

The sermon

Intro

There's a lot of things we're afraid of. Psychotherapist and author Amy Morin notes the Top Ten things people fear (<https://www.inc.com/amy-morin/the-top-10-fears-that-hold-people-back-in-life-according-to-a-psychotherapist.html>).

- 1) Fear of change – every time I was getting a new boss at work I was afraid of how they'd affect my quality of life.
- 2) Fear of loneliness – I don't want to be alone.
- 3) Fear of failure – so we don't try.
- 4) Fear of rejection – maybe a date or a job interview.
- 5) Fear of uncertainty – yes, we want to be in control and leave nothing to chance.
- 6) Fear of something bad happening – can't enjoy life because of fear of impending doom.
- 7) Fear of getting hurt – whether emotionally or physically.
- 8) Fear of being judged – we want people to like us.
- 9) Fear of inadequacy – do I measure up? Am I good enough?
- 10) Fear of loss of freedom – job changes, health changes, new policies.

What do we do with these fears? I think Paul has some answers.

READ PASSAGE (4:1-9)

Body

More Intro

I also considered the question, how do I find inner peace? The answers I got from the Kentucky Counseling Center (<https://kentuckycounselingcenter.com/how-to-find-inner-peace/>) and Oprah daily (<https://www.oprahdaily.com/life/a29474453/how-to-find-inner-peace/>) were fascinating.

Stick with me as I note their answers. I'll have a question for you.

A number of ideas sound similar to the Bible:

- 1) Be grateful or cultivate gratitude.

I think we find thanksgiving contributing to peace in verse 6.

- 2) Don't let you past mistakes define you.

Interestingly, in 3:13 Paul talked about "*forgetting what lies behind.*"

- 3) Practice acceptance and contentment.

That is accepting your circumstances as they truly are. Being content rather than greedy. Realizing that material possessions and wealth don't produce inner peace. Paul commends contentment in 1 Timothy 6:6.

- 4) Take responsibility for your actions.

Admit mistakes and receive criticism. The Bible teaches that we are held responsible for our actions.

- 5) Serve others.

The Bible instructs us to love our neighbor (Mark 12:33). One way we do this is by serving them.

Other ideas were foreign to the Bible:

- 1) Yoga breathing techniques.
- 2) Visualize your happy place.

Feeling discouraged? Think about what makes you happy. Your favorite vacation spot. Your pet. Fishing.

Why am I sharing these things?

Am I trying to promote psychotherapy and Oprah? No. I want you to notice something. When they use biblical concepts, what are they leaving out?

Answers: God. Prayer. Truth. Obedience. Faith. God's sovereignty. Our struggle with sin. The power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

In each case, the answer is something we do in our own strength. In other words, we don't need God. We can fix ourselves. It's the **"you can do it"** religion of today. Techniques not faith.

We begin the our Christian lives through faith. We continue our Christian lives through faith. I'm not giving you three effective techniques for inner peace. I'm giving you three ways faith in God brings peace to our souls. There's a world of difference!

Point 1: Prayer produces peace (4:6-7)

do not be anxious about anything

I want to remind you that the two main problems in the Philippian church are internal division and external opposition to the gospel. The three P's (prayer, ponder, practice) will certainly produce peace in the body.

But the cause of anxiety appears to be fear of the repercussions of evangelism. Can you think of a time when you failed to speak the gospel because you were afraid of what might happen if you did?

Earlier Paul wanted to hear they were standing firm **"and not frightened in anything by your opponents"** (1:28). Gospel opponents were creating anxiety. What fears? Maybe verbal mockery, family rejection, loss of friendships, loss of employment, physical assault. Paul then stated how God had graciously granted them to suffer for Jesus' sake (1:29). The suffering was real and not imagined. The people were anxious about verbal evangelism.

"about anything" indicates general instruction about whatever causes anxiety. When you're anxious about something, here's what to do. But let's not lose sight of the fact that this applies to fears about speaking the gospel.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety arises from our fears and concerns. Anxiety can be good or bad. In Matthew 6, it's bad to be worried about whether or not God will provide our needs. Anxiety can reflect a lack of trust in God. In Philippians 2:20, Timothy's concern for the Philippians' welfare is a positive. It's right to be concerned when our brother or sister is having a medical emergency.

Sometimes anxiety results from a lack of trust in God. Sometimes anxiety results from godly concerns. Concern is good. Lack of trust in God is bad.

So what do we do when fear is rising and faith is shrinking?

but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

If you're worried about something, pray.

Is there a difference between prayer and supplication?

Paul uses the words interchangeably so it's hard to detect a difference. Prayer speaks to the act of communicating with God. Supplication is the act of communicating requests. "*your requests*" speaks to the specific things we ask for.

What should accompany prayer?

Thanksgiving.

Lord, as I'm fearful about this opportunity to proclaim your gospel to so and so, I'm thankful that you saved me. I'm thankful that you sent so and so to proclaim the truth to me. I'm thankful for forgiveness of sins. I'm thankful that you made me alive and set free from sin's tyranny by your indwelling Holy Spirit. I'm thankful you're with me right now. I'm thankful you'll be with me in the moment. I'm thankful that you're strong to strengthen me as I seek to speak about you. I'm thankful that you don't leave me to myself. Move my heart from fear to compassion for sinners and confidence in your gospel.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – 4:7

That's turning to God in **prayer produces peace. Peace follows prayer.**

What is meant by peace?

Inner rest and harmony. No turmoil, no anxiety. Fear giving way to calm. I know it's inner peace because this peace guards our hearts and our minds. The anxious heart with unstable emotions finds rest. The anxious mind wandering with intrusive thoughts finds rest.

This peace "*surpasses all understanding*" because it's supernatural. "*peace of God*" means peace from God. Peace produced by God.

Inner rest comes when legitimate fears abound because God does something inside our heart. God does this when we pray. Peace comes through prayer.

How does prayer produce peace?

Prayer produces peace because the prayer stems from faith. When we're afraid of foreboding circumstances, we're not viewing life with eyes of faith. When fear is foreboding, turning to God in prayer is an act of faith. We shift from fear to faith.

Illustration

When the circumstances look bleak (say you're watching the news and the inflation projections indicate your pension and savings won't be enough), it's confidence in God that brings peace.

We're not in control. We're powerless to change our situation. But there is one who is able to intervene in our circumstances. There is one who is infinitely good to us. The proof being Christ died for our sins. In our place as a substitute. He took the suffering we deserved to rescue us. Yes God is good to us!

And our infinitely powerful, infinitely able God tells us to ask and he'll give us good things (Matt 7:7-11). Jesus tells us God will do the impossible when we pray (Matt 11:23-24). God encourages us to ask for the impossible.

When we turn our eyes from our circumstances to God's ability and goodness, fear subsides and faith emerges and peace flows to our hearts. Bringing God into the picture brings peace!

That's David's pattern in Psalm 25. In hostile circumstances turning to God sparks confidence in God's intervention.

Point 2: Pondering produces peace (4:8)

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. – 4:8

Take control of your thought life. Think about the right things.

This is what I mean when I use the word meditate. Thinking about a concept in God's word for a period of time. Running over truth repeatedly for a while.

True = things that are factual, accord with reality.

Not living in fantasy land. Not believing lies. Seeing life from God's perspective. Like suffering for the gospel is a gracious gift from God.

Ponder life from God's perspective.

Honorable = dignified. Deacon qualifications use this word twice meaning not marked by dishonorable behavior like hypocrisy, drunkenness, greed, or slander (1 Tim 3:8, 11).

Ponder honorable conduct.

Just = whatever is moral, ethical, right, fair in the eyes of God. Righteous conduct is conduct that corresponds to God's character and instruction.

Ponder just conduct.

Pure = without moral defect or blemish. Thoughts, words, deeds.

Ponder pure conduct.

Lovely = those things which people find pleasing and attractive that agree with God's will.

Ponder conduct God commands which everyone finds attractive. "*A soft answer turns away wrath*" (Prov 15:1).

Commendable = those things which people speak well of that agree with God's will.

Ponder conduct which people speak well of. A soft answer.

Excellence = moral excellence. In 2 Peter 1:5, it's translated virtue. Think a public figure whose virtuous conduct commands respect.

Ponder virtuous conduct.

Worthy of praise = something that's worthy of praise. Like virtuous conduct.

Ponder godliness that brings praise from the world.

Summary

Putting all these together, what are we to ponder, dwell on? Ponder truth. Who God is. What God does. What God's promised. Ponder the conduct God's word commends. Ponder how we'll commend the gospel to the outside world by obeying God's commands ("*shine as lights*" – 2:15).

Ponder God and what he instructs us to do. **These are the things you should be thinking about.** The verb think speaks to careful thought, consideration, dwelling on something for a good period of time.

Application

Does this mean read the Bible eight consecutive hours every day? No. It's like "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Thess 5:17). You don't pray every moment of the day. But you do pray throughout the day.

Sometimes you're in deep focus at work. A hospital pharmacist needs to be concentrating on getting the right medication to the right person. You can't be meditating on the sovereignty of God when your job requires intense focus. You can't pay attention to a person you're talking with if you're meditating on the sovereignty of God. But while you're walking in the hall or using the rest room or have a break in the action, there's opportunity to think how can I glorify God in this task?

Let me put it this way. If God gets 5 minutes a day and Tears of the Kingdom (a video game) gets 12 hours, how much peace will you have? Same with ESPN, Food Network, HGTV, History Channel. How much is God going to do in your life if you give him 5 minutes?

The retired person has it easy. You can take your time in the morning and spend an hour in the word and prayer without being rushed. I have it easy. I'm paid to ponder God's word. But the full-time worker has to fit God in around everything else. Thus the need to pray and ponder throughout the day.

Point 3: Practice produces peace (4:9)

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me- practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. – 4:9

Paul taught them truths about God and human conduct. Paul taught them verbally and by living example. They believed and embraced these things. Paul says keep doing these things. And God's peace will overflow in your lives.

Application

Peace follows obedience. Do you want to find happiness in life? Obey God. Do you want misery? Disobey God. That's why **Isaiah 57:21** says, "*There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.*"

Earlier I noted how self-help psychotherapy takes pieces of truth while leaving out vital aspects. For example, they proscribed accepting our circumstances and contentment. But they leave something out. In **1 Timothy 6:6**, Paul says, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*" That's godly conduct, practice benefits the person who obeys God. In Philippians 4:9, the benefit is internal peace.

How does this work?

When the bully beats you up or mocks you with unkind words. When you had a hard conversation with a friend or a spouse. When you have cancer. When your physical body is in immense agony. How do you find peace?

You bring God into the equation. You ease the burden on your soul by casting your cares on God (1 Pet 5:7). As you pray you begin to think on who God is. You ponder truth. You recognize your weakness and God's infinite strength. You remember God's steadfast love and wisdom and infinite ability. You remember how God strengthened Paul with his thorn in the flesh. You start believing God will stand with you. You begin to believe I can endure in the strength God supplies. You begin to believe in God's protection. You begin to believe that God will guide you to a wise response. You look to Scripture for guidance. You seek godly counsel. You begin to believe God will either heal me or bring relief or he'll supernaturally sustain me in physical affliction or he'll take me into his presence. **Moving from self-confidence to God-confidence makes all the difference!**

Then confident in God's help and God's truth, you resolve to obey God in that hard situation. As you obey by seeking God's guidance and depending on God's enablement, you're flooded with supernatural peace. **God acts for us when we turn to him in faith!**

Non-Christian

How do I find peace? How do I become a Christian?

Moving from fear to peace begins with faith. As you turn from self-confidence to God-confidence. As you turn to God by confessing sin and receiving forgiveness in Christ, peace floods your soul. Peace doesn't stop there. God walks with us through everything we face. Jesus put it this way:

"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" – **John 7:38**

Conclusion

God saves us to be a praying, pondering, practicing people. As we pray and ponder and practice, we'll be a people with supernatural peace produced by God.