

## Facing Times Of Stress: Faithfulness

Prayer and the Peace of God

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We live in a nation more abundantly blessed than any other nation on earth. And, at the same time, it is a nation with more ingratitude and unthankfulness than any other nation. A result of this unthankfulness? We are a nation suffering from worry and anxiety to the nth degree.

If anybody had an excuse for anxiety and worrying, it was the apostle Paul. His beloved Christian friends at Philippi were disagreeing with one another, and he was not there to help them. We have no idea what Euodia and Syntyche were disputing about, but whatever it was, it was bringing division into the church. So Paul had to deal with many problems from afar.

Along with the potential division at Philippi, Paul had to face division among the believers at Rome. So he was not just dealing with one church area that had problems, but two or even more. Added to these burdens, was the possibility of his own death! Paul had a "good excuse" to worry, but he did not. Instead, he took time to explain to us a secret of victory over anxiety and worry.

**Philippians 4:6-7** Be anxious for nothing, 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 minds through Christ Jesus.

This is undoubtedly one of the most comforting statements found in any literature, anywhere on earth. We often feel that way about many scriptures of the Bible, and yet from the standpoint of our personal lives in this world, and from the standpoint of practical experience, there is little that has greater comfort for God's people than these two verses.

In them, the apostle Paul is continuing what is not only the major theme of this fourth chapter, but the major theme of the entire epistle. He is concerned about the happiness and the joy of the members of the church at Philippi.

He wrote the specific exhortation that they should '*rejoice in the Lord always,*' and again he says, '*rejoice.*' In his urgency for these people to maintain constant rejoicing in the

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Lord, Paul considered various forces and factors that tend, from time to time, to rob us of that joy and to bring us down to a lower level of Christian living.

*'Let your longsuffering—your forbearance—be known to everyone, because the Lord is at hand.'* Paul explains how an unquiet spirit, a grasping desire to have our own way so frequently robs us of our joy.

Here in these verses, he goes on to consider another factor that may be more problematic than any of the others that tend to rob us of the joy of the Lord, and that is what we may well describe as the tyranny of circumstances, or just the simple things that happen to us in our daily lives.

The early Christians lived in a very difficult world, and had to suffer and to endure a great deal; and these men, called of God, wrote letters in order to show them how to overcome these things.

It is a great theme of the New Testament; but we find it also in the Old Testament. Take Psalm 3 and 4, for example. How perfectly they put it all into perspective. The great problem of life is, in a sense, how to lay oneself down to rest and sleep. *'I laid down and slept,'* said the psalmist. Anybody can lie down, but the question is—can you sleep? Today, because of additives in our food, and pollution, it can affect our sleep. Women have a particularly hard time sleeping when they reach menopause. They try all different kinds of supplements, techniques, and they try to clear their minds, but they still cannot have a long night's sleep very often.

The psalmist describes himself surrounded by enemies, and by difficulties and trials, and his powerful testimony is that in spite of that, because of his trust in the Lord, he both laid himself down and slept, and he woke up safe and sound in the morning.

Why? Because the Lord was with him and looking after him.

Psalm 92:1-2 is a song for the Sabbath day, "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your loving kindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night.

That is a man who trusted in the Lord. That is the theme of so much of the Bible, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, so it is obviously essentially important. This is a matter that provides a thorough test of our faith and of our whole Christian position.

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(I would just like to add to this point that I in no way want to accuse the women who cannot sleep during their menopause as having faithlessness. That is not the issue at all.)

God tested Jonah in his faithfulness and obedience and he failed miserably, initially. But eventually, through his ordeal, he came to realize several things, one of which was that salvation follows thankfulness. God does the saving exclusively, but we must be thankful. When Jonah was in the belly of the fish this is what he said:

**Jonah 2:9-10** But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord." So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Part of Jonah's sinful problem was that he was not thankful for what God had provided to him personally, and for what God was willing to do for Nineveh. So it was not until Jonah learned to be thankful that God saved him from the belly of the huge fish, and from certain death. Salvation from the Lord requires a thankful heart and mind. Salvation itself is always a gift from God, but our responsibility is thankfulness always.

It is one thing to say that we subscribe to God's way of life, which is the Christian faith. It is one thing having read our Bibles, to say: 'Yes, I believe all that, it is the faith by which I live.' But it is not always exactly the same thing to find that faith, triumphant and victorious and maintaining us in a state of joy, when everything seems to have gone against us, and has almost driven us to despair.

It is a subtle and delicate test of our position, because it is such an essentially practical test. It is far removed from the realm of mere theory. We are in the position—in the situation—that these things are happening to us, and the question is, "What is our faith worth at that point?" Does it differentiate us from people who have no faith?

That is obviously something of very great importance not only for our peace and comfort but also, and especially at a time anxiety, from the whole standpoint of our Christian witness.

People today tell us that they are realists and practical. They say that they are not interested in doctrine, and not interested to listen very much to what we have to say, but if they see a body of people who seem to have something that enables them to triumph over life, and have peace in their life they become interested immediately. Sadly though, as soon as they hear that God is the solution, they abandon it because of the enmity

that they have against God.

They are unhappy, frustrated, uncertain, and fearful. If, when in that condition themselves, they see people who seem to have peace and calm and quiet, then they are ready to look at them and to listen to them, initially anyway.

So, from the standpoint of our own personal happiness and our maintenance of the joy of the Lord, and also from the standpoint of our witness and our testimony in these difficult days, it benefits us to consider very carefully what the apostle Paul has to say in his wise statements about the way to deal with the tyranny of circumstances and conditions.

**Philippians 4:6-7** Be anxious for nothing, 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 minds through Christ Jesus.

There seems to be a naturally simple way to divide up this matter. First of all Paul tells us what we have to avoid. There are certain things that we must avoid; Paul says—'*Be anxious (KJV) careful for nothing.*' That is a negative command, and something to avoid. 'Be anxious for nothing' or 'be anxious about nothing.' 'Careful,' in the King James, means 'full of care,' and it means anxiety, harassing care, nervous concern, tending to worry or to overly consider things. It indicates an imbalance in thinking.

It is the same word that Christ used in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, where He said, 'Take no thought. . .' It means do not be over-anxious, do not worry, or do not over-think about what might happen. Do not over-meditate on things; do not have this nervous concern about the thing that is bothering you.

It is important, in passing, that we understand that the Bible would not teach us to neglect making ordinary provision for life, or not to use common sense. It does not encourage laziness. You remember that Paul, in writing to the church at Thessalonica, said that 'if any would not work, neither should he eat.' So that is a direct put down of the transference of wealth, or the redistribution of wealth, that the present government administration is so intent on burdening this country with.

By using the word 'careful,' or more correctly 'anxious' in the New King James, he does not refer to wise forethought, but he refers to harassing, wearying worry. That is the thing that Paul tells us we must avoid at all costs.

But notice that he does not stop merely at that negative command. There is a very profound piece of biblical psychology here. By biblical psychology, I mean the study of the human mind and its characteristic mental makeup according to Scripture. Paul shows us how we tend to get into this state of nervous, gloomy anxiety.

You will notice that he tells us that it is the result of the activity of the heart and mind. 'The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.' So, the trouble is in the heart and mind. It is the heart and the mind that produces this state of anxiety.

This biblical psychology, so to speak, is vital in applying Paul's remedy to ourselves. We should understand his explanation of the condition. In other words, what Paul is saying is that we can control many things in our lives, but no human being, of and by himself, can completely control their heart and mind.

Paul says that this condition of anxiety is something that is, in a sense and to some extent, outside our own control. It happens apart from us and in spite of us. By experience, we know this to be true. Without God's Holy Spirit we would be continually sinning, like the rest of the world.

Remember how it could not be controlled. You were awake and you would have given almost anything if you could only sleep. But your heart and mind would not let you sleep. In a sense, the heart and mind are somewhat outside your control. Again, we would give almost anything if we could just stop the heart and the mind from going on working, from revolving and thinking, and so keeping us awake.

Paul is dealing with the psyche here. Once more, we come across the wonderful realism of the Scriptures, their utter absolute honesty, their recognition of man as he is. So Paul tells us that in this way the heart and the mind, or if you prefer, the depth of one's being, tends to produce this state of anxiety.

Here the 'heart' does not only mean the seat of emotions, it means the very central part of one's personality. The 'mind' translated, if you like, by the term thought. We have all experienced this condition and know exactly what Paul means.

The heart has feelings and emotions. If a close relative or friend is taken ill, 'oh!' how the heart begins to work! Your concern, your very love for the person, is the cause of the anxiety. If you thought nothing of the person you would not be anxious.

There we see where the heart and the affections come in. Not only that, the imagination!

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What a prolific cause of anxiety is the imagination. You are confronted with a situation, but if it were merely that, you would probably be able to lie down and go to sleep. But the imagination comes in, and you begin to think, 'What if this or that should happen? Everything is fairly under control tonight, but what if by tomorrow morning the temperature goes up, or what if this condition arises and leads to that?' You go on thinking for hours, agitated by these imaginations. The result is that your heart keeps you awake.

Or then, not so much in the realm of imagination, but more in the realm of the mind and of pure thought, you find yourself beginning to consider possibilities, and you put up positions and deal with them and analyze them and you say, 'If that takes place we will have to make this arrangement, or we will have to do that.' You see how it works. The heart and mind are in control at that time. We are victims of thoughts. In this condition of anxiety we are the victims. It is the heart and the mind; these powers are within us, and which are outside our control that are mastering us and tyrannizing over us.

The apostle Paul tells us that this is something that at all costs we must avoid. Of course, we know this from experience. In this state of anxiety we spend the whole time reasoning and arguing and chasing imaginations. And in that state we are useless. We do not want to speak to other people. We may appear to be listening to them as they speak in conversation, but our mind is chasing these possibilities. And so, our acknowledgment is useless. In this state we are of no value to others, and above all we lose the joy of the Lord.

There is a second principle in negative form that I want to cover.

What must we do to avoid that inner turmoil?

This is where we come to that which is specifically Christian. Let us try to see the eternal difference between the Christian way of dealing with anxiety, and the psychological, or common-sense, way. The use of the world's psychology is one of the most subtle dangers in connection with the Christian way of life.

People sometimes think that they are being sustained by the Christian faith when what they have is merely a psychological mechanism in operation; and it breaks down in a real crisis. God's ministers do not preach psychology; we preach God's way of life, and God's way of doing things.

**Philippians 4:4-6** Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for

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nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

The phrase in the New King James Version: 'Be anxious,' or in the King James Version: 'Be careful,' is from the Greek word "merimnate." It means to be anxious about, have care, or take thought, as I mentioned earlier. Verses 4 and 5 point out that joy and gentleness, accompanied with an awareness of Christ's imminent return, drives out anxiety. Paul's appeal to the Philippians is: 'Don't be anxious about anything.'

But this was not a suggestion to pursue a carefree life. To care and be genuinely concerned is one thing. To worry is another. Paul and Timothy cared for the people they ministered to, and they retained trust in God. Paul exhorted the Philippians to prayer instead of allowing anxiety to cause them to distrust God. Praying with thanksgiving involves trusting God.

Jesus warned against worry, which obviously eliminates trust in God.

**Matthew 6:25-34** "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? "So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

You find the same account in Luke 12:22-31.

The Greek word translated "worried" means, "to be pulled in different directions." This is

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exactly how we feel when we have anxiety and worry. Our hopes pull us in one direction; our fears pull us in the opposite direction; and we are pulled apart figuratively!

The Old English root, from which we get our word 'worry,' means 'to strangle.' This also gives us another indication of how we feel when we are going through worry and anxiety, we feel like we are being suffocated or strangled with worry. In fact, worry has definite physical consequences: headaches, neck pains, ulcers, even back pains. Worry affects our thinking, our digestion, and even our coordination.

What is the difference between the Christian way of dealing with worry and anxiety, and the world's method of dealing with it? What should we do when we are threatened by worry and anxiety? Common sense and psychology says, 'Stop worrying, pull yourself together.' But there is no long-term improvement in the person who is told to bottle-up worrying and anxiety. Telling a person in that condition to stop worrying is useless.

**Revelation 21:7** He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

None of us should be repressing these things, but we should be dealing with them.

If you happen to be a strong-willed person you can hold these things from the conscious mind, with the result that they then go on working in the unconscious mind.

That condition is even worse than anxiety itself. But not only that, it is useless to tell the average person to stop worrying. It is the very thing they cannot do. They would like to, but they cannot. It is like telling a hopeless drunkard to stop drinking. He cannot, because he is helplessly in the grip of this lust and passion, and he does not have God's Holy Spirit.

It is also somewhat fruitless to say: 'Don't worry, it may never happen.' But if anyone says that to you, when you are in this state, your reaction is: 'Okay, but it may happen!' That is the problem. What if it does happen? That is the essence of your problem, so it does not help us very much to say that it may never happen.

We are warned in Proverbs 22:3, "A prudent man foresees evil and hides himself, but the simple pass on and are punished." So it is important to be careful about planning for your future, but not to worry about it to the point of anxiety. Worry and anxiety can be very detrimental to your physical and mental health.

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From the spiritual point of view, 'worry' is wrong thinking (which involves the mind) and wrong feeling (which involves the heart) about circumstances, people, and things. Worry is the greatest thief of joy. It is not enough for us to tell ourselves to "quit worrying" because that will never capture the thief of joy.

Worry is an "inside job," and it takes more than good intentions to get the victory. The antidote to worry is a secure mind. Remember, "the peace of God . . . will keep [that is, garrison—guard like a soldier] your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

When you have a secure mind, the peace of God guards you and the God of peace guides you. With that kind of protection, why worry? Well, we all do.

**Philippians 4:8-9** Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned, received, heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

We have a list of things that we can do to meditate on to help us to rid ourselves of that worry.

If we are to conquer worry and experience a secure mind, we must meet the conditions that God has laid down. There are three: right praying, right thinking, and right living.

The third principle is also negative and it is this. People tend to say to people who are anxious and worried: 'Don't worry, it's wrong to worry, and all the worry in the world will not make any difference.' Now that is perfectly true, it is sound common sense.

The psychologists in their reply say: 'Don't waste your time and energy. The fact that you are worrying is not going to affect your position at all.' That is true, but it does not get at the source of your trouble—for this good reason. If you are concerned about what may happen: Worrying is not going to affect your position, but your position remains and it is the position that is causing you this anxiety. Although this may be true, it does not deal with your particular situation.

In other words, all these methods fail to deal with the situation because they never realize the power of what Paul calls 'the heart' and 'the mind,' and these things that grip us. That is why none of the psychology and common-sense methods are finally of any

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use. They may help temporarily, but they do not resolve anything.

Paul puts the remedy in the form of a positive command. Philippians 4:6 'let your requests be made known to God.' Of course there are qualifications to that. That is the answer though, and how do we deal with this?

Paul says, 'let your requests be made known to God.' But many a sufferer has said, 'I have tried, I have prayed; but I have not found the peace that Paul speaks of. I have not received an answer. It is no use telling me to pray.' Thankfully, for us, God saw fit to give us specific instructions for carrying out Paul's command.

**Philippians 4:6** Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

Paul is speaking advisedly, as he shows us how to let our requests be made known to God.

How are we to do that? First, he tells us to pray. He differentiates between prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving. What does he mean by prayer? This is the most general term, and it means worship, adoration, and reverence.

If you have problems that seem unsolvable, if you are predisposed to become anxious and overburdened, and somebody tells you to pray, is there anything that should be done before you rush in to God with your petition for Him to solve your problem by intervening?

Before you make your problems and requests known to God, the beginning of your prayer should be worship, adoration, and reverence. Come into the presence of God, and for the time being forget your problems. Do not start with your problems. Just realize you are face to face with God. In this word 'prayer' the idea of being face to face is inherent in the word itself. You come into His presence, and you think of and consider His awesome presence, and that is generally the first step.

You remember Jesus' instruction of the sample prayer. What is the first thing we should do?

**Matthew 6:9-10** In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

It is praising, it is adoration, and it is glorifying of God. But, following prayer comes supplication. Now we are moving on. Having worshipped God because God is God, having offered this general worship, adoration, and reverence, we come now to the particulars, and Paul encourages us to make our supplications.

Both Jesus Christ and Paul tell us that we can take specific things to God, that formal request is a legitimate part of prayer. So we bring our formal request, the specific things that are now concerning us.

**Matthew 6:11-13** Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

It is after we have given adoration and reverence to God that we get into the specifics of our own needs, and He gives us some general ideas and categories of things to ask for.

Although Jesus does not mention thankfulness, the attitude of gratitude is clearly seen here. We are now coming nearer to letting our requests be made known. But wait, there is still one other thing, Paul says, 'by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving.' That is absolutely essential.

And it is just here that so many of us go astray when we are in this anxious and worried condition with which Paul is dealing. He is interested in worship, and thanksgiving is absolutely essential for this reason.

If, while we pray to God, we have a grudge against Him in our hearts, we have no right to expect that the peace of God will guard our heart and our mind. If we go down on our knees feeling that God is against us, we may as well get up and leave. No, we must approach Him 'with thanksgiving.' There must be no doubt as to the goodness of God in our mind. There must be no question; we must have positive reasons for thanking God.

We have to learn to thank God even for trials. People are often tempted to complain about their lot in life. We should never give in to such a temptation. We have to learn to count our blessings and to thank our Creator for everything—even for trials and tests, which many times turn out to be blessings in disguise. We learn a tremendous number of things that help us to improve our character. God wants us to learn through these trials, tests, and sufferings, to help develop us and complete us in the way that He

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wants.

God often permits trials and calamities to happen to us to teach us certain lessons, and to help us learn some of the true values of life. Remember the apostle Paul's words about his trials:

**II Corinthians 12:10** Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Knowing this, we should sincerely thank our merciful Creator, even for our suffering. The apostle James saw dealing with suffering the same way:

**James 1:2-4** My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

There is that perfection again, that God is moving us toward, and that perfection that He talked about in Hebrews 6, that what we are to move on to is a completeness of character that is sufficient for what God's purpose requires. It is very sad that most people do not understand this today. Few, even among Christians, seem to comprehend the greatness of the God whom they profess to know and serve.

Job's friend Eliphaz reminded him of God's blessings and loving chastisement.

**Job 5:17-24** "Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects; therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty. For He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole. He shall deliver you in six troubles, yes, in seven no evil shall touch you. In famine He shall redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. You shall be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, and you shall not be afraid of destruction when it comes. You shall laugh at destruction and famine, and you shall not be afraid of the beasts of the earth. For you shall have a covenant with the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with you. You shall know that your tent is in peace; you shall visit your dwelling and find nothing amiss.

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Eliphaz said that Job's problems were disciplinary: God was correcting him, so Job should welcome His discipline, not despise it. If Job would have the right attitude, God would bless him.

Although God sometimes punishes using wounds and injures, He also restores, or binds up, and heals. In verse 19, He delivers from six calamities and even seven. You know that the number seven is a number that represents completion. Also, when one number follows another in Scripture, with the highest number it expresses thoroughness, or emphasizes the final item. So in verse 19, God is emphasizing that no evil shall touch you.

Eliphaz then mentioned famine, war, slander, destruction, and wild beasts. The man who God corrects would, following God's discipline, have good crops (prosperity). In verse 23, "a covenant with the stones" means the stones would not hinder his farming. The sense is that they will not harm you. The stones represent enemies that were made to be at peace, and that would not annoy or injure.

This was probably spoken in Arabia, where rocks and stones are innumerable and are impediments to production. Traveling over such terrain was difficult and dangerous. The sense here is that the man who God corrects would, following God's chastisement, be permitted to go on his way in ease and safety. God may correct us, He may chastise us, and we may be suffering through trials, but God does give us respite from those trials, and gives us smoothness for a while. Eventually that smoothness will be permanent in God's Kingdom.

The man who God corrects would, following God's reprimand, have security (represented by, 'your tent is in peace,' in verse 24). He is also promised numerous descendants, good health, and a long life.

The type of ingratitude in the world today is appropriately illustrated in Luke 17, in the incident where Christ healed ten lepers.

**Luke 17:15-17** And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

This type of ingratitude is often repeated today. There is probably not one in ten who will

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so much as turn back and give God thanks. One of the worst sins you can commit is the terrible sin of ingratitude.

Most people have built up an entrenched habit of continually complaining about everything instead of being thankful. Whether you realize it or not, you have many, many things to be thankful for. Remember the old saying, "I once complained because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet." We must never forget that our Creator is the One from whom all blessings flow!

When God appeared to Abraham, intending to bless him and his descendants, God revealed to Abraham one of His many names—El Shaddai.

**Genesis 17:1** When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.

In the Hebrew, the name El Shaddai means, "the Almighty Blessor".

The apostle James was inspired to write in James 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning."

David reveals throughout the book of Psalm the mercy, goodness, and boundless blessings of God—blessings God bestows on all mankind.

Psalm 103 expresses eloquently David's thanks and praise for the many blessings that he received from God.

**Psalm 103:1-5** Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

All through these five verses, we see David's attitude of thankfulness, absolutely required in giving a prayer that God received.

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Our Creator likes to see us overflow with genuine gratitude—just as we rejoice when someone we help shows appreciation. In Psalm 50:23, the almighty God declares, "Whoever offers praise glorifies Me."

We must be thankful for everything! God does not require us to offer animal and grain sacrifices as the ancient Israelites did, but He is very pleased when we 'offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually,' that is, 'the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.'

In ancient Israel, a peace offering was offered for a thanksgiving.

**Leviticus 7:11-12** 'This is the law of the sacrifice of peace offerings which he shall offer to the Lord: If he offers it for a thanksgiving, then he shall offer, with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, or cakes of blended flour mixed with oil.

That was offered as a physical sacrifice to show thankfulness under the Old Covenant.

Psalm 107 shows us that we can offer thankfulness, as a spiritual sacrifice, by declaring God's works with joy.

**Psalm 107:21-22** Oh that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing.

The proper and acceptable thing to do when we have been sick and restored to good health is to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving, that is, praise God. The psalmist recognizes that most people do not fulfill this obligation, so he says, 'Oh, that men would give thanks to (or, praise) the Lord.' The word 'sacrifice' in verse 22, is used in a general sense to indicate worship, adoration, or reverence. Let them worship God with thanks or praises.

As a spiritual sacrifice, thanksgiving can be offered in the form of a prayer and/or praise.

**Hebrews 13:15** Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

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Prayer, praise, and thanksgiving are almost inseparable, and, therefore, are most often offered together.

One reason why many find prayer so difficult is that they have not learned to mix praise and thanksgiving with their prayers. We have our problems and troubles, but there on our knees we must ask ourselves: 'What can I thank God for?' We have to do that deliberately, and it is something that we can do, and we have to remind ourselves of it.

We have to have the attitude that although we may be in trouble at the moment, we can thank God for our salvation, and that He sent His Son to die for us. We must thank God that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world.

We have to thank Him for calling us out of this world and placing us in His church. There is so much more in our physical life and spiritual life to be thankful for. We must work out with our mind and with all our energy the reasons for thanking and praising God.

We must remind ourselves that He is our Father, and that He loves us so much that the hairs of our head are all numbered. And when we have reminded ourselves of these things, we must pour out our heart in thanksgiving. We must be in the right relationship to God. We must realize the truth concerning Him.

Therefore we must come into His presence with a loving, praising, worshipping, adoring, and confident faith and then make our requests known to Him. The prayer that Paul advocates, in other words, is not a desperate cry in the dark, not some frantic appeal to God without any real thought. We have to first realize and recollect that we are worshipping a glorious, holy God. We worship first, and then we make our requests known.

Now let us move on to the third principle, and that is the gracious promise of God to all who do this. We have seen what we have to do, we have been instructed as to how we are to deal with it; and now comes the gracious promise to those who do what Paul tells us.

This is, of course, the best of all, but we must learn how to look at it.

Have you noticed the promise, have you noticed its character, have you noticed that it does not even mention the things that are worrying you?

That is the unusual thing about the Christian method of dealing with anxiety. In all things, 'in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be

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made known to God.' Paul does not say God will banish and remove them all.

One of the most exciting things about God is that He is more concerned about us than our circumstances. The final triumph of God's plan of salvation is seen in this, that whatever our circumstances, we ourselves can be put right and maintained and developed and completed.

Scripture does not mention our condition as much as it mentions our salvation. It does not dwell on these things that are harassing and perplexing us. They may or may not happen, we just do not know. Paul does not say that the thing feared is not going to take place; he says that we will be guarded whether it happens or whether it does not happen.

We receive victory because we are dealt with above circumstances; we are triumphant in spite of them. That is a tremendously encouraging principle.

We all tend to be tyrannized by circumstances because we depend on them, and we would like them to be governed and controlled, but that is not the way in which the Scripture deals with the situation. Paul says in Philippians 4:

**Philippians 4:6-7** Be anxious for nothing, 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 minds through Christ Jesus.

God will keep you absolutely safe from these things that are keeping you awake and preventing your sleep. They will be kept outside, and you will be guarded in peace in spite of them.

Again, the apostle Paul does not say that if we pray our prayer in and of itself will make us feel better. It is a misunderstanding of purpose when people pray for that reason. That is the psychologist's use of prayer. They tell us that if we are in trouble it will make us feel better to pray—good psychology, but bad Christianity, because it lacks proper worship and true reverence.

Neither does Paul say: 'While you are praying you will not be thinking about your problem, and so you will have temporary relief.' Prayer is not meant to be just a distraction from everyday life. Neither does Paul say that 'Your prayer has the power to changes things.' Prayer has no power, in and of itself, to change anything. We cannot

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force God to do something because we pray to Him.

What Paul says is: 'You pray and make your requests known to God, and God will do something'. It is not your prayer that is going to do it; it is not you who are going to do it, but God.

**Philippians 4:7** and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, [He, through it all] will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

I would like to say something about that expression 'keep' in the King James, or 'guard' in the New King James, your hearts and minds. As I mentioned before, it means guarding, garrisoning—several synonyms could be used to create the picture of a castle or a fortress with the high turrets that had a guard looking out for the people within.

This peace of God will walk around the walls and fortifications of our life, figuratively speaking. We are inside, and the activities of the heart and mind are producing those stresses, anxieties and strains from the outside.

But the peace of God will keep them all out, and we ourselves inside will be at perfect peace. It is God that does it. It is not ourselves, it is not some psychological mechanism. We make our requests known to God, and God does that for us and keeps us in perfect peace.

What is meant by this phrase: 'the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding?' The human mind cannot understand this peace, we cannot imagine it, we cannot even believe it in a sense, and yet it is happening and we are experiencing it and enjoying it. Of course, it is the Holy Spirit that enables us to experience and enjoy it. But we still, as human beings, do not have a full grasp of the greatness of God.

It is God's peace that is in Jesus Christ. This peace of God works by presenting Christ to us, and reminding us about Him.

Notice the explanation that the apostle Paul gave to the brethren in Rome, of what God has done through Jesus Christ on our behalf.

**Romans 5:10** For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

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**Romans 8:28, 32, 38-39** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. . . . He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? . . . . For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The explanation is that if God has done that supreme thing for us in the crucifixion and death of His Son, He will not and cannot forsake us now. He cannot leave us halfway. He is going to finish that plan, and we are a part of that plan.

So the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guards our hearts and minds through or in Jesus Christ. In that way, God gives us our peace and our freedom from worry and anxiety.

Thankfulness must be a daily part of every Christian's life, because it is an essential characteristic of each member of God's Kingdom.

**Revelation 7:11-12** All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

In Revelation 7, we see that a main theme in the Kingdom, at the throne of God, is thankfulness. This song of the angels, elders, and the four living creatures shows the worship and reverence that all have in God's presence.

There are seven aspects of praise, listed here in verse 12, in this spiritual worship of God. Seven signifies perfection and completeness. Thankfulness comprises part of this list. It is the central or pivotal quality of the seven, and often in Scripture that shows a very central, pivotal, and extremely important quality.

In great contrast to this present evil world's gross ingratitude, God has revealed, to those who will listen and act, that thankfulness is a duty to which the elect of God are bound.

One last word about the principle: 'Be anxious for nothing' in Philippians 4:6, which is the all-inclusiveness of the promise. It does not matter what the problem is, there is no limit in the promise.

Whatever it is that is tending to get you down—tending to make you a victim of this anxiety, inclined to harass and spoil your Christian life and witness—whatever it is, let it be known to God in that way, and if you do this, it is absolutely guaranteed that the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard, keep, and garrison your heart and mind.

**Psalm 6:1-10** O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled; But You, O Lord—how long? Return, O Lord, deliver me! Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake! For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks? I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears. My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows old because of all my enemies. Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity; for the Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer. Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled; let them turn back and be ashamed suddenly.

Like the psalmist, you will lay yourself down and you will sleep, you will know this perfect peace. The peace of God guards the heart and mind, and gives it quiet in the sense that our circumstances cannot upset us.

With prayer, supplication, and thanksgiving, therefore, let your requests be made known to God, and He, through His peace in Christ, will guard your heart and mind in a state of rest and in peace. So what could be so bad about anxiety and worry when we have the peace of God to push it out of our minds and help us to get restfulness? It does not mean that we will not have times of anxiety and worry, but certainly the peace of God will improve the situation greatly, and someday we will have that total peace that He promises.