



Title: Thankful in Tough Times
Theme: Guarding Your Heart in This Life
Series: Full Measure of Thanksgiving

Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

This passage of Scripture was written while the Apostle Paul was in prison and gives us truths to protecting our spiritual hearts in this life. (The Ryrie Study Bible; Matthew Henry Commentary; The Expositors Bible Commentary) The people to whom the Holy Spirit led Paul to write were faced with worrisome things. (Daily Study Bible Series) The fact is just being a human being, vulnerable to all chances and the changes of this mortal life is itself a worrying thing. The Early Church, just like us had normal worries over human situations. Being Christians did not protect them nor will it protect us from giving in to the temptation of taking one's life into his own hands.

There is a magazine, "The Smithsonian Institute," saying that "we are in the golden age of anxiety." Pastor Rick Warren came across a study done by Dr. Walter Calvert, giving us the results of the sin of worry. He writes:

"Forty percent of what you worry about will not happen. Thirty percent of your worries concern the past. Twelve percent of your worries are health issues. Ten percent of your worries are insignificant and petty issues with only eight percent of your worries having actual legitimate concerns."

Those are interesting statistics, however, you and I know that there are real stress issues that do not need to be proven by a study. The death of a spouse or a loved one, the effects of divorce, our nation's financial instability, our war on terror and especially the eternal condition of souls who do not know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord.

I would propose to you there are three powerful truths in today's key text that will protect your relationship with Jesus Christ and enable you to express a life of thankfulness to God regardless of the circumstance.

Just what are the truths found in Philippians 4:6-7, truths the Holy Spirit revealed so powerfully to the Apostle Paul in prison? Just how can we apply them to our everyday life?

Do not worry or be anxious about anything

The first step to guarding your heart and mind in this sin cursed world is, do not worry or be anxious about anything. Worry is a constant attack from the devil to distract us and keep us from enjoying God's best. Paul addressed the sin of worry and so did Jesus. He taught, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ...But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:25-34)

The Apostle Paul and Jesus are on the same page and both of them are not giving a pep talk, but a charge not to worry! (The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible) The reason for this charge to all Christians is because worrying expels trust in God (The Bible Knowledge Commentary) and implies to those looking on that the Lord is not present. The Biblical goal set before every child of God is to present the truth, "God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1)

With this truth set before us, we must seriously consider, "What is worry?" "Worry" or "anxious" (merimnao) means not to be troubled in thought and heart so as to cripple you. (The Complete Word Study Commentary; Analytical Lexicon of the Greek, New Testament; Dictionary of Biblical Languages) The application is to be pulled in different directions. Our hopes and dreams pull one way, but fear takes us another direction, thus preventing or crippling us from enjoying all that God has for us. The Old English root word from which we get our word "worry" means to "strangle." You and I have fallen into this type of worry, thus we find ourselves not thinking clearly, no longer being productive, and looking for other avenues through which to work. Hours are wasted daily because of this sin and vision is not prayed through to completion. (The Bible Exposition Commentary)

From a spiritual point of view, worry is wrong thinking and wrong attitude of heart about circumstances, people, and things. Worry is the great thief of joy. Being surrendered over to anxiety binds people and causes them to withdraw, fall into hesitation, cowardice, depression, discouragement, and a defeatist attitude, perform quick and unplanned actions, make unwise and harmful decisions, and suffer physical sicknesses, emotional problems, spiritual backsliding, distrust, and unbelief.

It is not enough to just tell yourself "Do not worry!" Only an inside work can enable one to enjoy the peace of God. If Christians are going to conquer worry and experience a secure mind, they must meet the conditions that God has laid down in Philippians 4:6. The child of God who is thankful in tough times is literally living in the light of the Lord's presence. (The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

The peace of God is given to born again Christians as soon as they put their hope and trust in Christ. His peace can be enjoyed right now if they choose not to worry and it can be continually enjoyed if they do not let even one thing that comes up in the future cause them to worry. Our key text says, “not anxious about anything.” “Anything” (*medeis*) means not even one thing, not one person, situation or circumstance. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary; Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament; Dictionary of Biblical Languages; Greek-English Lexicon)

C. Kingsley understood the heart of this portion of the message and it is so clearly presented as he wrote, “Be not anxious about tomorrow [or anything]. Do today’s duty, fight today’s temptations [through Christ] and do not weaken and distract yourself by looking forward to things which you cannot see and could not understand if you saw them. Enough for you that the God you serve is just and merciful, for He [rewards] every man according to his [labor].”

The heart of this part of the message is, Christians are to be concerned about the things of this present life, but with a heart that enables them to look to the Lord with such a confidence that it frees their minds, strengthens visions and embraces the peace of God through Jesus Christ. This is done by taking to heart 1 Peter 5:7, “Cast all your anxiety on Him [Christ Jesus] because He cares for you.”

Christians are told to pray

Once Christians grasp the truth that worry is sin, keeping them from enjoying the true peace of God, they are told to pray. Our key text says, “but in everything, by prayer and petition, ...present your requests to God.” (Philippians 4:6) Ephesians 6:18 says, ““And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests...” 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, “Pray continually.”

The Holy Spirit has three powerful words in our key text today that will enable you be thankful in tough times, not thankful for the trial, temptation or affliction, but thankful to Jesus Christ in the midst of troubled times. (The Bible Knowledge Commentary)

The first word is prayer, “(*proseuche*) which means a house devoted to prayer. (Thayers’ Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament) The house of prayer God wants to hear from is us, the temple of the Holy Spirit of Christ. Prayer here is a personal application of a child of God coming to Him in the Name of Christ, and yes there are to be set times of corporate prayer as well. The application is there are to be special times of prayer with intimate worship with God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This only comes as we make set times for prayer (Practical Word Studies in the New Testament) and are committed to making it to those prayer appointments. These prayers are to God, for the glory of His purpose in the midst of the circumstances Christians are in. (Word Studies in the New Testament)

The second word is “petition” (*deesis*) meaning a specific petition coming from the heart with intense crying out, a gut cry for something or someone. It is interceding for a situation only God can do a work in or through. (The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible; Practical Word Studies; The Complete Word Study Dictionary; Theological Dictionary of the New Testament)

A third word is “request (*aitema*) meaning we are to be specific, giving details, telling Him exactly what we need. There should be no fear that we are giving God too much information or that we are bothering God. Neither should we hold back in prayer because we are afraid that God will not answer yes to the request. Christians have convinced themselves that they will appear spiritually weak if the Lord does not grant the request. (The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible; Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament; The Complete Word Study Dictionary) It is imperative that you understand that God does not need these details in order to give you an answer to prayer, you need to let the anxiety go as you present the request. God knows what you need even before you ask. (Matthew 6:8)

Paul stresses that we can take everything to God in prayer. There is nothing too great for the Lord and nothing too small for His attention. Christians may take their disappointments and their triumphs to Him. When no one else will pray, each child of God may take His own petitions, supplications and requests to God. Christians can pray for forgiveness of the past, for their circumstances and for their future.

For application’s sake, the Apostle Paul formed the habit of prayer as he faced every circumstance in this life. Have you and do you follow as Paul followed Christ? A.B. Simpson wrote, “Our God has boundless resources. The only limit is us. Our asking, our thinking, our praying is too small. Our expectations are too limited.”

Heart of thankfulness in all things

Thankfulness in tough times begins with not being anxious, by taking everything to God in prayer and by having a heart of thankfulness in all things. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” To fail to give God thanks is a symptom of unbelief. (Romans 1:21)

The true victories enjoyed in this life by born again Christians are obtained through joyfulness, prayerfulness and thankfulness. As long as the child of God is joyfully and prayerfully seeking God’s guidance, he can look at aggravations, temptations, afflictions and persecutions as being opportunities for being transformed into the image of Christ Jesus. (The Expositors Bible Commentary; The New Bible Commentary; The Bible Knowledge Commentary; Matthew Henry Commentary) Romans 8:28-29 says, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love

Him, who have been called according to His purpose. ...to be conformed to the likeness of His Son...”

In regard to aggravations in ministry, Pastor Jerry Vincent once said, “It is very aggravating to know what is right and see people choose to do what is not right, especially once you have pointed them in the right direction.” There is a tremendous temptation to just give up and get involved with something that others are willing to get involved in. Christians can be thankful in aggravations in ministry, because they are wonderful opportunities to grow Christ-like.

Jesus knew aggravation in ministry. In Gethsemane, Jesus took Peter, James, and John into the garden with him and gave them very clear instructions, “stay here and keep watch with Me.” (Matthew 26:38) “Keep watch with me,” meant “stay awake and pray!” (The Expositors Bible Commentary; The Bible Knowledge Commentary; The Bible Exposition Commentary)

These three disciples were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, (Matthew 17) and they were with Jesus in the home of Jairus where they witnessed the raising of a dead girl. (Luke 8) If anyone would be fired up, ready to walk in obedience, we would think it would be these three. In Matthew we read of Jesus requesting prayer twice and three times He finds the three disciples asleep when they had been called to be in prayer on their watch. (Matthew 26)

When you find that you are alone in prayer, and in reality, there is no tougher time than to stand alone in prayer, it is time to thank God and allow Him to enable you to pray like Christ did. Jesus did not fail His watch in prayer and He intercedes for you right now at the Throne of Grace. (Hebrews 12:2-3)

Jesus knew of another tough time in His obedience to God, His Father. The Gospel of Mark 1:9-13 says, “At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. As Jesus was coming up out of the water, He saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on Him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: ‘You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.’ At once the Spirit sent Him out into the desert, and He was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan...” Matthew 4:1 says, “...Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.” Losing a home, a job, or a loved one or becoming ill are tough times, however, none of these are as tough as having Satan after you.

Satan is our adversary. He is “the prince of this world;” (John 12:31; 14:30) “the prince of the power of the air;” (Ephesians 2:2) “the god of this world;” (2 Corinthians 4:4) “the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.” (Ephesians 2:2) The distinct personality of Satan and his activity among men are very easily recognized. We have just read how he tempted Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:2 (Matthew 4:1-11) Satan is the prince of the demons. (Matthew 12:24) He is the constant enemy of God, of Jesus Christ, of the divine kingdom, of the followers of

Christ, and of all truth; full of falsehood and all malice, and exciting and seducing to evil in every possible way. His power is very great in the world. He is a "roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." (1 Peter 5:8) Mankind is said to be "taken captive by him." (2 Timothy 2:26) Christians are warned against his "devices," (2 Corinthians 2:11) and called on to "resist" him. (James 4:7) (Easton's Bible Dictionary; Tyndale Bible Dictionary; Willington's Book of Bible Lists)

Yes, there is a great adversary of the bride of Christ, however, we can be thankful in midst of Satan's attacks, because we have Jesus Christ, who redeemed us. Hebrews 2:14-18 says, "Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil--and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason He had to be made like His brothers in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that He might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted." The Bible teaches that we can have the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead living in us, and for that reason we can be thankful in the tough times of Satan's attacks. (Romans 8:11)

We can be thankful in the tough times of having to be alone in prayer, in the tough times of Satan's attacks and we can be like the Apostle Paul who wrote, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

The whole of Scripture teaches us, if we are seeking with all our hearts and strength to walk in obedience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, in our afflictions we can be thankful for the opportunity to rest in "Christ's" power. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

When Christians are afflicted, their value of ministry does not decrease, if anything it increases by presenting opportunity for the Lord to manifest Himself in and through His faithful children.

In reality, there are tough times. Being alone in prayer, being attacked by the devil, suffering affliction and even persecution are just some of the tough times. "Persecution" originates in ignorance of God and Christ, (John 16:3) hatred to God, Christ and the Word of God. (John 15:20,24; Matthew 13:21) And because of mistaken zeal (Acts 13:50; 26:9-11) (New Topical Textbook) Jesus said, "...No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you also." (John 15:20) Paul wrote to the young pastor Timothy, "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," (2 Timothy 3:12) Paul also told Timothy that the Lord rescued him out of persecutions and sufferings and enabled him to be faithful

and patient, to express love, and to endure all that came against his work for the Lord. (2 Timothy 3:10-11)

Loss of loved ones, financial instability, changes, uncertainty, and temptations, all come at us from our adversary. This is why the Holy Spirit moved the writer of Hebrews to point us in the right direction. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (Hebrews 12:1-3)

In Closing: *The Bible teaches that we are to look at the lives of Christians God has set before us in some way and follow their example.*

Hebrews 13:7 says, “Remember your leaders, who spoke the Word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” All through Biblical history, the early church, and even today there are faithful servants who have tasted the truths of today’s message and applied them regularly. One such faithful servant who had his heart and mind guarded in Christ was George Meulluer.

George Mueller was a pastor, evangelist and Biblical prayer intercessor. He knew what type of church is pleasing to the Lord and prayed fervently for God’s will to be done. In an 1871 article, “The Times,” stated “Since 1863, 23,000 children had been educated through orphanages overseen by George Mueller. His ministry distributed 64,000 Bibles and 29,000,000 Christian books and teachings as well as supporting 150 missionaries.” George Mueller’s ministry was often in tough times. You do not house 23,000 orphans in 8 years because times are good.

At the age of 70, after overseeing ministry for a large number of years, he did a 17 year period of missionary travel, taking him 200,000 miles into the United States, India, Australia, Japan and China, an incredible achievement in pre-aviation times for a man in his 70’s. (Wikipedia, George Mueller) He faced many trials and temptations, yet his reading of the Word of God over 200 times equipped him to prayerfully be thankful through the tough times.

Here are two prayer tips from the life of George Mueller, a man who put into application Philipians 4:6-7:

One: George opened the Bible, put his finger upon that promise, he would plead that promise and so received what he asked. R.A. Torrey wrote:

"One of the mightiest men of prayer of the last generation was George Mueller who for the last sixty years of his life prayed in \$7,200,000.00 for ministry unto the needy and getting the Word of God out. George Mueller never prayed for a thing just because he wanted or even because he felt it was greatly needed for God's work. When it was laid upon George's heart to pray for anything, he would search the Scriptures to find if there was such a promise in the Word of God. Sometimes he would search for days. When he found God's promise, with his Bible opened, put his finger on the promise, he prayed according to the written Word of God." (Prayer Foundation, Pray God's Word)

Two: Mueller's discovery, "Mediating on Scripture" enabled him to have a more meaningful prayer time. William Bridge, a Puritan Writer wrote:

"Reading without meditation is unfruitful, meditations without reading is hurtful; to meditate and to read without prayer upon both is without blessing." (Prayer Foundation, Pray God's Word)

Donald S. Whitney, in "Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian's Life" wrote:

"Christian meditation (on the Scriptures) is the missing link between Bible intake and prayer. If there was a secret to George Mueller's prayer life, it was his discovery of the connection between meditation and prayer. Mueller's discovery was that after meditating on the [Word of God] he was more able to experience a meaningful prayer time." (Prayer Foundation, Pray God's Word)

Every child of God can have the same enjoyment in prayer that Christ, the Apostle Paul, and George Mueller had. Follow the truths in today's text; Do not be anxious about anything, pray for everything and be thankful to God in all circumstances because Jesus Christ cares about you.