From anxiety to peace through prayer

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Preacher: Rev R.G.Mackay

[0:00] Philippians chapter 4 and the verses 6 and 7. Be careful or be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. I want to begin this evening with a question.
And the question is, why do you pray? By that I mean, what circumstances make you pray?
What are the reasons of your circumstances that make you pray? Why? I believe the Bible would allow us two answers to that question.
I don't know what your answer is. Why do you pray? But I think the Bible would allow two answers.
That we pray because we are happy.
[1:18] We are happy with our circumstances. Or we pray because we are sad. We are sad about our circumstances. As I mentioned this morning, we have been studying Christ's prayer in John chapter 17 on Wednesday evenings at the prayer meeting.

And we have been finding there that the reason for Jesus' prayer seems to be his awareness of his glorious relationship with his Father.
And even when he comes later on in the prayer to pray for his disciples again, it seems to be his assurance of the wonderful relationship that these disciples, despite their continuing sin, have with their Father in heaven.
That causes him to pray. He prays because of those things for which he is happy. But that's not the way with the reason for prayer that's given in the text that's in front of us this evening.
Here we're called to prayer in times when we're sad. In times when we're feeling that our lives are full of care.
[2:35] And that's what the word that's translated careful means here. It's a little bit unfortunate in our present use of the word careful.

We usually use it to mean full of care, taking great care. But it also means full of cares. And that's what it means here.
When you're full of care, pray. But I want to ask the question again, before we look at the text more carefully.
Why do you pray? And when I ask the question this time, I'm not asking, where are you that causes you to pray?
Whether you are in an experience of sadness or gladness. But I ask you, why do you pray? With a view to where do you want to get to?
[3:47] When your reason for praying is to do with where you are. There may be two reasons for it. But when you think of prayer in terms of where you want to get to.

The Bible has only one answer. The reason for prayer. When we recognize that prayer can get us somewhere.
The only reason for prayer is that we might be right with God. That we might be pleasing to God. That we might be drawn into God's will. That's why we must pray. That's what James was teaching in his epistle that we read earlier.
The people, the Christians to whom he was writing, were in all sorts of confusion. Sightings and warring. Some of them weren't praying.
[5:03] And that was the reason why the confusion was continuing. You have not because you ask not. That some were praying.

That they were praying for the wrong reasons. You ask and receive not. Because you ask amiss that you may consume it upon your lust.

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They weren't praying with the motive of being right with God. When Jesus prayed that high priestly prayer in John 17.
Out of an experience of being happy. When he thought of his glorious relationship with his father. It was for the purpose that they may be one.
As we are one. It was for the purpose that all would be right. Between Christ and the father. And between the disciples and the father.
[6:10] And here a different reason for praying. Praying when we're sad. Praying when we're burdened with cares. The reason. The purpose is the same. And the peace of God.

Praying when we're sad.
Praying when we're burdened with many cares. And let's follow the journey that is recommended in the verses here. That we may learn effective prayer.
In such a context. We begin with the predicament. We begin with the situation of sadness.
The situation of things not being right. Be careful for nothing. But in everything by prayer. When you have cares.
[7:22] When you have anxiety. Let that always be a signal. For prayer. The words you see give a comprehensiveness.

There's no detailing of what exactly the cares. Or the burdens are. But whenever you feel them. Whatever these burdens are.
Pray. Now that's something that we can all understand tonight. That's something that the children here tonight can understand.
Even although you're still quite young. You know what it's like. When things are not pleasing you. You know what it's like when you've got difficulties.
Perhaps difficulties at school. Perhaps difficulties with your friends. Perhaps difficulties with your mams and dads. Perhaps difficulties with yourself.
[8:33] Not being pleased with yourself. Well this verse from God's word is for you just as much as it's for the grown-ups.

Whenever you've got cares. Whenever you're feeling out of sorts because there's something pressing in on you. And it's difficult and it's like carrying a heavy burden.
Whenever. No detailing of which cares they are. They may be childlike cares. They may be adult cares.
Whenever. It's a signal to pray. It's as simple as that. And we've got to match ourselves against it tonight.
You must match yourselves against this word. And I must match myself against this word. Although the word was most definitely initially written for Christians.
[9:47] For those who are already believers. I hope you will recognize that it's a word that's relevant to every one of us here tonight. If there's someone here tonight who's not a Christian.

Who's not converted. Who is not sincerely trusting in Jesus. Maybe this is part of the reason. Maybe if you would learn to take this one word of God seriously.
And whenever you've got an anxiety. Whenever you've got a care. Whenever you've got a burden. To pray to God about it. Maybe that would be the very means that God would use.
To lead you. To the assurance of faith and of salvation. In Jesus Christ. Whatever is the burden. Yes. Even if it seems to be a trivial burden. If it is a burden. If it is a care.
[10:58] Beware. Because with the care you see. There comes the temptation. That it will become a source of anxiety. That it will become a source of unbelief.

It will become a source of you trusting in yourself. To sort the matter out. And it may get worse and worse. The care itself is not necessarily sinful. Jesus had burdens.
And cares. Surely he knew what it was to be full of care. When he wept over Jerusalem. And cried. Oh Jerusalem. Jerusalem.
How often would I have gathered you together. As a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. And you would not. Jesus was feeling the burden. Of Jerusalem.
Surely Jesus was burdened with great care. When he prayed in Gethsemane. With such intensity. That he was sweating drops of blood.
[12:03] But as a true believer. As a consistent believer in every situation. He was being anxious for nothing. He was being careful for nothing.

But in everything. He was bringing his cares to the Lord. And there are great cares today.

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That are constant cares. That we should be all sharing in these days. There are the cares of our spiritual condition before God. There is the care of our need of holiness.
Our need of ongoing sanctification. Is that a burden to you in these days? Without losing the joy of the Lord.
Without losing great confidence of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian. There is still surely room. To feel the care and the burden.
[13:05] Of a life that in so many areas. Grieves the Holy Spirit. Because we are slow to believe. And slow to obey.

There is the care of our spiritual condition. There is the care of the unconverted. As Jesus had a burden for Jerusalem.
Have we a burden for our town here. Our town of Inverness. Have we a burden for our loved ones. Have we a burden for our neighbours.
Do we find it as a care. That is pressing down upon us. Don't let that care swamp you. Don't let that care cause unbelief.
In everything. In all of these cares. Pray. Surely we have a care for our beloved denomination.
[14:09] Surely we have a care. About the difficulties and the problems that have afflicted us. And we haven't come to a consensus. That is bringing us again to sweet reconciliation and peace.

Surely that's a care. Surely that's a concern. What are we doing about it? Do we find ourselves praying.
As we have never prayed before. Do we? Do you? Do I?
We've got to lay out these cares. You see, I say again that the Holy Spirit didn't list them. They will be various in our various experiences this evening.
Some of them we will share. Others will be individual to us as families. Or individual to us as individuals. But the verse includes all of them.
[15:19] And says you have not to allow that burden, that care. To become a distraction. That will lead you from the Lord's ways. That will stop you from putting Christ first.

From being confident in him. And from going on and serving him faithfully. The care has not to become a sinful anxiety. And the antidote.
Is prayer. And so once again. I hope I'm not laboring it over much. I say lay out these cares.
In your mind. And ask yourselves. As the word. As the Holy Spirit would ask you. Am I matching all of these cares.
All of these burdens. With prayer. If we could all say yes.
[16:26] To that question. To that situation. That we are matching. Our every care. With prayer.

Day in. Day in. Day in. Day in. If we can do that. Then I am certain. That we would have great. Reason. For hope. And assurance. In these days. The predicament. The prayer.
Once we see the situation. Once we see what God is directing us towards. The question truly comes up. That how am I to pray. To know this way of hope.
And assurance. In what way am I to pray. Can you give me some help. Holy Spirit. In my praying. In my seeking to match.
[17:26] The cares. With prayer. So that I can have this assurance. That it is indeed leading me. That the cares. Are going to become a way. For the Lord. To lead me more and more.

Into his peace. And into the ways. That are the ways of his will. How do I pray. What instructions can you give me. In other words. We must say.
As the disciples said to Jesus. Lord teach us to pray. If prayer is the great antidote. If prayer is the means. If prayer is the condition.
That gives us great assurance. Of your promises. And the outworking of these promises. Teach us to pray. And that's exactly what the Holy Spirit does through Paul.
Because he puts a little bit of meat on the bones. He says be careful for nothing. But in everything. By prayer. And supplication. With thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known.
[18:23] And to God. How am I to pray. Well there are a few aspects to the answer. First of all.

You're to pray. To God. You're to pray. To God. The words come near the end. But.
They're understood. Are they not. Throughout the whole instruction. In everything. By prayer. And supplication. With thanksgiving. Let your requests be made known. To God. God. That's what prayer is.
It's coming to God. Come into that place. Of personal encounter with God.

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Prayer you see. Will make you conscious. That there is a higher hand. Prayer will make you conscious. That whatever is happening.
[19:25] However bewildering it may seem. However it may. Be giving you a feeling of tension. Pressing in upon you. God is in control.

God is above it. There is no tension. Where he dwells. There is no tension. From his point of view. And in prayer.
You can go to God. And you can trust in God. You see. Prayer immediately. Challenges us.
When we recognize. That what we are doing. Is taking all the burdens. To God. And bringing them to us. And entrusting.
The burdens. And ourselves. To him. Make your prayers. To God. To God. And so the challenge is.
[20:26] Will we trust. He's the God. Who has made himself known. In Jesus Christ. He's the God. That has made clear.

That the only good way. Is the way of faith. In Jesus. The way of trust. In Jesus. That brings forgiveness. And cleansing.
The way of Jesus. Being absolute. Master. And Lord. Because he is good. And he is God. Will you trust.
It all. To him. Prayer. Will encourage you. To do that. It deals with all sorts of questions.
When we get God into focus. It deals with the question. Can I cope in this situation? It all seems too much for me.
[21:26] Can I cope? In myself. I cannot cope. But prayer brings me. To God.

Prayer brings me. To rely on him. With his promises. With his infinite resources.
To do whatever is required. That will be good. I can cope. It deals with the question.
Why is all this happening? I can't understand. Therefore I don't like it. And it's making it a worse burden than ever. Why is it happening like this?
Prayer brings us. I can't understand. I can't understand. And prayer brings us to God. And when we go to God. We remember that.
[22:25] He is God. I'm not God. He is sovereign. He knows the reason.

He's got a reason and a purpose for everything. And it's all working out according to his plan. He may or he may not reveal the reason to me. But there is a reason.
And it's when I bring these cares to God. That I am assured. And reassured of them.
But there is even more vocabulary added about prayer. To help us. To learn to pray more effectively.
Be careful for nothing but in everything. By prayer. A general word. For addressing words to God.
[23:25] And the lesson here is just this. That when we're in prayer. We're in communion with God.

We're in his presence. We don't need to see him. We don't even need to feel him. But we have the promise.
That when we come through Jesus. We're in his presence. Face to face. Prayer gives us the assurance that God is near.
And we need to expect that assurance. I say it may not be a matter of feelings. But it will be a matter of the assurance of faith.
That in prayer. We are near to God. And God is near to us. I think that's what Jesus was getting at. In the Sermon on the Mount.
[24:31] When he said. When he warned against vain repetition of words. But getting into the secret place. To be face to face.

Alone with God. The thing that matters is not. How many words we use. Or what sort of words we use. But to see that whether we use many words.
Or few. They are a means. Of bringing us a consciousness. That we are in the presence of God.
In the pattern prayer. The Lord's Prayer. Jesus used very few words. Our Father in heaven. If it is addressed to him thoughtfully.
May be sufficient. To give us the assurance. That we are face to face with our God. It may be right.
[25:39] To use many words. To assure us of that face to faceness. But it's more than probable. That in our tradition.

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We use far too many words. And that they become vain repetitions. And that they are not really helping us. To be face to face in prayer.
With our God. Then there's the word supplication. A word that speaks of prayer being in a lowly position.
Recognizing our need. And appealing for help. Looking up in supplication. Is the idea.
Lowly. Before the Lord. The humility and the need to humble ourselves. That we read about in James. It's all here in this word supplication.
[26:39] Come with supplication. To put it another way. When you are praying. Be aware of the snare of pride. And of course.

Pride is often the sin. That causes cares. To become sinful anxiety. We feel the burdens. We feel the difficulties.
And before we know where we are. We're sorting it all out ourselves. Our own way. According to the way that we think best. And neglecting to take a lowly position.
Before the Lord. In prayer. To recognize how we have the propensity within us. To make the cares and the burdens worse. If we approach them.
Or deal with them in a wrong way. We need to learn supplication. Bowing low.
[27:39] That it would be God's will that is revealed. And not our will. And then we need to come with requests.

One of the commentators has suggested it. That the word. Suggests a response to the question that says. What exactly do you want me to do?
We've to come with requests. We've to come sometimes with many words. At this point. Not necessarily many words.
But we must unburden ourselves. That's what requests is about. Telling God how we feel.
Telling God what the problem is. Telling God perhaps what we think needs to be done. But we're not sure. What we feel we want.
[28:44] But now that we're in his presence. We recognize that his thoughts and his ways are high above our ways. So I think it's a detailed explanation.

But always in the supplication mode. Always from that lowly position. Like the Psalms. There's such an example to us in prayer.
Where the Psalm is so often poured out his soul. It will take time. To tell the Lord how we feel.
To detail our cares. To tell him what's wrong. To tell him what we want. To tell him what our requests are.
Surely in the variety of the difficulties of life. That we all have. If we stop to think of it. Have we not all got many requests.
[29:51] To lay before the Lord. Are we taking time? Are we neglecting the priority of prayer?

How will we know peace with God? How will we know the right way? If we do not learn to pray.
As the Holy Spirit teaches us. In the word. When the predicament. Develops into prayer.
And prayer grows as we are taught by God. Then peace comes. And the peace of God.
Which passeth all understanding. Shall keep. Your hearts and minds. In Christ Jesus. I suppose.
[30:53] I suppose. I'm repeating something that I said. At the prayer meeting on Wednesday. The one thing.

That we all need. Is to be kept. In Christ Jesus. I can say.
With absolute authority. Because it's the authority of God's word. I can say tonight. That no matter.
What are the differences. Amongst us this evening. Some of you.
I may not even know. Although I think I know almost all of you. But I certainly don't know you well. I don't know your hearts. As you know your heart. And I certainly don't know your hearts.
As God knows your heart. A variety of conditions. But the truth is. That for every one of us here tonight. There is one thing. That we will need.
[31:50] At the end of our lives. And it's to be in Jesus Christ. That's the one thing. That will divide us.

Between heaven and hell. Being in Christ. And if we're going to be in Christ Jesus. God wants us to know that.
God wants us to enjoy that. And so the cares. And the troubles. And the trials. Come into life. And they're a testing.

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For those who will bring them to God. Who will trust it to God. Day in. Day out. Whatever new care comes. Whatever new trial comes.
By prayer. Bringing it to God. Trusting in him. They will find. That they are being kept.
[32:51] In the peace of God. God. And Paul says. And the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit. Therefore says. That this is God's way.

And it's beyond human understanding. It's beyond reason. Our reason might say. Oh I've got to sort out this care. This trouble. I've got to manage it.
I've got to work it out. God may want us to work it out. But it will only be worked out in a way that will glorify God.
If first of all. We pray. And find peace with God. In the midst of it. That peace doesn't come by working out the care.
By managing it. By applying our reason to sorting it out. The peace of God comes. By prayer. Pray about it.
[33:50] Lay it before the Lord. With lowly supplications. And requests. For every possible care. And. The peace of God.

That passes understanding. Will keep your hearts and minds. In Christ Jesus. And when you're in that position.
Then you'll be in a position. Where you can receive God's grace. And God's guidance. And God's leading. To deal with these cares.
In the way that pleases God. Whatever are your cares tonight. If you will pray about them.
The peace of God. Will calm. And guard your hearts. And minds. Amen.

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