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## PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Series: Choosing Joy in a Post-Traumatic World

We will call his name Mike. He was eleven years old when I started working with him. His parents brought it to me because he had some extreme anxiety issues. I've told you about Mike before because Mike is this young man who had severe anxiety that prevented them from going out to lunch at Costco. That's what they liked to do. He was afraid that his siblings would get abducted. This fear that he had paralyzed him and caused him to get really upset when his siblings weren't in proximity to him. When they went to church, they had to all be in the video room, TV video room together so they could go to church. In their home, they had to install interior locks on the interior doors at night so the kids couldn't go in different rooms because he was so afraid that they would get abducted. This challenge that he had was just crippling the family, as is always the case. You just got to remember, the person with the most anxiety controls the family or any group. That's just what happens. Anxiety dominates the interaction and can hinder whatever the family wants to do.

Well I worked with Mike for eleven weeks with his parents right there. So I was sending them home with assignments every week. We talked through things like triggers that caused this and techniques to manage it, like breathing, and we talked about anxiety itself and what it is so he would understand more about these things. After eleven weeks he told his mom, "My anxiety is gone." Now if you have any challenges with anxiety, you know that that's a miracle in this young man's life. His anxiety is gone.

So when I saw him at the next session, I said to him, "So I hear your anxiety is gone."

He says, "Yeah, it's gone."

I said, "Well I want to learn from you so I can share with other people what you learned. Over the last eleven weeks, what was it in particular that stuck out to you that helped you overcome your anxiety?"

He said, "It was when you taught me about the Holy Spirit."

I'm going to share with you now what I shared with Mike so that you can understand the process of what happened in his heart. I started with him and I said something like this. I said, "I'm going to give you a list of nine things that come from Galatians 5:22-23 and I want you to pick one of those things off that list that you wish you had."

He looked at the list and he says, "Peace."

I said to him, "I'm not surprised that you chose peace. I think peace is a really important quality. And I think that's what you need here. But do you know what that peace comes from? Just look in the passage. Do you see where it comes from? Notice it comes from the fruit of the Spirit. It is from the Holy Spirit. Are you a Christian, Mike?"

He says, "Yeah."

I said, "Oh good. Because when you're a Christian, there are so many more resources available to you than if you're not a Christian for dealing with emotional challenges. This is really great."

"Let me tell you about the Holy Spirit. Because the Holy Spirit isn't just a plaque on the inside of your heart that says 'I'm a Christian.' He is that. He's a confirmation that we're a Christian. But He's much more than that. He's moving around in there. He's got this fruit basket. And there's all these parts of the fruit basket He could pull out, but you need them. It's all part of God's big grace package that He gives. And when you pull out peace and He puts it in your heart and you experience God's peace, then what it does is like a sponge and it sucks up all the energy. You know what I mean by energy, right, Mike? It's when your mind starts racing and you think if this happens, that's going to be bad. If that bad things happens, this is going to be terrible. And if that terrible thing happens, it's going to be disastrous. And your mind just kind of runs with that. You know what I mean, right?"

He says, "Yeah, I know what you mean."

"And also your heart starts fluttering and getting upset. That energy that happens inside of your heart, the peace that's there just sucks that energy out and gives you the peace that you need.

That's what you want. Right?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Well I need to explain something else to you about the grace of God because all of these things fit under the category of the grace of God. And God wants to give it to you. In fact, there is a shower. I mentioned your shower in your house. There's a shower of God's grace that's available to all of us. Now if you go in your bathroom and you turn on the water and the shower starts going, do you get wet? No, you don't get wet. How do you get wet?"

He said, "You get into the shower."

I said, "That's right. You have to position yourself under the grace of God in order to receive the benefits of the grace of God. So just because you have the Holy Spirit in your heart doesn't mean peace is at work yet. You have to position yourself well so that you can receive the benefits of the peace that God wants to give you."

"In order to do that, Mike, I want to teach you about the suitcase idea. You see, God has this really big suitcase. It's so big that no one could carry it except for God. Only He can carry it it's so big. You try to carry it and you'd just have a lot of trouble. You can't even pick it up. God has given you a small suitcase and you can carry that suitcase around, but you try to stuff all your worries and concerns and anxiety into that suitcase, you are going to feel overwhelmed because God did not make your heart big enough to carry around the anxiety of life. He's given you a suitcase to put those things in. And when you put your worries and your concerns into God's suitcase, then a transaction takes place, and it gives you the peace that you need."

"In fact, let me show you, Mike, where this is found in the Bible. I'm going to take you to Philippians 4:6-7," which is where we're going to spend our time, folks, today. So let's put Mike aside for now. We'll come back and talk about him in a little bit. Let's talk about Philippians 4:6-7 and try to understand what God is saying in this passage, in the most comprehensive, crucial passage about anxiety in the whole Bible, Philippians 4:1-9. We're right in the middle of that passage. We're going to look at verses 6 and 7 today.

The first principle that it wants you to see is the anything and everything principle. Let's just look at the verses themselves and see what they say there. Anything and everything. You see the word there – *anything* and *everything*.

Now in the Greek what that means is anything and everything. That's what it means. This is a principle that God is going to share with us in Philippians 4:6-7 that is for every kind of situation that has to do with anxiety that we might experience. And He wants us to know this is anything and everything. So don't say to yourself, “Well God doesn't know my heart. He doesn't know my situation. My situation is really difficult. I don't know what I could do about it.” Don't allow that to distract you from the anything and everything principle here. This is for all of our anxiety, and we all need that.

Now let's go to this first word there, the word *anxious*. This word *anxious*, the Greek word *merimnao* means to rip apart or to tear apart. You know that feeling I'm sure, as I do. When you're feeling anxious, you just feel kind of torn apart inside here. I want somebody to push it back together. Because you're just kind of ripped apart inside.

This idea of anxiety is a challenge to understand in the scriptures. Most of the time it's used of worry. But you know, this is what's really interesting. Sometimes this word is used as a good kind of anxiety. There is a healthy kind of anxiety, healthy kind of concern. We don't like to use the word anxiety because it has connotations of being negative. But it is the exact same Greek word as is used in Philippians 2:20 where Paul is talking about Timothy and he says these words about him: *For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare*. That's the word anxiety. You see, there is a word concern that is really valuable for us to recognize because a little bit of anxiety helps you to be responsible. Putting the gas in your car when you need it. To stay on a diet. To turn off the heat when you need to. Or to pay your bills, get your taxes done. Okay, all of those things there's a little bit of concern there that's good.

When I work with children, I say there's a continuum between zero and ten for the three big emotions – sadness, anxiety, and anger. So zero to three is the part where it's the good part of anxiety. It's the part that makes you responsible. It's the part that gives you concern. When you're responsible then you get things done that you need to get done. You're concerned about them. When you're compassionate, you're concerned about other people and how they feel, and so that concern is a valuable one. That's a good kind of anxiety that goes from zero to three. That's how I describe it. That's kind of green. And I make that the green section where your emotions go up and down. Because God does not want us to be non-emotional. God designed us as emotional beings and that emotion, whether it's sadness, anger, anxiety, has a good side to it. And the zero to three is okay. That's when we're going back and forth in our emotions. This is what makes us a special person because we're emotional. There's a good part of that.

But then, as you know, there's a line that we cross and we get into the four to seven range where we start feeling bad because we know we just crossed that line. So we yell at somebody and we know that wasn't the right thing to do with our anger. Or we start getting depressed or feeling “oh I'm not doing the right thing here. I need to let this go.” Where we get anxious and our anxiety causes some problems for us. That's in the four to seven range. I call that the yellow part of the

emotional drama that takes place in us. It's dangerous and we need to move it back into the green part where God would have us to live with healthy emotions in our lives.

But then I look at the eight to ten, the red area, I call this the red area. That's when you develop what we call disorders. Disorders like this idea of the locks on the doors. It's just so crippling to a family. Or I told you last week about the family that I worked with where the child was washing her hands for fifteen minutes at a time. And then last Sunday I went home. Last Sunday after church I made a phone call to this family that wanted to talk to me. As we talked, I described some of the teaching from last Sunday morning because this child has anxiety. I even described this child whose fifteen-minute handwashing time was delaying the bedtime and other kinds of things. And they said, "That's funny. You know, our son washes his hands for twenty minutes. And the problem is he washes his hands for twenty minutes to get all the germs off and then his hands get all chapped, and then he won't put cream on. So it's continually irritated by this hand washing ritual that he has to go through."

When we get to the eight to ten side, we enter into this disorder category. Disorders that... You know you're into disorder when it's creating so much internal tension for you that you can't experience vitality in life. There's so much tension you're creating in relationships that the relationship loses its vitality. When that starts to take place, we are in a really bad danger area. And we have to understand what Paul is saying here. He's saying – *Don't be anxious about anything*. But there seems to be the way even the way Paul uses the word in Philippians 2:20 that there's a line that's crossed when it turns into a bad anxiety. In fact, most of the time in the Bible when this word *merimnao* is used it's not always the word anxiety in the negative sense.

In fact, if we were going to do a theology of anxiety, that is looking at the different passages in the Bible, one that would come up quickly to our mind would be one passage that contains the word *anxious* six times in the passage. It's Jesus teaching about anxiety. Sometimes in some translations it uses the word *worry*. But let me read it to you. Just draw some principles out of this for our own anxieties as we're thinking about it.

Jesus says – *Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious 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?* So what He's saying is here sometimes we worry about trivial things that aren't as important and we need to think about the big things. Don't worry about the small stuff and everything is small stuff. That's the idea here.

*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?* So the principle here is remember God is in the picture here. You're not living the life alone. Anxiety is all about feeling like I'm all alone and everybody's against me, bad things are going to happen, and doesn't recognize the grace of God's presence in the midst of that situation. God is there.

*And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* In other words,

there's a waste of time with some of the worrying that we do, because it's about frivolous things that are never going to take place in our lives.

So Rose DeLisi who's probably online and Facebook with the church at the DeLisi house this week, but she said to me last week when she came up to me after the sermon, “Yes, I've heard that worry is like a rocking chair. It's a lot of activity that doesn't get you anywhere.” That's what's being said here, that you can't add a single hour to your lifespan.

Verse 30 – *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, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.*

So He's saying don't be anxious about are you going to get these things. What does that mean? You say, “Okay, God, I'm just not going to worry about it. I assume the food's going to show up on my doorstep.” No. You see, there's a good kind of anxiety that says I need to go shopping because the refrigerator is out of food. But I don't want to be anxious about this idea that I'm not going to have enough money to eat. I'm not going to have enough clothes to wear. There's a bad anxiety that kicks in here that He's speaking of here.

And then comes the key verse, verse 33. *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* So there's this sense in which when we put Christ at the center of our lives, the center of our thinking, the center of our hearts, then the other things start to fade away. The things that we tend to be anxious about aren't as significant because it's about values. What's the most important thing? *Seek first the kingdom of God.* When we do that, these other things just work out themselves that we spend a lot of time worrying about.

And then comes this principle about grace and tomorrow that we mentioned last week. He says – *Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.* I think that's rather interesting that a day has anxiety to it. *Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.* The idea here is that God gives us grace for today's challenges. God does not give you grace for tomorrow's challenges until tomorrow. So if you start thinking about tomorrow, then you might get worried and upset about tomorrow. But if you realize that God's grace will also be present, then you can trust in the fact that I'll be able to handle tomorrow too. Because anxiety is going to be there tomorrow, but so is God's grace.

See, we tend to think about the uncertainties of tomorrow without recognizing that God's grace will be present in that moment. So there may be sometimes we think, “Oh, I don't know what I would do if...” Well I'll just tell you. You don't need to know what you're going to do if until the if comes because when the if comes, you will be in the presence of God's grace at the same time. Tomorrow will take care of itself.

Well let's go back to the verse because I'm jumping over three words here to get to the last part of verse 6. Because if we follow the passage, he's saying – *Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything (then jump to this) let your requests be made known to God.* Put them in the suitcase. Give them to God is the idea here. Now the three words that are before that are going to

tell us how. I'll come back to those in a little bit. But the idea here is that we need to put them in the suitcase that God has provided for us. There's a place for our anxiety. Some people develop a little tool called the worry box, where you put your little request in the worry box so you can get rid of them. But it's okay. It's like the suitcase idea. The point is, who are we giving them to? We're giving them to the Lord. *Let your requests be made known to God.*

The presence of the Lord in a person's life is so strategic because of all the tools available for managing anxiety. And there are a lot of them today. The greatest tools that can help a person manage their emotional health is a spiritual closeness to God and understanding of theology, not only in our heads, but in our practice of life. So we take these worries that we have and we make them known to God. We put them in the suitcase. And that's when the beautiful exchange takes place that he talks about.

That's why the next word is *and* in verse 7. He says – *And the peace of God...* Let's pause there for a moment. Because I want you to see this isn't just about peace. Oh there's a lot of talk today about peace, and I want peace, and let's have peace. We're not talking about peace in general. We're talking about a very specific kind of peace. We're talking about the peace of God. Jesus is the one who says in John 14:27 – *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.* There is a lot of peace that the world gives, we just have to understand that.

You see, when a person washes their hands for twenty minutes, they're trying to obtain peace. They do get a certain amount of peace by washing their hands for twenty minutes. They feel like they finally dealt with what they needed. They can leave the sink because now they have some peace. But you see that this is an addicting kind of peace. There are a lot of people who engage in addicting patterns in order to deal with their anxiety in order to find the peace that they want. So a person who gets drunk and passes out has peace temporarily. That's a worldly kind of peace, you see. There are a lot of peaceful solutions out there. But most of those peaceful solutions are driving us into addictions, they're driving us into disorders that aren't helpful. We just really have to be careful of the world's kind of peace that's offered out there.

In a particular way what Jesus is saying here in this passage in John 14 is that the peace I'm giving you is different than the world. Keep that in mind so when we go back to our passage and it talks about the peace of God, we have to understand we're trying to get under the shower of God's grace so that we can receive something that is supernatural.

Sometimes what people do is they try to argue themselves out of anxiety situations. Parents do this with their kids. Well let me tell you, the chances of our house getting hit by lightning are so small. The child says, "But it's possible." You know the chances of our house getting robbed is so small. "But it's possible." It's the "but it's possible" that gets us down this path. It's potential dangers of life that get us into trouble. And there's some times when people try to argue out of their anxiety situation. So just keep in mind this next part of the verse, that the peace that God gives us is one that surpasses all understanding.

Now next week when we look at the last part of this passage, we're going to learn some more technique kind of ideas about how we can handle anxiety when we're in the midst of the struggle.

But notice that he says that this peace is different. This is a peace that passes all understanding. Which means you're probably not going to get it from logic. Nothing is wrong to think about how a potential is so low that I don't have to worry about it. But it's always a little potential to get us into trouble. There's something about this peace that passes all understanding that's really rich theologically and requires that the peace that we have involves trust. A very important understanding of peace. Because most people who are anxious want control. They either want control of the situation or they want to know things they can't know right now. And because of their control, their desire to know things, they push and push and push in those directions. Really what we need to do is we need to learn how to trust. When we learn how to trust then we're receiving this peace that passes all understanding. It's part of God's grace shower that He wants us to have.

Here's what it does for you, notice, it will *guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. Remember, we talked about this already. It's your heart that's fluttering and getting all upset. He will guard it. The word *guard* there is a garrison. It's a standing guard around your heart. There's a comforting element of that for all of us that we need this garrison around our hearts to protect it. And will guard our minds. Our minds that start to race in crazy directions.

Well that's amazing, all of those things about anxiety. But let's go back to the three words there that are in Philippians 4:6 because this is the how-to. This is what are you going to do when you start to feel anxious? These are the three words you want to go to in this verse.

The first one is *prayer*. That's your general word for prayer that's coming to God in prayer. It's the common word used for prayer, that we pray without ceasing kind of idea.

The second word is *supplication*, which is the idea of a treaty. It's the idea of a little more passion. "I really need this, God" kind of an approach. So that's another way that we can come to God and plead with God, "Lord, would you please give this to me."

The third word is *thanksgiving*. An interesting word there. Because thanksgiving helps us focus on what we have and what we are grateful for, instead of focusing on the things we don't know about. It gives us a kind of solid block in which we can allow our hearts to be guarded. Because we're focusing on something different than our lack of knowledge or lack of control. So now we're moving our hearts in a direction.

So sometimes we'll say to children, "If you're starting to feel anxious, go through the alphabet and think of one thing you're thankful for for every letter of the alphabet." And what that does is it helps a person, whether a child or an adult, to start changing the focus. Because the focus of anxiety is on trouble. It's on problems, it's on potential problems, whereas we switch over to joy, as we talked last week, we were focused on the joy, this week focus on thanksgiving, then we see something completely different. It's part of the therapy that is here in this passage.

I want to remind you that in verse 9 (which we're going to look at next week) do you remember that it says *and practice these things*? Very important verse. In fact, let me first go back and just summarize some of the things we've talked about. I want to give you five principles for anxiety out of Philippians 4:6-7. These will complement the ones we looked at last week, the four kind

of precursors to get ready to deal with your anxiety. Now we have five, all out of this passage in verses 6 and 7.

Anxiety can be good or bad (verse 6). Number two, we can exchange anxiety for God's peace (that's what it says in verse 7). Number three, prayer is the secret to accessing God's grace and mercy (in verse 6). Number four, God's peace is practical. That means it's going to deal with my heart and my mind (in verse seven). And fifthly, you can trust God with anything. This is the anything/everything principle. You can trust God with anything.

He understands. He understands computers. Kids have a hard time with this sometimes. Does God really understand the weather? Well yeah, I think He understands the weather. Does He understand your computer? I don't know if God understands it. Of course He does! God understands every piece of us, everything in the world. God understands all the challenges that we have. We can deal with all of these things in our lives.

Well back to Mike. Mike experienced miraculous change in his life at eleven years old. He went on to live life and it was great. But I want to tell you that three years later, Mike's mom called me and said, "We're having trouble again with Mike's anxiety. Would you spend more time with him?" Which I did. I share this part of the story because I want you to know that the work of dealing with emotional challenges takes the practice of verse 9. I hope you're going to circle verse 9 when you come there. Verse 9 – *Practice these things*. It takes practice.

In fact, many people who have challenges with anxiety at some point will continue to be tempted by anxiety in their lives. So they often need to continually practice these things. I would suggest that you take all the ideas we're talking about in this passage and you write them down, you implement them, and you work them. When things are starting to go well, you know, you're overcoming some of your anxiety, you continue to work them, so they don't drag you back on the continuum down the continuum in the wrong direction. That would really help in a number of different ways.

I want to tell you one more story. This is a Bible story that I was telling my four-year-old grandson this week. I said, "Everett, yesterday we talked about Jesus feeding the 5,000 people." He says, "Yeah, how did He do that with just a little bit of food?" I said, "Jesus does miracles. He can do anything." And Everett says, "Wow."

I said, "Well after He was done feeding all 5,000 people, He told his disciples to get into the boat and row across the lake to get to the other side while He dismissed all the people. He dismissed all the people and then He went up on the mountain to pray. The darkness came and it was dark out. In fact, a storm came up and the wind was blowing and the waves were really bad for these guys on this boat. They're trying to row in the dark with the wind blowing and all of these waves coming up. It's really bad. And the Bible says about Jesus that He saw them out there. He saw them. In the dark, He sees out there from the mountain. Jesus knows exactly what they're going through. And He told him to do something. I would suggest that the greatest safety that you could ever find in your life is to be obedient to God. When you're in obedience to Jesus Christ, as they were going through, they were in a safe place. But they didn't feel safe at that time. They

felt very anxious. They were afraid, the Bible says, because of the wind and the waves that were coming out, probably splashing into the boat, wondering what might happen. If they had anxiety they'd be saying, 'Oh, well, I wonder if this is it. I wonder if we're going to die here.'

"Then to make things worse, they see this thing walking on the water. The Bible says it was Jesus. As if He walked by. It's like He's going to meet them on the other side by taking a shortcut across the water. That's what it says. Amazing. And now these guys think it's a ghost. And so they are so afraid now because they see this ghost, until Jesus says, 'Don't be afraid. It is I.' At that moment, there was a lot of kind of wondering of what's going on. So Peter says, 'If it's really you, Lord commanded me to come out on the water with you.'"

Everett says, "How does He walk on the water? Walking on water. How can He walk on the water?" "Well Jesus can do anything. He can do miracles."

"So Peter, he puts his foot outside the boat, and he steps down on the water and it's hard. He puts his other foot out and it's hard too, and so he's looking at Jesus and he starts to walk toward Jesus. He cannot believe that he can walk on water. This is so cool. Because he has his eyes fixed on Jesus. But then the Bible tells us that he started looking around to the problems around him and when he did, he became afraid because he saw the wind and the waves. And what happened? He started to sink underneath the water. He became overwhelmed with his fear and anxiety, as we often do. He was so overwhelmed with that, that he prayed the shortest prayer in the world in the whole Bible. The shortest prayer: 'Lord, save me.' That's the shortest prayer in the Bible right there. And so notice Jesus wasn't fifty feet away and throws him a life preserver. The Bible tells us that Jesus was right there to pull him up out of the water, and to walk with him back to the boat, and to take care of him back there. And the water became calm. Wow. What an amazing story."

"Everett, do you know why I tell you that story?"

"No. Why?"

"I tell you that story because there are problems in our world all the time and we keep our eyes on Jesus and we need to keep focused on Him so that we don't get afraid of the things that are going on, and we learn how to trust Him more."

Stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Lord, I ask that you would give us your grace. Oh we know you give it in abundance. But sometimes we don't stand under it. So Lord, teach us what it means to obey you. So that when we obey you we can receive more of that grace that we desperately need on our hearts. Lord, I pray for those who might be struggling in some challenging areas of the continuum of anxiety in their lives. People may be listening to this sermon just because it was passed on to them by a friend. Lord, we know that you want to live inside of our hearts. So I just ask that you would be ministering to each person who hears this sermon. Especially those who don't know you personally that they come to know you in a special way so that you can offer them those spiritual resources to deal with the emotional challenges. Father, thank you so much for being close to us, loving us, for caring about us. We ask for your grace as we continue to live our lives this week. In Jesus' name, amen.