

**Philippians 4:6-7 (ESV)** <sup>6</sup> do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Philippians 4:6-7 (MSG)** <sup>6</sup> Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. <sup>7</sup> Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life.

**Philippians 4:7 (TLB)** <sup>7</sup> If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will keep your thoughts and your hearts quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

One week before Christmas and all through the houses everyone was stirring including the mouses. No one was happy all were forlorn, soon Christmas is here and yes Jesus is born. We are all so stressed to enjoy the day; I would much rather be out making hay. The pastor is boring, the poor ladies wait, for church to be over to go home and bake. The men feel the pressure to help their mate, but little they do and leave it up to fate. The children are hopeful and are feeling so grand, knowing their parents will fulfill their plan. On Amazon the children spent much of their time and learned every gift purchased cost more than a dime. The day soon will be over, and we will all sleep and wake up in the morning with weather a sleet. While Christmas carols were sung with great celebration; the advent hymns were a complete desecration. The season is Christmas, and all is for Jesus; let us hold our noses and not spread our sneezes. For unto us a child is born. Unto us a Son is given. He's the only way we will make it to heaven. I wish we would all laugh lots and lots more and quit being so serious and such a bore.

When we were on the mission trip, I kept asking the same question until I got tired of the same answer. I was the only one laughing at my jokes. "How come none of you laugh at my jokes." A couple of times that question made them laugh. The young people, tired of my

question, bluntly stated, “Pastor, your jokes are not funny.” I honestly was not hurt by their comment, and it became a joke that my jokes are not funny.

At this time of year, I think it is good to give each other a break, cut each other some slack. If we take ourselves too seriously, we become highly critical of everything, everyone, and every word that comes our way. Friendships can become strained. Family relationships experience great tension. Workplace conflicts arise. On the other hand, as we learn to laugh at ourselves, we invite people to laugh with us. I had a funeral this past week. When I teach Psalm 23, I point out bald people and I point out people who have a lot of hair. I get a lot of laughs pointing out the baldies and this is at a funeral. Laughter can be good and healing to the soul.

Jesus came so we can be at peace with God, at peace within ourselves, and at peace with each other. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. God is the God of all peace.

Peace with God. **Romans 5:1 (ESV)** <sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified by faith [made right with God by faith], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus purchased your peace with God for you on the cross. We would all be enemies of God, alienated from God, estranged from God for all eternity if it were not for the work of Jesus on the cross. This is why Jesus and His work on the cross and resurrection will always be at the center of teaching for this church. It's the only way to God's perfect peace, so perfect we can't even comprehend it or understand it.

Jesus also died so we can be at peace with each other. God has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, reconciling us to God and to each other. Paul writes, “As much as it is possible, as far as it depends on you be at peach with each other” (Romans 12:18, Breum translation). Again, this is only possible due to the work of Jesus on the cross and it takes both parties, both sides to pursue peace. I read this week something that startled me. “We must recognize that the cause of discord often lies wholly or partly with us. We must seek a genuine spirit of humility about our own responsibility rather than blaming the other person for it all. As we pursue peace,

we must be prepared to face up and acknowledge to the other party any wrong attitude, action, or words on our part” (Jerry Bridges. The Fruitful Life, pg 97).

For the rest of this sermon, I am zeroing in on God’s personal peace inside of us as believers. Nonbelievers cannot experience Christian peace for “there is no peace for the wicked” writes Isaiah (Isaiah 20-21).

**1. Anti-anxiety medications can be used of God to help those whose anxiety levels go high and seldom come down.** To be on such medication is not a lack of faith or trust in God. It is a chemical imbalance in the brain that you have no control over. Praying more, reading more of the Bible, being in church more, trusting in God more, having a personal counsellor, does not solve a chemistry in the brain that will not quit producing anxiety. Those are all good things to do and have, yes. I learned something about the brain with my mother’s Alzheimer’s. She in no way was responsible for the demise of her brain power. Yes, new medications came out that could help the brain a little, but the disease was out of her control. There are specific things about our brains that can use help in order to be healthy emotionally and antidepressants and anti-anxiety meds can be a gift from God.

Last Saturday I was overtaken by a high level of anxiety, going through the roof of this church. It was not an anxiety or panic attack. No, I could still cope with life and people, but the level of anxiety was not something I could just ignore and hope it away. Here are some insights into coping with anxiety. **2. Anxiety is part of the human condition.** After Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, anxiety and depression entered the human race along with a lot of other emotions such as guilt, shame, frustration and more. Therefore, every human being faces anxiety.

So, this is what I did. I had to hide stop and hide from people as I literally laid my head down and came up with four reasons why my anxiety level was on an upward spike. I cannot share the first three, but I will say something about the fourth reason. I need help. This church is

much too large for one pastor. I want to stop right now and pray for the call committee to be used of God to bring in help yesterday. They are a wonderful committee deserving of our prayers. The other three anxiety related issues added together, no wonder I was in trouble and needed help. And all four are something I have no control over.

**3. I believe God can use anxiety as an early warning system similar to a check engine light, to motivate one to face the issues causing the anxiety.** I could no longer let these four issues consume me. I had to give them up in a healthy way, by addressing them including the people who are involved. A person from church came into my office and I laid it all out before him and yes, we prayed. He checked up on me couple of days later. That conversation brought some relief. I read my sermon that I had written up to that point. Years ago, after hearing my complaint, a wise person in this church told me to read my own sermons. Then, I listened to a sermon from a close friend out in California and I felt my anxiety lessening. I texted my friend and told him what a blessing his gifts from God are to me and that I was dealing with anxiety issues. As the anxiety was lessening, I can honestly say I began to feel a teaspoon of peace, God's peace, but there was still room for more. Finally, last Sunday I had a huge surprise. My pastor friend from California showed up here and I was absolutely stunned. I had tears in my eyes. Michal Best used to be a pastor with Erwin Lutzer for about a decade at the Moody church. He had travelled with his family to Chicago for a family reunion and he took the time to drive up here to spend time with me and pray with me. God's love is so present in that friendship. It was hard for me to believe that such an act of kindness from God truly happened, but it did. Anxiety out the window and in came God's love, peace, and joy. I was overwhelmed.

He and I prayed about all four things. God dropped right in front of me a messenger, God's messenger. That blessing would not have been there had I not been open and honest about

what I was dealing with. I could have faked it and said all was well. No, anxiety can be used of God as an early warning system that specific things must be looked at and dealt with head on.

Jerry Bridges writes a peace killer, an anxiety raiser comes about like this. “If God really loved me, He would not have allowed this to happen to me or if God loved me, He would provide a way out of the situation” (ibid pg. 94). Questioning God’s love will never be helpful. God can’t help but love you and God is always 100 percent for you and never against you. Yes, what we know about God truly impacts our own emotions.

**4. Another anxiety reducer is to thank God for every issue that is raising your anxiety.** We go to God with thanksgiving. You can remember previous ways God has helped you and know that God is not giving up on you. Some are dealing with super heavy issues. How can we thank God for cancer or family problems or financial difficulties or grandchildren issues. Dr Bridges writes, “We should thank God that in His infinite wisdom He is able to work in this circumstance for our good and that because He loves us. He would not have allowed it if it were not for our good. God promises to us that when we come to God in prayer with thanksgiving, is not deliverance, but the peace of God. One of the reasons we don’t find peace is because all too often we will not settle for anything other than deliverance from trouble. God promises peace that is unexplainable, and that peace will guard our hearts and minds against anxiety to which we are prone” (ibid 93).

**5. Peace is a fruit of the Spirit, an awareness of God’s Presence that quiets inner turmoil that comes with life’s painful issues of living in a fallen world. Isaiah 32:17 (NLT2)**  
**17 And this righteousness will bring peace. Yes, it will bring quietness and confidence forever.** Friends, righteousness, doing the right thing before God and for God, knowing the righteousness of Christ resides within you is a peace maker and an anxiety reducer. The quickest anxiety raiser is rebelling against God with willful continual sin. Guilt, shame, and anxiety can be killers. On the other hand, knowing you are completely forgiven by God, the fact

that God no longer holds those sins against you is a peace maker and an anxiety reducer.

Peace results from God's forgiveness. Contentment in and with God produces an inner sense of wholeness, of soundness, of completeness, shalom.

**Isaiah 26:3 (ESV) <sup>3</sup> You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Isaiah 26:3 (NLT2) <sup>3</sup> You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!** How much of your thoughts throughout the day are focused on God? Peace is the Presence of God, not the absence of conflict. Jesus is our peace. Peace be with you. Amen.