

Handling Anxiety

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[0 : 0 0] This is a sermon from King's Church West We're sort of tag-teaming today which is just, isn't it wonderful that she's going to be sharing with us So, I mean they'll hold up cards at the end with numbers on they often do it to me and I go, oh no, no So that's brilliant so I'm really delighted that she's going to be sharing today as we continue our series on Philippians Before we get into that the other thing to tell you because I've got the microphone the other thing to tell you is on Friday, so on all of last week from Saturday all the way through and even a couple of our youth at least on Friday night we had all kinds of different prayer meetings and gatherings going on but also on Friday we finally, after what has only been one year but feels about a decade to me handed in the paperwork to West Lothian Council to say to them that we want to take on this building church and community together to help it flourish and help it be a permanent home for us, so that's a really in some ways a really boring moment because of about 100 pages of paperwork but it's also a really exciting moment we say, we think the Lord's led us to this point and now it's in the hands of the council so I just encourage you to keep asking him to give us favour with them we've got a really good application in we've got a load of people from the community all saying, this is a really good idea so it's all heading in the right direction but ultimately over the next three oh no, sometime between now and the 1st of April they will come back to us with a kind of, either a no or a kind of legal offer and say, well here's what it could here's what we think we need to tweak and change would you like to sign and that would be a really big moment for us as we put roots down in a very different way and get to really shape and form this place as a hub and a home for church and community together so just have that in your mind and do keep praying into it and believe in God for what's best for us as a church family so today we are looking at Philippians 4 and both Vicky and I were sharing from 4 verses 4 all the way through to 9 and you might want to grab your Bible open we'll need those for our verses in just a moment part of our kind of series called Unity in Humility and looking and the whole of Philippians is really about what has Jesus done and how did Jesus live and what did he achieve for us and how do we respond to that by living as he lived and by well how do we respond to that in loads of different ways to be honest and we've explored quite a few of those already today we want to talk about anxiety and

Paul has this very simple pattern in Philippians 4 certainly the first half which then goes on to be applied in the second half where he shows us that God is near that we can ask him to be involved in our life and we can give thanks for what he does and we'll get into that in a few minutes Christmas 2012 I think it was just to kick us off was a nightmare for me I was in Edinburgh there was heavy snow everywhere and I was in a friend's flat because actually I lived in Broxburn at the time and I was getting a train back to see my family one of the last three trains of Christmas Eve who on earth travels on Christmas Eve you might say but I was much younger in 2012 than I am now and so I sat in this friend's flat and I just kept clicking refresh on the sort of train tracker before we had so many apps we could use and my train was showing two hours delayed so I had my feet up I probably had a hot chocolate in my hand thinking two hours delayed I've got loads of time so I sat there and I kept refreshing really regularly just in case for hours ages and ages and then suddenly my train went from nowhere this is going two hours delayed don't worry to departing in four minutes so I think it might have been six minutes so I

I suddenly go race out of the house grab my bag sprint down to Waverley Station which fortunately wasn't too far away and I get to the desk where I haven't bought a ticket I mean a lot of this was self-inflicted and I and I arrive at the desk and this very calm lady says to me calm down calm down it can't be that bad I'm like no it's really bad I was definitely not calm and I've heard it said that in all the history of human humankind telling someone calm down calm down has rarely worked I'm like ahhh and actually I did get the absolute last train because the trains were dropping like flies I ended up there was like a an injured swan on the track at one point there was an I mean it feels like there must have been an avalanche or something at another point an earthquake I don't know but basically this train limped into the not even the station I was going to the nearest station about 50 miles away from my family and they came and got me off of it so I got there in the end it was not calm and yet here in Philippians what we find is a whole series of times that we're told to do something and and to not be anxious so I want us to look at that and ask what's going on there and how can we how can we be people who as scripture will tell us in a second cannot be anxious when so much around us is almost will make us so and the stats tell us that we're we're increasingly an anxious people in the world around us but let's look at these verses and we'll then ask that question again so 4-4 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 request to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus maybe depending on personality these verses could sound like pull your socks up like rejoice come on guys rejoice like whatever's going on just get on with it or you know be gentle like we say that to our kids all the time I have to be honest be gentle I'm not totally sure that when I'm saying it in that tone it's helping them at that point but come on be gentle and it can sound like there's a bit of a prescription here like pull your socks up rejoice harder pray more do more

I think what we see here is a two part focus of what God does and what we do in response to that but I think we miss the most important words of these verses quite often of the 56 I think round 56 words depending on your translation it will be different we find four little words in the middle that I think give us the key to all of the rest of these verses and they don't even get their own verse they're not even verse 5 they're verse 5b okay the Lord is near now I can tell you something about the Greek here I can tell you there are no conditions in those four words it's not rejoice and then he'll be near it's not the Lord might be near it's not the Lord can be near if you're good enough or you've got it all together it's not it's not there's no there's no conditions to it there is this understanding for Paul as he sits in prison the Lord is near and I think that frames all of the rest of these verses it's a statement of reality he is near and we know that's possible only because of Jesus because actually if we didn't have if we weren't rescued by Jesus well the Lord is near could mean something very different you know righteous judge of all of heaven and earth is near to you but in Christ that is such good news the Lord is right there the Lord is available he's the

[8 : 41] New King James version says at hand the Lord all powerful all loving able to save he's right there suddenly the rest is possible Tyler Staten says or Staten says prayer is first about presence and it really is first about the presence of God it's first about knowing that he is available to us and we spent the week calling out to him but prayer is first about presence so when Philippians are saying like pray the first thing I think we need to understand in whatever kind of anxious state we might be in that the Lord is at hand that he's available to us and that he wants to be with us and meet us in whatever is going on and whatever anxiety inducing stuff is happening there's a guy called Brother Lawrence who many years ago I can't remember the date now wrote a book called Practicing the

Presence of God and his big idea is that we become people who just become aware that the Lord is near in whatever we're doing so not just in our quiet time and not just in our crisis but in washing up you know putting our kids socks away or dealing with a kind of annoying boss or on our walk into work and along with Tyler Statton he's saying there is something so good for us when we realise just how near the Lord is and just how available he is for us the Lord is near when we're anxious and when we're not now that said fear is this God given gift right I want my kids to fear some things it really freaks me out we did a little bit of Christmas shopping this morning it really freaks me out they don't realise how little they are and how big all the cars in the car park are so I spend my entire time saying these cars can't see you you need to be aware of them like that's a healthy thing for them to know right

I don't want them to have a general anxiety about cars but I want to think when I'm in a dark car park or a busy car park it's anxiety on the other hand can be and I'm sure we'll experience it can be that swirling what if that isn't necessarily connected to reality but just as that oh my goodness what might happen what if that what about this and the Greek word for it is actually almost double minded it's like part of your mind being on the other thing that might happen and yet here we find 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 he's not shaming anyone saying how how unrealistic to be afraid or even to be anxious I think I think we're seeing an invitation here to realise whatever we're going through how near the Lord is and how much he wants to be with us in what's going on so I think there are three invitations to us here one is to recognise verse 5a 5b sorry the Lord is near to recognise his nearness before anything else and to be people who practice realising before we do anything through Jesus the Lord is near and often

I know this in my own life that means pausing long enough to remember that he's near we live in an anxious anxiety inducing world that runs probably faster than ever before and certainly we know we have more data flung at us than any other time in the history of the world there's lots to cause us anxiety pausing and realising the Lord is near is essential in that and the second invitation is this is by prayer and petition and the third one is thanksgiving petition really is recognising his nearness and trusting him for it in the future it's like God I need this and I guess we can do that in a way that's distant from him but we can also do that in a way that we know he's going to be with us that we slow down to be with him and then to ask him and trust him in his nearness for the future not a distant shopping list or a Lord I'm going through this would you do this because he's near he's with you in that future but petition is trusting for his nearness in whatever might happen and whatever need you have and then the third invitation there is thanksgiving to look back and however rubbish it's been to recognize he's been there with you now sometimes we have to go all the way back to the cross to be thankful because we're like this season has just been rotten and I don't know what you are doing but I do know that you're really good so thank you for your goodness but if petition is trusting his nearness in the future and trusting his ability to meet our needs in the future thanksgiving is trusting that however messy it's been there's something we can say thank you for

Lord you were there in some way petition looks forward thanksgiving looks back but both are rooted in the fact he is at hand and he has been even when we've not been sure about it and he will so how can we not be anxious well recognise his nearness trust him for the future that he'll be with you and that you can ask him and express all of your needs even the ones you don't quite like that you have but also we can look back in thankfulness and say I don't always get it but I trust that you were there in some way thank you for this thing or for that thing and naming things before him I love verse 7 which says and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus God offers to guard both but we experience it best when we choose to know that he's near and we choose to actively depend on him for the future to be with us and thank him for the past we need to actively engage with him our need for him back then now and moving forwards and just a little note on that the kind of guard your hearts right that's military grade security system

[15 : 24] I've forgotten the Greek word I should have noted it down but basically the word used is like top notch security it's not he will kind of vaguely keep an eye on your hearts in the way you might you know kind of know your kids are playing over there but you're not guarding them all the time right you know it's like military grade like guarding of the military kind it's like surrounding you and keeping you in a really amazing way when we choose to know that he's near when we choose to depend on him in prayer and petition and thanksgiving he's saying the peace that impacts us the peace of God it will get hold of you like a security system provided like a military grade security system if you're anything like us the trouble with having a security system is sometimes you do stupid stuff so we were I was at the barbers a few months ago and our burglar alarm we have a very cheap burglar alarm but it does the job that tells you if someone breaks into your house and it goes off and I and you can listen to what's going on in the house in it right as the way of knowing has it just gone off or is it is there actually someone in the house so we get a call and I'm hearing people talking in our house while I'm while Toby's actually at this point getting his hair cut so we've got the security system it does the job and I'm like this will just be a false alarm who is that talking in our house so I say the barber says you look a bit worried

I'm like yeah I'm really worried I can hear someone talking in my house and we go home and we discover that someone it was me fine I'll admit it has left the front door unlocked and slightly ajar the wind has blown it open and two of Toby's friends have come to get him for a game of football have walked into the house to go where's Toby and why is this thing making all this noise and so what use is a security system that's actively working for us if at the same time we mugging here we're doing stupid stuff like leaving doors unlocked now forgive me if this seems like a bit of a jump but it's a known thing that we will ask the Lord to help us in something while actively not playing our part anyone else ever know that about the mistel yeah I can see if thank you thank you thank you okay a guy once came to one of the popes and said oh I just feel so rotten all the time woe is me I don't know I know Jesus loves me, but I just feel awful.

And this Pope, I think it was the one before last, said, what you need is to sleep more. And the guy must have been a bit gutted, I imagine, because he was on a one-to-one with the Pope, you know.

But the Pope says to him, I think you just need to go to bed on time. And I wonder if, well, I know this for myself, and I suspect some of you do too, that actively we can be finding ourselves anxious and seeking the Lord and be like, Lord, be with me, help me in this.

I just wonder sometimes, well, I know, sometimes the answer is, have you been to bed on time recently? Have you stopped drinking, for me it was seven coffees a day. And I'm like, why is my heart so funny?

[18 : 30] Hang on, why are you drinking that much coffee? And I just want to encourage you that I think there's some brilliant truth here. You need to know he's near, and that goes for us. Whatever we're going through, we need to know that he is persistently going to be near in the future, and we can ask him to be with us.

He has persistently been near in the past. But there's also a bit of truth that we might have military-grade spiritual security in Jesus, but sometimes we just need to make sure we've locked the front door and we're looking after ourselves.

I'm going to do a little book plug. I rarely do this because my number one book plug, a million times greater than this other book, is going to be keep reading your Bibles, okay? But I have to tell you, particularly if you're a bloke, just to be really gendered for a second, I have found this an exceptionally good book on not being stupid about leaving front doors unlocked when you're asking the Lord to protect you.

Because it goes through the various chemicals going on in your brain and says, what can you do to work with the way the Lord has designed you rather than against it?

I know in my own life I'm praying about it, but I'm kind of sabotaging sometimes. And the long and short of it, okay? You're going to hate this and not read it now I say this probably.

[19 : 43] If you're thinking, okay, I'm anxious loads, I would suggest you give this a shot. The long and short of it is do the things your mum probably told you to do, like get some exercise, get some sleep, have some pals, actually, you know, go to bed on time, all of those things.

He says it in a much more convincing way. He is a neuroscientist and he gets paid lots of money to go around and tell people about this stuff. But I highly recommend it. But I would also say a lot of it is real common sense.

The Lord will guard our hearts. We have a job to work with him. Okay, I'm going to wrap up because I'm realizing I'm over time and you've got Vicky coming to talk as well, which I'm so looking forward to.

I will just tell you this. This week on the way into school, I was in a foul mood because I had parents' night and I didn't really like parents' night. Okay, and I had a pray in the car and I recognized that God was with me and I felt him say, do you not think I've got you where I want you today?

I was like, oh my goodness, everything changes when you realize he's with you, wherever he puts you. Everything changes. In that parents' night, I found myself, didn't bother reading most of my notes other than the really essential, what they need to do to improve bit.

[20 : 58] And as each parent came up, I just said to them, I'm so glad your child is in my class. And some of them got real shocked because they were like, man, everyone else has not said that to us. But I just felt this real grace from God to say, I'm with you, Gordon.

Just go and be gentle to people. So I said, I'm so glad your child is in my class. Even the ones where I had to believe that, put a bit more effort in to believe that than the others, okay? And then I gave them some honest feedback.

They bombed that last test. They're going to need to put some real effort in. You know, and I was really honest still. See, the next day, six kids came to me and said, my parents really like you.

And I was like, okay, that was not me. That was the Lord. Okay, because I'm all right. But this was unusual number. And every child from my two classes that I was talking to their parents of walked in taller and worked harder and achieved better because they knew that the teacher cared for them and was glad to be near them.

Guys, how much better is knowing the Lord is near you than knowing I'm near you? Like, he is the Lord of heaven and earth. And in Philippians here, we say, the Lord is near.

[22 : 04] The Lord is near. So we can not be anxious. So we can rejoice. So we can talk to him about the future, depend on him and look back knowing him in the past. The Lord is near.

I'm going to stop saying that and let Vicky carry on. There's nothing more ironic than listening to somebody talk about anxiety when all you're doing is going, I'm next.

I'm just sitting there going, don't be anxious. Anyway, we're here. So I'm going to talk about verses eight and nine. But before I get into them, I have a few letters on the screen which I thought would look bigger than they did.

Sorry if you're at the back. It's not an eye test. I just wondered if anybody had any idea what those letters are to do with. The colours of the rainbow.

Exactly. Could I have the next slide, please, Regan? Yep. So it's Richard of York. Well done. Richard of York gave battle in vain. I was really hoping somebody would get it because I thought otherwise.

[23 : 11] That's pointless. And you might be wondering, well, that's a funny place to start, what that? What's that got to do with Philippians, verse eight and nine? But if I could have the next slide, please, Regan. So the verses that we're looking at here say, finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are a good report, and if there is any virtue and anything praiseworthy, meditate on these things.

The things which you have learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. So I was looking at verse eight and going, that's a lot of words to remember.

I don't know about you, but I try to remember them. And I start off and I go, true, noble, just, there's good in there somewhere. There's praiseworthy in there somewhere. It's like, how would you remember?

Like, that's quite a long list to give people to meditate on. So I was thinking there's a few ways you could try and remember them. So one of them is just, memorize the verse, just say it over and over until it's in your head.

Another is to try and make a word out of the letters that I've got, the bigger ones in bold there. Problem with that is they're all consonants.

[24 : 29] So you get, which doesn't exactly roll off the tongue. It's no what would Jesus do, is it? You know, it's kind of, I can't really remember.

So then I thought, could we use them to make a phrase like a mnemonic device, but like the, the one for colors of rainbow. So if we could have the next slide, please, Raven. Ta-da.

So, this was, this, I can't take the credit for this. I put the letters into a chat GPT. I'm not a big AI person, but I thought it'd give me, give it a go.

And it came up with, the nervous juggler painted large graffiti revealing hidden patterns. So true, just, noble, pure, lovely, good report, praiseworthy.

So if you want to remember that list, you might want to remember the nervous juggler. However, that's not actually what I think, first day, is getting at.

[25 : 25] I don't think Paul was asking people to memorize a list of things. And then every time you have a thought, every time you watch something, every time somebody gives you a bit of advice to go, is it true?

Is it just? Is it noble? Is it pure? Remember all the other ones. Because studies estimate that humans can have, and this is quite the range, anywhere between 6,000 and 60,000 thoughts per day.

Now, I think I'm probably somewhere up the top, the top end of that, I never stop. Now, if you were thinking, I've got to go through each thing, every single one of those, and ask if it's true, just, no, I mean, you wouldn't get anywhere, would you?

I'd also just run out of steam. So, I don't think that's what these verses are telling us to do. I think what they're showing us is where we need to direct our gaze, where should our focus be, and our intentionality, particularly in light of the verses that Gordon just shared on.

So, if I could have the next slide, please. So, there are two main directions here that I think Paul's encouraging people to focus on. One is on God, obviously, you know, there's the verse in James 1, 17 that says, whatever is good and perfect is a gift coming down to us from God our Father.

[26 : 46] He never changes or casts a shifting shadow. So, this is about being intentional, about spending time with God, spending time in his word, learning about who he is, so that our gaze is on all of the things that we saw in that verse.

Everything that is true, just, noble, pure, lovely, good report, and praiseworthy. The second direction, I think, is in verse 9, and it's godly examples.

It's looking to men and women and testimonies and stories that point us to God that show us aspects of his character and how we should live with him.

So, it says, the things which you have learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you. So, it's, again, about our gaze and just picking up on those things and seeing those things.

And also, it slightly challenges me to think about the way that I live and what example am I being to people around me. Sometimes at work, I try not to, but occasionally I send email outside of office hours that my team are copied into, or I'll say, right, I'm going to get that done at the weekend.

[28 : 05] And what I'll say to them is, do as I say, not as I do. Because I don't want them to feel like they have to send emails outside of office hours and they have to work at weekends. But it doesn't really work like that, particularly in the Christian walk.

You can't really just say, do as I say and not as I do. Because people see your actions. So, if we could go to the next slide, please, Regan. So, why does our intention matter?

You know, why does it matter where we're directing our focus? Because it says in Proverbs 23, verse 7, as a man thinks in his heart, so is he.

And there's evidence and studies that have looked at how people think. And they say that unchecked, the human mind naturally kind of veers towards a negative bias, thinking the worst that can happen.

And so we have to be intentional about where we put things into practice. And putting these verses into practice has an effect, not just mentally and spiritually, but also physically.

[29 : 09] But I geek out on you here, and I don't care. So, the image up here is of a brain, and there's a highlighted portion. And within that, there's something called the prefrontal cortex.

And when we, the way that we think and intentionally think actually shapes our neural connections, it actually strengthens that part of our brain.

It's called neuroplasticity, if anybody's interested. And it affects how we think and act in the future. And what I have on this slide here are nine unique functions of the prefrontal cortex.

And all but one of them relate to how we think and act. So, we've got, there's bodily regulation there, which has to do with digestion and maintaining a good balance of heat in the body and that kind of thing.

But all the others relate to how we think or act. So, there's empathy, insight, response flexibility, and that's to do with your ability to pause and to think about an action before taking it.

[30 : 18] Emotional regulation, morality, intuition, attuned communication. So, that's to do with communicating with others on an emotional level. And fear modulation.

Which I just think is absolutely amazing. That the intentionality of how we think and where we direct our gaze actually strengthens the physical body that God gave us to live the way that he wants us to live.

And I think that's amazing. So, that's why I have zero apologies for geeking out on you because I think it's just brilliant. Yeah, so, can I have the last one, please, Regan. So, yeah, just to finish up, I'm thinking the best approach to these verses is not necessarily to remember a mnemonic device about juggler.

Although, if you want to remember all the words in there for any reason, it might help. I think the encouragement is to intentionality. Intentionality in our thinking, in looking to examples that we can emulate, and also in our relationship with God.

And I just wanted to finish with a quote from a Bible commentator on these verses that I thought was just lovely. Let your minds be exercised, breathed, braced, lifted, filled, by bringing them into contact with truth, especially the highest of all truths, the truths affecting God and your relations to him.

[31 : 43] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Why don't we pray?

Jesus, we started today, this afternoon in our meeting, by gazing upon you, and what you have done for us, and the strength that we find in your name.

And we just thank you. Thank you that you are available, that we can look to you. Thank you that you made our bodies to be wonderful, that as we look upon you, and realize how near and real you are in our lives, and you're able to change the very way we're wiring in our brains even, Lord.

That is also awesome and wonderful. We invite you, have your way. Keep taking our gaze towards you, and away from the many other things, that can attract us, or can even cause anxiety in us.

We love you, Lord. We declare you as Lord in our hearts. Please have our gaze more and more, and help us with that. In Jesus' mighty name. Amen.