

# Joy in Anxiety

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, is there anything more personal or anything more intimate than receiving a handwritten letter?! In an age of sending emails and texts and WhatsApp chat messages and snaps, we don't tend to write letters very much anymore, do we?

In fact, even mentioning the lost art of letter writing has probably alienated half of you at least because you've got no idea what I'm talking about. Because letter writing or receiving letters tends to be something that is not normal for younger generations.

Nobody tends to write letters if you're under the age of about 48, 49, which is really young. Above that, it's obviously very old. But for older generations, the letter has always been and probably still always is the way to communicate.

Especially if you want to communicate something really important. You take time, get a pen and some paper and write down what you want to say to somebody else.

And you know that most personal letters, when they're written and as the sheet of paper is running out of space, the letter tends to end with a bunch of random statements or questions for the person.

[ 1 : 18 ] As we come to the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Philippians, it seems like he throws out this series of random comments just as we come to the end. Is he just throwing out some comments like maybe your mother used to do when you went to university and said, Now remember to wash yourself. Remember to wash your clothes. Put on some deodorant and make your bed.

Just before she said, Love, Mum. Is that what Paul is doing here? Is this just a random selection of disconnected commands in this kind of haphazard way?

Well, when you read Paul's letters in the New Testament, I don't think there's ever any time when you read his letters where Paul says anything that is disconnected or random or haphazard.

He never just randomly chucks out comments that aren't connected to what he is saying in his letters. His letters have this logical flow or argument where everything is connected to what he wants to communicate to those that he is writing to.

And so here in Philippians, what Paul is saying in these verses actually picks up on what he's been saying all the way through his letter so far. And Sinclair Ferguson and his teaching on Philippians has really helped me to see this.

[ 2 : 36 ] Because Sinclair Ferguson has highlighted an important concern that runs through all of Paul's letter to the Philippians. And what is that concern? Well, it's the use of the mind.

Or to put it another way, it's having the right mindset. Because again and again, when we read through Philippians, we see that Paul uses what is a verb to think.

And it's translated in various ways, but it appears in chapter 1 verse 7, chapter 2 verse 2 twice, chapter 2 verse 5, chapter 3 verse 15, 3 verse 19, 4 verse 2, 4 verse 10 twice.

Translated different ways. Translated different ways but again and again, it's this verb, to think. Because what Paul wants the Philippians to do, and then by extension us, is to have the right kind of mindset.

To think in the right kind of way. And so Paul here wants the Philippians to use their minds in a certain way as they live their lives.

[ 3 : 40 ] Because when you think about it, how you think determines your attitudes and your actions. Our thinking undoubtedly affects the way that we live our lives.

And that's why at the heart of Paul's letter, he says that we are to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. Chapter 2, verse 5. Where being in Christ, being in union with him means that we will have the mind of Christ.

We'll think in a Christ-like way. And that's really the secret to everything. As we'll see here in this passage, it's the secret to our relationships with each other.

It's the secret to our relationship with Christ himself. And it's the secret to our relationship with ourself. Everything depends on our thinking.

How we think. And so Paul's saying here that we need to have our mind shaped and fashioned by Jesus Christ and his gospel. And that's essentially what it means to be a Christian.

[ 4 : 49 ] Is to have our minds shaped by Jesus Christ. And so Paul now applies this in a really practical way to his readers as he comes to the end of his letter. Which is what you and I need to hear if we profess to be Christians.

We need to hear what he says about how we live our lives and how we think. But it's also what you need to hear if you wouldn't call yourself a Christian and you're here this afternoon. And perhaps you're curious just about what it means to follow Jesus.

But what Paul says here really helps us know what Christianity is all about. And so we're going to look at this passage under three headings this afternoon. First, how to think in relation to others. How to think in relation to Christ. And how to think in relation to yourself. So first of all, how to think in relation to others in verse 2 and 3. So there's a personal issue going on in the church in Philippi. And it needs to be resolved. Look at what Paul says there. Verse 2 and 3. I plead with Iodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

[ 5 : 55 ] Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel. Along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers whose names are in the book of life.

Two women in this church family in Philippi were divided. Iodia and Syntyche. And it's the only time their names are mentioned in the New Testament.

So it's not as if they're famous. And it's unusual for Paul in his letters to highlight individuals like this. But I don't think it's because he wants to name them and shame them.

And yet the fact that he calls them out means that this is a serious issue that he has heard about a long way off. And so it's an issue that needs to be sorted.

And it's interesting because Paul, there's no indication that Paul is taking sides here, as if one of them is right and one of them is wrong. Because he pleads with both of them. And he doesn't discuss the details.

[ 6 : 54 ] But there's obviously some kind of beef between these two women. And so he urges them literally to think. Think the same way in the Lord.

And it's an echo of what he's already said in chapter 2, verse 2. About being like-minded. So the reality for these women is that they were both in the Lord.

In other words, they were both Christians. They were both believers. And so both should be behaving in a Christ-like manner in relation to each other.

Just as Jesus, as Paul says in chapter 2, just as Jesus, their Savior and Lord, our Savior and Lord, valued others above himself. He looked to the interests of others, not his own.

Jesus did not hold on to his own rights. But rather, he emptied himself by taking the very nature of a servant. He humbled himself and he died on a cross.

[ 7 : 55 ] And so therefore, these women, as followers of Jesus, as his people, they're called to follow his example in their relationship with one another. And so Paul's not pretending that their disagreement doesn't matter.

And his concern's not even that they agree with one another. What he wants is for them to be of the same mind in the Lord. He wants them to be united.

After all, these were two women who were fellow workers with Paul in the gospel work of Jesus Christ. They'd labored side by side with him. And so there's no doubt they were probably influential personalities in the church in Philippi.

And the very fact that their names are mentioned in a letter to the whole church suggests that whatever the issue is, the whole church was aware of it.

It was serious enough to cause division to that church in Philippi. Why? Because disunity or division in a church is always a serious matter, isn't it?

[ 9 : 04 ] And it is never a private matter either, is it? It's dangerous to the unity of the whole church family. It affects everybody, especially if the people involved have a significant leadership role, like Iodia and Syntyche seemed to.

Because people can tend to divide themselves, can't they? Well, whose side are you on in this debate between these two people? And that's why Paul suggests this third party to come and to intervene.

He says he asks his true companion, more literally his loyal yoke fellow, to help these women out. So who's this? Well, it could be Epaphroditus, the one who delivered the letter to the Philippians. It could be another co-worker. Paul may even be talking about an individual whose name is Sigigas, which is the Greek word here. So whoever this person is and whatever the issue is, both of these women were true believers, but they shouldn't be carrying on the way that they were carrying on. It needed to be sorted. Paul even says here, and this is brilliant logic, he says their names are written in the book of life. What's the book of life?

[10:18] Well, the book of life is the list of all of those who have eternal life in Jesus Christ and who will go to spend eternity with God. And so what Paul is saying here to Lodia and Syntyche, he's saying, if you're destined to live in God's presence, united together for all eternity, if that is the case, then you've got to live together now.

You've got to be united in your small church in Philippi. You can't continue to be divided in this way. They've got to be of the same mind in the Lord.

And so have we, because division and disunity in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is bang out of order. And we'll know this when we have the mindset of Christ.

Because when this mindset takes over, when we grasp what Jesus Christ has done for us, and therefore how we are to live, when it takes over our minds, then it influences how we relate to each other as members of Christ's body.

And so Paul's words highlight just how problematic, just how un-Christ-like disunity between Christ's people really is.

[11:39] Because it causes people to fall out with one another. People end up being bitter towards each other rather than loving one another. And it hardly ever remains disagreement between two people.

The impact of division, of disunity in a church, impacts so many more, and is a danger to the church. Of course, it's a danger in terms of the personal relationships within the church.

But it's also a danger because this kind of division, this kind of behavior, poorly represents Jesus Christ in the outside world. It's hardly an attractive witness to Jesus to see a church that is full of people who are divided against one another.

It distracts from the mission of Jesus. And if you think about it, if time and energy and emotion are spent on disagreeing with somebody else, then that is time and energy and emotion that is not spent on helping to build up the church or to reach out to those on the outside.

And so before we move on, I'm sure we've got no problem grasping this in theory. It's quite straightforward. It's quite simple. It's a no-brainer. Nobody's going to disagree with anything that I've said about being united instead of being divided.

[13:03] And yet we shouldn't miss the personal application for each of us because we need to ask ourselves, well, is there a brother in Christ or is there a sister in Christ? Is there anyone in our church family that I'm not united to?

If so, then what do I need to do to ensure that we are of the same mind in the Lord? That's our first point, how to think in relation to others.

But Paul goes further and moves on to how to think in relation to Christ. Because knowing who we are in Christ is the key to having a joy-filled, anxiety-free life that experiences the peace of God.

Now that's my summary of verse 4 to 7. Let me say it again. Knowing who we are in Christ is the key to having a joy-filled, anxiety-free life that experiences the peace of God.

So Paul says, verse 4, Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

[14:16] And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. So Paul's talking here about our hearts and our minds being guarded by the peace of God.

So how does this come about then? Well, Paul outlines here, if you look at your Bible, in verse 4 to 6, he outlines a way of life that when that way of life is in place, then what you experience is what's there in verse 7.

So doing verse 4 to 6 leads to verse 7, if that makes sense. So first of all, Paul says, Rejoice in the Lord always. Now, he's already urged the Philippians to do this many times because we've seen how this emphasis on joy and on rejoicing runs right the way through Philippians.

So again, he states it even more emphatically. He doesn't simply say, Rejoice in the Lord always. In case we miss the force of his words, he repeats himself and says, I will say it again, Rejoice.

Now, this isn't just good advice, the kind that you can take or you can leave. No. This is a command to be obeyed, something we must do, no matter what our life circumstances are feeling.

[15:38] So Paul is not saying, Rejoice in your current life situation. He's not saying, Rejoice in your relationships. He's not saying, Rejoice in your bank balance.

He's not saying, Rejoice in your family. No, he says, Rejoice in the Lord. And he's not saying, Rejoice in the Lord when things go well, or rejoice in the Lord when you feel like it, or rejoice in the Lord when you're with a bunch of other people and they're rejoicing in the Lord, so let's all just rejoice in the Lord together.

He's not saying any of that. He says, No, rejoice in the Lord always. And Paul, the author of these words, is a fantastic example of doing this.

Remember his circumstances and just try and imagine how he must have been feeling because he wasn't writing this letter, sipping a nice cool drink in a lovely beach resort in the med, chilling, relaxing.

No, he was in prison. He was in chains. Not sure whether he would get out or whether he would die inside. But he was able to rejoice.

[16:49] And that sounds weird. Sounds strange. Sounds odd. Doesn't it? And do you know why? I think it's because our minds have been conditioned to think that if we're to have joy, if we're to be happy in any sense, then our circumstances must all be good or even perfect.

And I think our minds have been misled to think that joy is an emotion or it is a feeling. But the joy that Paul is talking about here goes much deeper than some kind of surface level happiness that our world chases after.

It's true joy that he is talking about that is not rooted in our circumstances being good and it's not rooted in how we're feeling at any particular time, but it's a joy that is rooted in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's why he says we can rejoice in the Lord always. So just think about it. If your joy in life comes from your circumstances being good, well, it's fine when everything is going well, isn't it? But what if it isn't? Like when the news from the doctor is bad, perhaps, or when the relationship ends, or when the job goes, or when the money is tight, well, what happens then?

[18:22] Well, we become miserable, anxious, depressed, even suicidal if our joy is based on everything in our life going well.

And so what Paul is saying here is that true joy doesn't come and go. He's saying it remains even when everything else goes.

Because it's got nothing to do with your circumstances and it's got nothing to do with your feelings because it's got everything to do with Jesus. Because he is the source of true and lasting joy.

And so that's the first reason for a heart and mind, which is what he's talking about, guarded by the peace of God. And the second reason is because, he says in verse 5, the Lord is near.

The Lord is near. Now, this can be taken in two senses. Firstly, the Lord is near is often understood as being a reference to the return of Jesus Christ because Jesus' coming is at hand.

[19:23] It's near in the sense that one day, at some point, Jesus will come back. Jesus' return is the next great event in God's salvation plan.

And Jesus will come at any time. And when Jesus does come, when he returns, he'll judge the world and he'll save his people. And that's why we shouldn't live our lives conscious of thinking that he's never going to come because he will come.

He could come today, tonight, tomorrow, next year. We don't know. And so we need to be ready for the Lord's coming. So in that sense, the Lord is near. But secondly, the Lord is near in the sense that, well, he's with us.

He is near us. He is close to us. His presence is with everybody who is united to him. And so the Lord is near could be taken in either of these senses or Paul just might be deliberately ambiguous because whether he means the Lord is coming in the future or whether he means the Lord is with you right now, it makes very little difference because what he's communicating is the reality that

Jesus is with you now.

And when you're in him, he'll always be with you, even in the future. And so Paul's saying here that you're safe. You're safe in Christ.

[ 20 : 50 ] And when we've got this in our heads, when we understand this and grasp it and believe it, then he's saying the peace of God will guard your heart and your mind in him.

Because when you're in him, then you'll know God's peace. That's why Paul can say in verse 6, do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your requests to God.

Now, do you know, that's another command that Paul gives. Do not be anxious about anything. Now, it sounds impossible, but Paul's not saying here just pretend everything is fine even when it isn't.

And he's not saying you can just do what you want and not worry about anything. But he is saying how we can cope with anxiety.

Well, what's the answer? Well, you notice that Paul's prescription is prayer. And this isn't some kind of pious platitude, but it is the antidote to anxiety.

[ 21 : 56 ] It is prayer to God. Pray to God in every situation and leave everything with him. Because if that is our default posture, if you like, or if that is the atmosphere in which we live our lives, that we take everything to God and we leave everything to God, then we'll be conscious of his fatherly care for us.

And our anxiety will be overcome, not necessarily because our circumstances change, but it will be overcome because of his peace, the peace of God coming into our hearts and into our minds.

One commentator says, the way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything.

And that's why Paul uses a number of terms here all to describe and emphasize the importance of prayer.

Prayer, petition, thanksgiving, requests. He's telling us to continually take all of our needs, all of our worries, all of our concerns to God.

And it's hardly surprising that we're to do this with thanksgiving. Why? Well, when our hearts are full of gratitude to God for all that he's done for us in Jesus Christ, when we realize that we are loved, that we're precious, that we're valued, then we're reminded and reassured that no harm can come our way ultimately because we are safe in Christ.

[ 23 : 31 ] And so we don't need to be paralyzed by anxiety if our hearts have unburdened themselves to our loving Father God in prayer.

We can trust our Heavenly Father knows what he's about. He knows what he's doing with our lives. And so in praying to him, we're saying to him, I'm depending upon you.

Not myself, not my circumstances, not my feelings, but you. I'm trusting you. And so, verse 7, the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. We can know the peace of God even in the midst of those things which generally cause people to be anxious or worried or fearful. We can know the peace of God and it's a peace, he says, that transcends all understanding because it's a peace that this world cannot understand.

If we don't have the mindset of Christ, we'll never grasp the peace of God that can come even in challenging situations because it's a peace that cannot be psychologized.

[ 24 : 42 ] Yet Paul is saying it is part of normal Christian experience. Knowing the peace of God is a normal thing. Being full of anxiety for the Christian, he's saying, is probably a really abnormal thing.

You need to trust in God and know his peace. How? Well, it's our union with Christ. Knowing who we are in Christ is the key to a joy-filled, anxiety-free life that experiences the peace of God.

So first, how to think in relation to others. Second, how to think in relation to Christ. And then thirdly, how to think in relation to yourself. Verse 8 and 9. So Paul urges the Philippian believers to fill their minds with what is good.

Look at verse 8. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.

So thinking about what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy will influence how we live our lives. You've heard it said, you are what you eat.

[ 25 : 57 ] Meaning, if you eat bad stuff, it will have a negative impact on your health, mental and physical. If you eat good stuff, then chances are it will probably have a good, positive impact on your health and your well-being.

And it's not rocket science. And I'm not here to deliver food, nutritional information. And yet, despite our culture's obsession with food and with fitness for our bodies, we can be so lazy when it comes to what we think about with our minds.

we tend never to think it's garbage in, garbage out. We think, I'll take all the garbage in, but I'll be fine and I'll carry on as normal. And yet, throughout the day, in fact, every day, we are bombarded by so much rubbish.

If we are 24-7 doom-scrolling on our phones, it is going to preoccupy our thinking, isn't it? Or if we sit down every night and watch three hours of Netflix on TV, we can't expect that that's not going to have any impact on us, can we?

Our minds are being filled with stuff that is false, shameful, impure, untrue, disgusting, disgraceful. It's coming at us from every angle and of course it is going to impact and influence and shape how we think.

[ 27 : 27 ] And when it shapes how we think, then the natural consequence is that it shapes how we live. Even if we're not aware of it, others maybe see it before we do.

Because the word that Paul uses here for think means to count or to reckon! Or to regard a thing to be something.

So he's not just saying, let good and beautiful things spin around in your mind the whole day. No, he's saying count them. Or regard these things in a certain way.

See these things as being the best way to be. Value these things, I'm telling you, as the things that are valuable in your life. The things you want to do.

Count them as being worthy of your mind time. and I guess we can assess by evaluating just how well we think about things by thinking, well, how much time do I think about what I watch on TV or scroll through my phone or read in a book?

[ 28 : 37 ] What is it I always tend to want to talk about? What consumes my thinking when I have a quiet moment during the day? What do I follow or who do I follow on social media?

All of this is going to shape our thinking. And whatever occupies our thinking, it is either going to hinder or it's going to help our relationship with God.

It will help us become more of what we should be if we're doing Philippians 4, 8 and thinking about these things. But if we're thinking about the opposite, then we'll end up sinning and we'll be less of what we should be.

So what we think about will make us more Christ-like or it will make us less Christ-like. And so the question is that Paul forces us to ask is, well, what is best to think about?

And the answer is Jesus Christ. we are to fill our minds with Christ. And isn't that what Paul has been doing all the way through his whole letter to the Philippians?

[ 29 : 48 ] It has all been about Christ. Look at how many times Christ is mentioned. He is continually directing our attention towards Jesus Christ so that our focus is on him.

Chapter 2, verse 5, he says, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. And then he shines the spotlight on the exaltation of Christ, the humiliation first, and then the exaltation of Christ, so our minds can be blown by the person and work of Jesus, who Jesus is and what he has done for us. Paul is saying Jesus is worthy of your mind time. He is the one that you should be thinking about. God is good.

Paul lists all of these good and beautiful things in his letter here in verse 8, we're not surprised that his words give a great description of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's like he's asking, who does this list describe for you? Who do these words, these traits, these characteristics remind you of?

[ 30 : 57 ] Because as we read them, we see them all perfectly displayed in Jesus. And so Paul is saying, think about how Jesus puts these things into practice in his life and let your mind, your thinking, linger on the Lord Jesus.

Remembering how he lived this life for you and for your salvation. Because living this kind of life, the life that Paul says here, doesn't come naturally to us.

No one of us is like this. And we never become like this by trying hard. Our hearts, our minds, are sinful.

We even fail to live up to the standards we set for ourselves, let alone God's perfect standards. And so it's our sin that separates us from our loving creator God and deserves his judgment. But the good news is that Jesus lived the perfect life, the life that we can never live. And he died the death that we deserve to pay for our sins.

[ 32 : 10 ] So that by faith in Jesus, we are united to him and we receive his righteousness. righteousness. And when we receive that righteousness, that is what reorientates our thinking.

Because it reorientates our whole life. So how we think about ourselves, how we think about Christ, how we think about other people, all comes as the gospel of Jesus Christ shapes our thinking. everything. It's all connected to everything Paul's been saying throughout his letter. So he says in verse 9, whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice and the God of peace will be with you.

And so whether it's the Philippians or whether it's us, we will only be able to put this kind of life into practice as we set our minds on the Lord Jesus Christ and fill them with everything we learn about him from God's word.

And through seeing Christ-like people around us, living out Christ-like lives before one another. When we see this, when we think about this, then we'll experience a life that is joy-filled, that is anxiety-free and that experiences the peace of God.

[ 33 : 39 ] Let's pray. Let's pray.