

Coach House Church

BEACONS

ONGOING PEACE

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God can get us through anxiety because he doesn't change, even when our circumstances do. In this Beacon I look at how we confront the experience of anxiety by trusting God and experiencing his peace.

I wish I could press a button and turn my anxiety off. It's a bit like when those warning lights flash up on the dashboard of your car. Something's wrong with the engine and you don't really know what. You keep driving and hope it goes away (and you also hope you don't have to pay for a new clutch). If you've got the money and time, you'll go to a garage, have it investigated and (ideally) get it fixed as soon as possible.

If the gap between discovering the problem and fixing it is small, we'll usually have limited anxiety. But if it's large, we need to know how live with it and confront it. That is where things get hard, and where faith in God directly helps us.

So let's look at one of the most famous Bible passages about anxiety in Philippians 4:6:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

It's easy to be scandalised by just the first part: "Do not be anxious about anything" How can anyone live free from anxiety?

This verse goes on to tell us how to do this practically. If we want to live with less anxiety, these are the definite steps you can take.

Firstly, we should "present our requests to God".

It is easy to keep anxieties bottled up and brewing inside of us. It's really common to bottle up worries and not even name them in your thoughts.

It's a bit like putting a sticker over your dashboard warning light so you can't see it.

We simply don't want to address our anxieties. But this verse encourages us to share these things with God, and tells us how:

We can break it down into three little parts, we should do it...

In every situation, By prayer and petition, With thanksgiving

Let's look at each part briefly:

In every situation – Meaning we turn to God whenever we face an anxious situation.

By prayer and petition – Meaning we directly bring our personal anxieties and our desired outcomes to God.

With thanksgiving – Meaning we thank God for all he has done and who he is, which should put our anxieties in perspective.

Basically, like any good friend or spouse, God want us to tell him what's troubling us so that he can help. Why? Because the Bible tells us that God wants to have a personal relationship with us. We can see these things hinted in the points above – 'petitions' are personal requests and 'every situation' really can refer to anything. I remember being extremely anxious as a child going into school on non-uniform day, just in case I got the wrong day and looked like an idiot. I'm sure it wouldn't have mattered if I had double checked with a friend first, I still would've been anxious. In another sense, it wouldn't have mattered if I'd been wrong either (since it was a 5minute walk to go home and get changed).

Even with dumb anxieties and things that we laugh at in retrospect: God wants to know and God wants to help us.

So let's look at the second half of this passage.

The first half has told us how to confront anxiety on our end: What we should do to address it and how we should bring it to God. The second half tells us what happens as a result:

Let's look at verse 7, it says: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

God's response to our prayers is to give us his peace which acts as a guard.

Primarily, it "guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" – the central parts of us which are affected by anxiety.

There seems to be two ways that we experience this peace from God based on this passage.

The first is (what I've chosen to call) instant peace

Perhaps we bring a certain anxiety to God, a specific situation, and he gives us peace there and then and fixes everything.

We follow what the passage says by bringing a request to God in prayer with thankfulness at a difficult moment, and we experience his peace which guards our hearts and minds from immediate despair or unbelief.

Because certainly, God can intervene at any time. He saves us even when we're not looking for it. His peace can nullify anxiety instantly. Truly, we can experience peace that "transcends all understanding" a moment after crying out to him.

This is a reasonable interpretation, and we see many comparable occasions in the Gospels where Jesus heals people instantly and not over a period of time.

Secondly there is ongoing peace

This is what happens when we bring our anxieties to God in the long term.

Let's say it starts with the first anxious situation we pray about. We experience God's peace and then we bring another request a little later. And then another.

The more this happens over time, the less anxious we become and the more we know God's peace.

That is the slow but sure route to being less anxious.

In fact, this captures the way that God wants to relate to us. He wants us to build a relationship with him and get to know him. This applies to all areas of life. God will gradually reshape us for good as we get to know him – way beyond merely controlling anxiety

As Romans 12:2 encourages us: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..."

I encourage you to dig in today and get started, whether it's the first situation you've presented to God or the millionth.

It starts with us trusting God, wherever we are, with the situations in front of us.



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