

# “Don’t Worry!” Looking at Life with Anxiety

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## Philippians 4:4-7, 11-13

<sup>4</sup> Celebrate with joy in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to all people. The Lord is nearby: <sup>6</sup> Don’t be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

<sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Messiah Jesus.

<sup>11</sup> ... I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content (self-sufficient). <sup>12</sup> I know how to be humbled, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of eating lots or going hungry, abundance and need. <sup>13</sup> I am strong for all things in him who strengthens me.

## Matthew 6:24-34 (Cf. Luke 12:22-32)

<sup>24</sup> “No one can serve two lords, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon.

<sup>25</sup> Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life (*psyché*, soul), what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body (*soma*), what you will put on. Is not life (*psyché*, soul) something more than food, and the body (*soma*) more than clothing?

<sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

<sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour (cubit) to his span of life?

<sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith?

<sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles (nations) seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

<sup>33</sup> But seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

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## 1 John 4:18a

<sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...

## John 16:33

<sup>33</sup> “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

## 2 Corinthians 1:8-9; 2:12-13

<sup>8</sup> For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ... <sup>12</sup> When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of the Messiah, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, <sup>13</sup> my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.

## Romans 8:35-37

<sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of the Messiah? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” [Psa 44:22] <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are completely victorious through the one who has loved us!

## Psalm 103:13-17 (Cf. 1 Peter 1:24-25; Isaiah 40:6-7)

<sup>13</sup> As a father shows compassion to his children, so THE LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. <sup>14</sup> For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. <sup>15</sup> As for humans, our days are like grass; we flourish like a flower of the field; <sup>16</sup> for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more. <sup>17</sup> But the steadfast love of THE LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

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## Anxiety, Vulnerability and A Secret

Anxiety, worry, fear is a deep problem of human life. What can “Fearless” mean? Anxiety tends to point to uncertainty of many kinds. Often magnified in my own mind. Fear of loss of control or unfettered choice. I create worst case scenarios. Merging into anxiety disorders/phobias. It’s amazing that Paul in prison, uncertain of sentence, can say, “*Don’t be anxious about anything.*” Or that Jesus, talking to poor farmers and laborers, says “*Don’t be anxious about your life.*” What can they mean? We all are vulnerable to death, disease, danger – the human condition! Paul himself is explicit not only on the dangers he faced but also the worries that plagued him. We today are far healthier/wealthier/long-lived than ancients, but still we all worry and all die. Paul says he’s learned a secret. I think it’s linked to what Jesus says. Paul expresses it by saying, “*Celebrate with joy.*” In the Olympics, you celebrate when you’ve won! Hug your competitors. Paul has realized that “*in the Lord*” he has won! He’s no longer in competition with anyone. Gentleness/generosity breaks out: the “*Peace of God*”! His “self” is in God and so he can be “*self-sufficient*” in anything. Rome: “We can kill you.” A worst case! Paul: “*Far better!*” (Phi 1:23)

## Jesus and the Scale of My Life

Paul is living Jesus’ teaching. In the middle of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus looks at the hardscrabble people around him and says, “*Don’t be anxious about your life*” and repeats it. He speaks in very basic terms: food, drink, clothes (not luxuries). These things support life, but our anxiety cannot change our basic human vulnerability or guarantee one extra day (Mt 6:27). More important, it’s the world of “Mammon” that defines us and our security in terms of stuff, that pushes us into anxious struggle in all circumstances with everyone over getting more. We (life and body) are already “*something more!*” Stuff (much or little) can’t touch that “more”! Mammon is not a god. We live our life within the true God who pervades everything, loves all his creatures. We can see his care, beauty, and delight in even the smallest, most passing things (birds, lilies). Yes, we also are passing, but we’re “*something more*” – a relationship of love, his unbreakable love. He knows all our needs. He calls us to focus our lives on embodying that “*something more.*” Be the embodiment of God’s rule, his love, justice, and beauty in his world.

## The World of the God who Enfolds All

Paul in prison follows Jesus on his way to a cross. But both are genuinely joyful, even in the face of uncertainty, suffering around them, real danger. They never look at human life as “nothing but” some limited definition. Human life, even with uncertainty and death, is always life that can interweave with the life of God. God has done the wonderful interweaving in Jesus. God creates, works, and loves on every scale, from subatomic to multiverse. God has created that “*something more*” in you to experience his love in depth and grace. Trusting that true God is gaining life, winning, celebrating with joy. Gentleness, grace, love flow out.