

## Paul's Three-Point Plan For Personal Peace

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### Introduction:

One of the most shocking statements in the Bible, to me, is Paul's statement in **Philippians 4:6**. "Be anxious for nothing." My initial response to such a statement is to question it as an overstatement. I want to soften it a little and say that I just need to be careful regarding what I am anxious about. If I heard this statement in a vacuum, not knowing who said it or why, I would immediately assume it was some young, naïve preacher making grandiose statements that simply are unsupportable. But the problem is I know who said it. It was Paul, who was neither young, nor naïve. He said it by inspiration which means it is certainly supportable. What really causes me to stand up and take more notice is the number of things about which this man had to be stressed out and anxious. Just consider the things mentioned in this letter alone: **1:7**—Paul was writing while imprisoned; **1:15-16**—there were men teaching from envy and strife just to add afflictions to his chains; **1:20**—he knew he may be executed; **1:28-30**—he knew his friends were going to suffer; **2:1-2, 14; 4:2-3**—evidently the church at Philippi was struggling with disunity and division; **2:25-27**—though Epaphroditus was well by the writing of this letter, Paul had friends who were dying; **3:2ff**—false teachers were getting to the brethren; **3:7ff**—he had to give up everything that had been meaningful to him when he became a Christian; **3:17-18**—he knew of brethren in Philippi who needed to be disciplined by the congregation; **4:10-12**—his needs were being fulfilled by the brethren and who knew when gifts and support would arrive. This is the man who said, "Be anxious for nothing." Then this man explained how to avoid this anxiety. When I consider what Paul had been through, that makes me want to sit up and read a little more closely. Within **Philippians 4:6-9**, Paul presents a three-point plan for personal peace. What anxieties, distresses, frustrations and concerns plague us today that Paul did not go through before us? Take a look at Paul's plan for peace and take courage that we can indeed overcome the stresses of our personal lives, family lives, work lives and even church lives.

### Discussion:

- I. Pray—Trust God (**Philippians 4:6**).
  - A. On the surface, we could easily just say that Paul's advice is to pray. We could talk about how to make requests and offer thanks. But that is really just the surface. The deeper issue that Paul is really bringing out is to trust God. No matter what stresses are weighing down on you, trust that God is there and will take care of you.
  - B. When you consider this trust note four areas in which you must trust God.
    1. Trust God that He will not abandon you (**Hebrews 13:5-6**). Additionally, trust that nothing is so powerful as to overcome God such that we will be abandoned by Him (**Romans 8:35-39**).
    2. Trust God that He knows what we need, even before we ask Him (**Matthew 6:8, 32**).
    3. Trust God that He cares about our needs and concerns (**1 Peter 5:6-7**).
    4. Trust God that He is able to take care of us. Paul demonstrated that in **Philippians 4:6**, when he pointed out that our requests should be made with thanksgiving. God has already demonstrated His ability to take care of us. That is why we owe Him our thanks already.
  - C. Paul makes an amazingly subtle, yet profound, point in **Philippians 4:7**. He demonstrates that the peace we will receive from God comes through Jesus Christ. What a welcome reminder that, in fact, the one thing that should cause us the most anxiety and stress has already been dealt with in Christ. No wonder we can have peace. That one thing of course is sin. Do you want stress and anxiety? Then think about trying to get rid of your sins and keep from going to hell all by yourself. No matter what you would do you would run into a brick wall (**Proverbs 20:9**). But Jesus has already taken care of that. If we are in Christ, we can overcome anxiety, stress and frustration because the greatest of stresses is resolved. Do you remember what Paul said in **Romans 5:6-11**? Paul made a great point. If God loved us so much to save us through Christ while we were still in our sins, how much more will God stay with us and get us to heaven once we have become His children in Christ?
  - D. We can trust God to take care of us and provide what is best and most needed for us. So, when we face anxieties and stresses, pray. Make your requests known to God, giving thanks. And know that even when, in your stress and anxiety, you do not know exactly how or what to pray, the Spirit knows and intercedes for us (**Romans 8:26**).

- II. Think good thoughts (**Philippians 4:8**).
- A. In **Philippians 4:8**, Paul gives a list of things upon which we should meditate—true things, noble things, just things, pure things, lovely things, things of good report. Basically Paul said to think about good things. However, his statement is even stronger than that. The term translated “meditate” is “logizomai” and is defined in Spiros Zodhiates’ ***The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*** as “to put together with one’s mind, to count, to occupy oneself with reckonings or calculations.”
  - B. Here is a man in prison telling us in very strong terms to look on the bright side. Do not get bogged down in thinking about all the bad things. Do not count up in your mind all the false, irreverent, unfair, sinful, disgusting and terrible things that are happening to or around you. Count the good things. The song we sing, “Count Your Many Blessings” fits here. It may surprise you what the Lord has already done for you.
  - C. Look at Paul’s example in the first chapter of **Philippians** alone.
    1. In **1:12**, Paul was in prison but thought about how his imprisonment furthered the gospel.
    2. In **1:14**, he thought about how his chains made the brethren bolder.
    3. In **1:15-18**, he thought about how the dishonest teachers were still teaching the gospel and some might be saved.
    4. In **1:21**, he considered the blessings of living and dying, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.”
  - D. One of the great battles of our time is the battle of the mind, but Paul said in **II Corinthians 10:3-6**, that we must wage that warfare and bring our thoughts into captivity. A friend of mine once said, “We may not be able to stop the birds from flying over our heads, but we can keep them from making nests in our hair.” In like manner, we may never stop fleeting thoughts from coursing through our minds. But we can control our meditations. Meditate on the good things.
- III. No matter how you feel, do what you know is right (**Philippians 4:9**).
- A. This is where the rubber meets the road. There comes a point when we get up off our knees and get out of our thinking chairs. There comes a point when we have to decide to do something. Paul says do what we know is right. Specifically, to the Philippians he said that they should do what he taught them. They should do what they saw him do.
  - B. Certainly, Paul has not literally been with us. He has not preached sermons to us, nor have we seen his daily behavior. However, we do have a guide given to us. Paul was one of the human authors, but ultimately it came from the Holy Spirit (**II Peter 1:20-21**). Paul said that the scriptures were profitable to teach us, convict us, correct us and make us complete and equipped for every good work (**II Timothy 3:16-17**).
  - C. The scripture provides instruction for how we should live as members of the church (**I Timothy 3:15**). It talks about how to live within a family (e.g. **Ephesians 5:22-6:4**). It tells us about personal day to day living regarding speech, actions and even emotions (e.g. **Ephesians 4:25-32**). It talks about conflict resolution (**Matthew 5:21-26**) and much, much more. There are so many things we can learn from the teaching in the Bible and from the example of saints recorded in the Bible. Paul explains that if we want peace from God to overcome the anxieties and stresses of life, we need to follow what we learn from them.
  - D. That means we do not follow our feelings. We do not follow the crowd. We do not follow our peer group or our family. We follow God, according to His word. Then we will have peace, because only then can we rest assured that we have done what is right.

### Conclusion:

Certainly, I am not so naïve as to think that you can go home tonight, go through this three step process and never have stress again. However, as you grow in Christ spending your time doing these three things—trusting God in prayer, thinking good thoughts and doing what you know is right—the God of peace will be with you and you, through God’s grace, will overcome the stresses and anxieties of life.