

Discipleship: Knowing God's Voice Well: the Bible Part 4B

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I. Introduction

God makes some outrageous demands and promises. He says, "Always rejoice!" "Always be gentle and kind!" "I'll take away your anxiety the moment you tell Me about it." "You can do all things through Christ!" "I will always supply everything you need!" What does He mean and how in the world can we do any of these things, how can they be true?

II. Discipleship: Knowing God's Voice Well: the Bible

God promises to get rid of your anxiety the second you tell Him about it, we're investigating what God means when He says, "Don't be anxious about anything..." in Philippians 4:6-7 by looking at its context. As you begin to read Philippians and meditate on what the apostle Paul and the Son of God went through and how they responded to their suffering and anxiety, a picture begins to emerge.

What's the context of Philippians 4:6-7?

2:12-30, in light of the fact that Jesus Christ produced His own salvation by giving up His life (2:5-11) and Paul is producing his own salvation by giving up his life (1:19-21) and the fact that the Philippians are one with Christ (1:1) and therefore have access to everything He is, i.e., to His encouragement, His loving comfort, His Spirit's fellowship, His affection, and His mercy (2:1), Paul wants the Philippians to face their suffering (1:27-30) in the same selfless, sacrificial way, that is, he wants them to work out their own salvation too, as they have always done in his presence. After all, it is God who works in us, who enables us to accomplish His will. They must do all things without complaining or arguing so that they can stand out as blameless lights in the midst of a crooked world. If they do, Paul will rejoice when Jesus returns knowing that his labor was not in vain. And if Paul is executed, he wants the Philippians to rejoice with him for giving up his life as Christ did (2:12-18). Paul then points to two others who gave up their lives: Timothy forsook the cares of this world and sought the things of Christ, faithfully serving alongside Paul as a son in the Gospel. Epaphroditus served Paul in the work of Christ on the Philippians' behalf and almost died in the process (2:19-30). In light of all this, what is God saying to you about the anxiety in your life?

3:1-21, Paul then urged them to rejoice in the Lord—say what?!—as he warned them not to have confidence in the things of the flesh but in the things of Christ: Paul possessed all the religious trophies the flesh could attain but he counted them all garbage. He lost everything so that He could gain Christ and His righteousness, which is by faith not by the works of the Law. He wanted to identify with Jesus' life of suffering and attain His level of resurrection life (3:1-11). Not that Paul had attained perfection in his resurrection life but he pressed on so that he could attain it, which is the reason why Christ had laid hold of him. Thus he urged them to have the same attitude, to strive for full maturity in their resurrection life (3:12-16). Therefore, they need to imitate Paul and individuals like him and not those who set their minds on earthly things. Because their citizenship is in heaven and one day their Omnipotent Savior Jesus Christ will return from heaven to transform their lowly body into a resurrection body like His! (3:17-21). How does God want us to see our anxiety, even if we lost it all?

4:1-23, In light of all this, in light of what God has done for the apostle Paul, for His Son Jesus Christ, for Timothy, for Epaphroditus, i.e., in light of the fact that God through the power of His Son's resurrection life (cf. Romans 6:4) can help you overcome anything—unbelievable suffering (1:12-18), death threats, prison, death itself (1:19-26), persecution (1:27-30), unimaginable pain and suffering that ended on a brutal Cross (2:5-11), the trials and tribulations of ministry (2:19-24), near death experiences (2:25-30), attacks from religious zealots (3:2-7), losing everything in life (3:8-11), temptation to give up and take the easy way out (3:12-19), your body breaking down and life after death (3:20-21), and starving because you have nothing or being content because you have everything (4:10-20)—Paul urges his beloved Philippians, who are his joy, to stand fast in the Lord. Having seen how God can deliver people from their pain and suffering, do you see what he means by “stand fast in the Lord” by “be anxious for nothing”? Notice how the letter ends and what He tells the Philippians to do.

He wants Euodia and Syntyche to reconcile and be of the same mind in the Lord and he wants Paul's true companion to help them. He wants them all to rejoice in the Lord always and everywhere! He wants them to let their kind and gentle ways to be known to all since the Lord is near. He wants them to be anxious about nothing. Instead, they need to take their problems to God, confidently knowing that He will answer them one way or another. If they do, then the **peace of God**, which is beyond comprehension, will protect their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Paul wants them to meditate on whatever is true, noble, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy, i.e., on everything he taught them and modeled for them. If they do this, the **God of peace** will be **with them** (4:1-9). It's not just “be anxious for nothing,” God wants us to always rejoice no matter what, to always put our best foot forward no matter what, to always meditate on what is good and godly. If we do this, God's peace will be with us regardless of what is going on around us!

Paul closes the letter with further encouragement. He's overjoyed in the Lord again because the Philippians have once again shown their love for him (as they have countless times, e.g., when he was in Thessalonica) by sending Epaphroditus with some much needed things. However, Paul has learned that no matter what state he's in, whether he's starving because he has nothing or full because he has everything, he's learned that he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. Therefore, what Paul loves about the Philippians providing for his needs is not the gifts they gave him over the years, but the fact that the Lord will reward them for walking so closely with Him. After all, when it comes to our needs, it is our God and Father who supplies all our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus, which is why he deserves our praise forever and ever (4:10-20). Paul ends the letter with one last note of encouragement. As he asks them to greet all the saints in Christ Jesus, he informs them that the saints who are with him, especially those from Caesar's house, send their greetings (4:21-22), i.e., not even Caesar can stop God, nothing can!

“Be anxious for nothing” is one of four things Paul wants the Philippians to do after going on for three chapters about the power of the Lord to overcome all of life's trials, all of which bring with them anxiety (e.g., 2:26-28, cf. Matthew 26:36-56). In fact, the book of Philippians ends with several quotes, some of them famous and all of which are tremendously powerful.....if you understand what they mean:

“Stand fast in the Lord”

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!”

“Let your gentleness be known to all men.”

“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.”

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

“My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Can you now understand what God means by these things? Every one of these statements is true and powerful but they're just words on a page unless you know why God said them, unless you understand the story behind them, unless you hear God saying to you personally, “My child, there's nothing you cannot do when I am with you. Look at what I did for Paul, for Timothy, for Epaphroditus, for the Philippians, for My own Son. Nothing and no one can stop Me. You can literally do all things through the power of My Son. You have nothing to fear or be anxious about, but you have every reason to rejoice because not even death can harm you!”

This is the message God keeps repeating over and over in the book of Philippians. Notice the constant themes throughout this book:

Getting your identity from Christ, 1:1, 3-11, 12-18, 19-26, 27-30; 2:1-8, 12-18, 19-24, 25-30; 3:1, 3, 7-11, 12-17, 3:20-4:1; 4:2-7, 8-9, 10-20, 21-23

Living the resurrection life, 1:3-8, 12-18, 19-26, 27-30; 2:1-4, 5-11, 12-18, 19-24, 25-30; 3:1-11, 12-17, 3:20-4:1; 4:2-7, 8-9, 10-20, 21-23

Joy/Rejoice, 1:4, 18, 25, 26; 2:2, 17-18, 28; 3:1, 3; 4:1, 4, 10

One mind/Like-minded, 1:27; 2:2-4, 5-8, 20-21, 25-30; 3:15-17, 18-19; 4:2, 6-7, 8

Confident/Confidence, 1:6, 14, 19, 20, 25; 2:19, 24; 3:3, 4-6

How will you face your next anxious moment?

III. Conclusion

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.