

Overcoming Anxiety

Philippians 4:4-7

The Journey of Joy in Christ

A Series in the Book of Philippians

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We are living through an epidemic of worry. It has become so normal that we at times treat anxiety like a toxic friend we refuse to leave. Worry fixates on unsettling thoughts and traps us in “what if” thinking. It torments us about the future, overwhelms us in the present, and chains us to regrets from the past. It shows up in our bodies with headaches, neck pain, stomach trouble, and fatigue. Anxiety steals strength from our souls. It drains our relationships and our joy. No one goes unscathed by its poisonous claws. Every one of us is all too familiar with being weighed down with worry.

Jesus understands our tendency toward inner turmoil, which is why He addressed it directly. Five times in one passage, He confronted worry directly and gave this clarion charge, “Do not worry” (Matt. 6:25-34). If that is His command, how do we obey it in a world that feels chaotic and from our hearts that fears can quickly overcome? Philippians 4:4-7 gives the path. From a prison cell, with every human reason to despair, Paul does not tell us to escape anxiety. Instead, he shows us how to overcome it in Christ and gain a vertical perspective when faced with a horizontal panic. We must learn to regularly engage these three life-changing practices to experience God’s peace when anxiety attacks.

How do we overcome anxiety?

1. Rejoice in the Lord always 4:4

Paul’s first practice for overcoming anxiety is to make rejoicing in the Lord a way of life. The command “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4; see also 3:1) is written as a present imperative, meaning it is to be continual and intentional, not occasional. Joy is not a fleeting feeling tied to changing circumstances but a deliberate act of faith anchored in the unchanging character of Christ. To rejoice is to express praise and gratitude to God, and in doing so, our confidence in Him grows stronger. Joy fuels the soul much like gasoline fuels an engine. As C.S. Lewis observed, humanity was designed to run on God Himself, and there can be no lasting peace or happiness apart from Him. When joy in the Lord is missing, spiritual breakdown is inevitable.

Paul modeled this truth while writing from prison, not from comfort or ease. His joy was rooted “in the Lord”, because Christ is sovereign over all, saves us from sin, and remains ever present with His people. This kind of joy transcends hardship and steadies the heart when life wavers. Practically, believers can cultivate this joy by starting each day with thanksgiving, offering gratitude to God throughout the day, and ending the day rejoicing in His faithfulness. In every situation, rejoicing redirects the mind from worry to worship and anchors peace in the person of Christ rather than the instability of life’s conditions.

2. Respond with Christlike gentleness 4:5

A second practice for facing off with worry when anxiety attacks is rooted in resting in and reflecting a particular characteristic of Christ. Anxiety often manifests as irritability, impatience, or a need to control outcomes, but Paul offers a surprising antidote: gentleness. When he commands believers to “let your gentleness be known to all” (Phil. 4:5), he points to a spirit that is gracious, considerate, kind, and merciful. Gentleness is a strength that stays under control because it rests in God’s care. The Greek term describes a humble posture that produces patience and contentment. Such gentleness is not weakness or passivity; it is power bridled by trust, much like a trained horse that moves with strength when guided by the reins. When believers respond with gentleness, they experience and express a calm that pushes back anxiety and a confidence that God is near and in control.

This Christlike gentleness reshapes how we face tension, conflict, and uncertainty. It releases the need to micromanage outcomes and reframes disagreements with patience and grace. Gentleness de-escalates relational fires, restores peace, and strengthens gospel credibility before a watching world. Paul roots this command in the assurance that “the Lord is near”—both present to help today through His Spirit and the promise of His return to set all things right. Remembering His nearness steadies our hearts, softens our tone, and clarifies our priorities. The result is a quieter spirit, reconciled relationships, and a life marked by gracious strength that flows from trusting Christ’s presence and power.

3. Replace worry with prayerful dependence

4:6-7

Paul’s third practice for overcoming anxiety calls believers to replace worry with prayerful dependence on God. The word “anxious” in Philippians 4:6 describes being pulled in opposite directions: our hopes tug one way, while our fears pull in another, tearing us apart inside. Worry, like a spiritual and emotional strangler, can drain strength, cloud judgment, and even damage our bodies. Paul’s antidote begins with prayer, not panic. Prayer is more than a frantic cry for help; it is worshipful communication that recenters our hearts on who God is—holy, sovereign, and good. Approaching God with reverence resizes the problem by renewing our view of God. As we bring our supplications—our specific requests and needs—before Him and do so with thanksgiving, we learn to trust His wisdom, will, and timing rather than demand our own outcomes. Gratitude reminds us that God is working for good, even when His plans do not match our desires (see Rom. 8:28-29).

True prayer is not a denial of hardship but a deliberate act of faith that mingles honesty with praise. Scripture never commands believers to feel thankful; rather, it commands them to give thanks in all circumstances, trusting that God is still worthy of worship. As Dr. John G. Mitchell remarked, “To give thanks when you don’t feel like it is not hypocrisy; it’s obedience.” The psalmists modeled this tension well, pouring out their hearts to God in raw honesty amid real difficulty while anchoring their praise in His unchanging character (e.g., Ps. 13; 62; 143). When we pray this way, we stop waiting for feelings of peace to arrive and instead direct our hearts toward the Source of peace Himself. Prayer becomes the spiritual exchange where anxiety loses its grip, and dependence on God grows stronger.

When believers surrender their concerns to God, He replaces their unrest with His peace—a peace that surpasses understanding and guards both heart and mind. This peace is not a self-produced calm but a

gift from Christ Himself, guarding the inner life from the assaults of fear and doubt. Each time worry resurfaces, it becomes a cue to pray again, turning anxious thoughts into moments of communion with God. Though we will not live completely free from anxiety this side of eternity, we can continually redirect our hearts toward Christ, who strengthens, sustains, and surrounds us with supernatural peace. Sanctification is not about perfection but about the direction of our trust as we turn away from self-reliance and toward steadfast dependence, development, and delight in Him.

Even the Apostle Paul, though mature in His faith, experienced seasons of deep anxiety and fear, describing these times as “conflicts without and fears within” (2 Corinthians 7:5-6). Yet on those occasions, he was renewed by the God who comforts the downcast. Mature believers are not immune to worry, but they know where to turn when it threatens to diminish or destroy their peace. God’s design is that His people live under the shelter of His peace, and when that peace seems distant, the solution is to return to the Source—Christ Himself—and work the plan found in Philippians 4:4-7. Just as a cook returns food to the heat until it is ready, so believers must continually go back to the Lord until His peace fills their hearts again. When anxiety attacks, we are to respond with prayer. In trusting God, we find that anxiety loosens its grip, and His peace once again finds its home in our hearts.

***Anxiety loses its grip when we rejoice in the Lord,
respond with gentleness, and rely on God in prayer.***

Passage Investigation: Prayerfully engage with the passage by reading it multiple times. Ask, “*What is this saying?*” and “*Why did God have this recorded?*” Look for the natural, normal meaning of the words and phrases and identify the meaning in context. **Write down your observations** about what the passage reveals about God, Christ, His kingdom, humanity, sin, the gospel, trials, and faith. Ask key questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Let your investigation lead to a deeper understanding and love for God and His word.

LIFE Application: Questions for our journey of joy in living out the LIFE we have in Christ
(Loving God, Investing in others, Following His word, and Engaging our world)

1. What does it practically look like to “rejoice in the Lord always”, especially when your circumstances feel painful or uncertain? How can intentionally choosing joy strengthen your confidence in Christ?
2. How does the example of Paul rejoicing from prison challenge your perspective about finding joy in difficult seasons? What specific habits could help you cultivate daily gratitude and praise?

3. When anxiety surfaces in your relationships, how can responding with Christlike gentleness transform the situation? What are some ways you can demonstrate “strength under control” this week?
4. Philippians 4:5 says, “The Lord is near.” How does remembering Christ’s nearness—both His present help and His coming return—reshape your response to worry or conflict?
5. What is the difference between worrying about something and praying about it? How might your prayer life change if every worry became a cue to turn to God with thanksgiving and trust?
6. Paul says that God’s peace “will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” What does this promise mean to you personally, and how can you return to Christ as your Source of peace when anxiety starts to tighten its grip?