Oh what needless pains we bear. All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

[40 : 13] Let us now pray.