

For many people, these are indeed, anxious days that we're living in (with the Covid pandemic & the shut-downs and the subsequent recession)... And the anxiety comes in different directions for different people...

Surprisingly, in the Australianⁱ newspaper during the week, there was an article about how the anxiety seems to be a bit back-to-front. – that elderly Australians (who are most at risk of Covid), are more concerned about the recession, and young people, (who are least at risk of Covid), are the ones who are more concerned about their health...

But never-the-less, for some, they're anxious that their health is at risk (or the health of their loved ones). For others, the shut-downs may have cost them their livelihoods...

Over the last few weeks, we've talked a fair bit, about having an eternal perspective. And we can sum it up in the way that Paul said, ²¹ **For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...** Alright, so even if this life that we have, is cut short, that's not so bad, because being in glory with Christ Jesus, is much better than physical life...

But here's the thing, in the midst of anxiety, we should never see death as the way out of our pain... And so today we're going to be talking about joy; prayer; and dealing with anxiety & depression while we live.

And there should be no surprises, that the answers to these problems (that many face), are found in Christ Jesus.

Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, restores joy to the depressed, and it gives peace to the anxious. And these are not mere empty platitudes. It's true... Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, gives joy to the depressed, and peace to the anxious...

Now, for a nation that (compared to the rest of the world) we have so much, and (compared to most of the world) we are so safe,, And yet it seems that we've become a people who are plagued by anxiety and depression...

And for many, who have never suffered anxiety/depression, they just don't understand it... They just want to say, "Come on, cheer up – stop being so sad"... And when someone says that to someone who's depressed, it makes them want to burst into tears, because they want to be happy, but they just can't...

The most miserable couple of months of my life, was when I had glandular fever... I have never suffered depression before, and I've never suffered it since... But for those couple of months, no matter how joyous the moment, I just felt sad...

I only discovered (when I found out that I had glandular fever) that one of the symptoms can be "depression"... I was:

- *Tired*
- *Lethargic*
- *My body ached;*
- *Headache;*
- *No energy*
- *But worst of all, I was sad*

In Romans 8:28 (ESV)

²⁸ And we know, that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

I reckon, God either allowed me to have glandular fever, or He **gave** me glandular fever, so that, for a short period of time, I could experience what it is like for a person to live with depression... It was awful, but I will never going to forget what it was like...

And if I hadn't of experienced it, I would still be that bloke who says "Just get over it, will you!!!"...

And through the years, I've had to deal with many people who struggle with depression and anxiety, and how could I empathise with them, if this hadn't happened to me??? ...

So, strangely enough, I thank God that He gave me glandular fever. And I'm even more glad that he healed me.

Now, what we're learning today, it's not just for those who get anxious and depressed. It's for all of us – we may just need to apply it in different ways.

So, in v4, we get presented with the proper state of mind, for a disciple of Jesus, and by V8, he's telling us how to get there.

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

Now, if we just left it at that, to somebody who's depressed and anxious, that's not going to help... To them, it could be like just saying, "Cheer up", or what I would've said, "Come on, get over it..."

But you know what??? There are 3 words in there, that give us the **key** to finding joy: **in the Lord**

⁴ **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.**

I've got a friend (He's visited this church. He might even be listening to this – G'day Jim if you are), but on these canoe camps I used to go on, he used to do these motivational things
[hands like a jackhammer – “act enthusiastic and you'll be enthusiastic”]

Now, is that what he's talking about there? **Act joyful and you will be joyful.** No, not at all...

A number of years ago now, one of the local churches ran a workshop on leading worship... And they said, “No matter how rotten your week's been, when you're leading worship, you've got to be happy and smiling, and you've gotta be joyful... And so, if you've lost your job during the week, and as you were backing your car out to come to church, you ran over your cat, you've gotta put all that aside, put on a smile, and be joyful” ...

And they said “If you start acting joyful, it won't be long, and you'll be joyful” ...

And if you know me, you've probably got a pretty fair idea where my mind went with that: That's just falsehood... God doesn't want us to be false...

*And to top it all off, they said "Yeah, it's not faking it – it's faithing it... They said, "In faith, start behaving as if you **are** joyful, and you'll **become** joyful"... Because the last thing somebody wants to see when they come to church, is to see someone who's sad....*

But Paul said, "**4 Rejoice in the Lord always.** He didn't say "pretend to rejoice".

In the Greek word for "Rejoice" Χαίρετε [Chairete] is an imperative – it's a command – we must do it... And doing it, has absolutely nothing to do with pretending/faking, or even acting "in faith" (as it's sometimes claimed)...

We are **commanded** **4 Rejoice in the Lord always;** . And then he backs it up again, by repeating it again **I will say, rejoice.**

5 Let your reasonableness (gentleness/graciousness) be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand;

Why do we rejoice? Even in the midst of pain and sorrow, why do we rejoice??? Because the Lord is at hand...

And yes, the Lord is at hand, because Jesus is coming back soon. And yes, the Lord is at hand, because when we die, we go to be with Him in glory.

But The Lord is ‘at hand’, in a more immediate fashion, right now... The Lord is **with** us. The Lord is at hand.

He is with us, in every:

- joy;
- Sorrow

- Blessing
- Hardship

- Wealth
- Poverty
- Safety
- Danger

- Confidence
- anxiety

Rejoice in the Lord always – the Lord is at hand...

And because the Lord is at hand, don't be **anxious about anything**,

How could we be, when the Lord is at hand???

Don't be anxious – pray about it...

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

I had a boss once, and it was in a largish workplace, and there was a problem that was impacting the service we provided, and it was impacting the section in which I worked, but I couldn't fix it, because I didn't have the authority (I was pretty low on the tree)... But it was getting to me – this needs fixing, but I can't do it...

And my boss, could see there was something wrong in my demeanour, and he said to me, “There are no problems in life”

And I looked at him:

And he said “If you think you've identified a problem, ask yourself, “Is it surmountable? – Can I fix it? And if the answer is “Yes, well fix it, and you've got no problem”... But if the answer is “No, it's not surmountable – I can't fix it”, Well it's not a problem for you, because you can't do anything about it. Therefore you have no problem...”

And I've always remembered that... And you might want to write that off as a bit of psycho-babble, but you know what – when I consider the Godly wisdom of our passage for today, I'm hearing something similar:

If I'm anxious about anything, take it to the Lord in prayer, and once I've left it with the one who's responsible, I've got nothing to worry about – it's not my problem...

But, what do we learn about prayer here??

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

I'm going to say something about prayer right now – it gets on my goat, so I'm just going to cut loose...

I hear some prayers coming from some traditions, and they are the most:

- self-centred;
- demanding;
- presumptuous;
- pushy prayers,

that could ever be uttered...

Now, I want you to consider:

What kind of a relationship are we in with God? He's our Heavenly Father. We are His children. And so, when we pray, we communicate with God, as the Father He is. And that's why Jesus said, "When you pray, say "Our Father"...."

Now, for those of you who are parents, imagine if your child came to you and said:

*Dad, I believe that you're going to provide for me today.
There's an opportunity for me to go on a camp with my mates,
And I'm believing that you're going to provide for me to go on
that camp...*

In fact, I can see it.

You're going to fill out my camp form;

You're going to write out a cheque;

And I can see right now, you driving me to the bus.

In your name Dad, I'm believing for this

Thank you Dad;

Thank you Dad;

Thank you Dad;

*Oh Dad, you are so good;
You're going to provide for this camp
And I'm already going to thank you for it.
I thank you that you've provide for me.
I thank you that you've signed the parental consent for me to
go on camp
I'm believing for this...*

Would any of you talk to your dad like that???
Of course not. What a ridiculous way to talk to anybody...

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

Prayer:

Lord, I'm anxious about this. It's been worrying me. Lord,
can you deal with it?

Supplication:

That means "Ask / request"... Never demand – we're not in
any position to demand... We're not in any position to
presume. Ask Request... "Lord, I'm anxious for this reason.
Will You please fix this? Will you please provide what I
need?" Will you please provide what is best.

With Thanksgiving:

We always have so much to be thankful for – we always have
so much to praise God for... Even when we are in need, we
still have things to be thankful for...

This is how we should pray, and isn't this pretty much how Jesus taught us to pray?

Matthew 6:9-13 (ESV)

9 ...

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

Prayer isn't supposed to be some kind of manic – hype-god-up cheer squad... It's about supplication; thanksgiving; it's about making our requests known to God. And when we've done that, the peace of God – a peace beyond human comprehension, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus...

You see, this is where faith kicks in.

- Do I believe that God is a good Heavenly Father?
- Do I believe that God loves me.

Yes, of course I do – that was settled once and for all, on the cross. God loves us so much, that Jesus died for us...

- Do I believe that God knows what I'm going through???
Of course I do. Our Father knows what we need before we ask Him...

And when we believe these things about God, doesn't that change the whole way we pray...

You see, in a way, when I pray, I'm not revealing to God what I need – He already knows:

- prayer is humbling ourselves before God, to own up to the fact that we need Him.
- It's acknowledging, that we are weak & He is strong.
- It's a putting aside of all our self-confidence; and
- acknowledging, "God, I'm at Your mercy"...

- Lord, lead me, guide me, provide for me...

And so in faith, we cast all our concerns onto God. And once we've done that, there's peace – And it's a peace, beyond human comprehension...

Here's an illustration of peace:

[Show video clip of peace by Jack Dawson]

I find it interesting that, when we hand it all over to God in prayer, that the peace that God gives us, **will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

The heart, relates to the centre of our feelings, and the mind relates to our thoughts/thought processes...

And the way we process stuff with our head, affects how we feel, and the way that we feel, affects how we process stuff in our heads...

And psychologists recognise this, and they do this thing called Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), but I'm not going to go into that now...

But what we're learning today, is the peace from Christ, guards our hearts and it guards our minds..., but we've got a part to play in this: it begins with prayer, but it continues, as we direct our thoughts:

V⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, 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.

What's he saying??? Don't dwell on the bad stuff. Don't dwell on the negatives... Use your mind – direct your mind, to think on the good God stuff...

- When you encounter lies and falsehoods, dig into the truth – concentrate on the truth;

- When those around you are being despicable/immoral, concentrate on what's honourable;
- When all you can see, is injustice, fix your mind on the justice of God;
- When you encounter that which is vile and obscene, think about what is lovely and pure and commendable
if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

But, let me be really clear here – **he's not talking about "positive thinking"** – Thinking that everything's going to be great...

What he's talking about, is "Bad stuff's going to happen"... And when it does, if we just concentrate on all the evil/brokenness/injustice of this world, we're going to just dig a deeper and deeper pit of depression, and we're going to get more and more anxious...

In Christ, we don't need to focus on this stuff. In prayer, we just hand it all over to Him – it's not our problem any more... In Christ, we can focus on what is true & honourable & just & pure & lovely & commendable... And we've got reason to praise Him...

And Paul's living the example. When Paul wrote this, he was in prison. If anyone had reason to be depressed, it was him. He could be executed. He had every reason to be anxious... ,

but he wasn't... And so he puts himself forward as a role-model:

V⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

He could speak with authority – he's living it. He's confined in prison, and all the way through this letter, he finds reasons for giving thanks to God....

So, are you anxious? Pray.

Are you depressed? Pray.

Are you distressed because you see so much brokenness in the world? Give your distress over to Jesus...

And look and see the good that God is done. Look and see the good that God is doing... Think on these things, and give Him praise.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, we want to thank you for all that is:

- Good
- Just
- Righteous
- Lovely
- Commendable
- Excellent

Lord, sometimes we can become so fixated on the
bad/evil,
We can almost cripple ourselves emotionally...
Oh Lord, is that because there's still too much of self?
Lord, when we chose to follow You,
we put to death the old man / the old self...
And we were born again, as Your children...

Lord, guard our hearts and our minds...
Our minds can be deceitful
Our hearts can be fearful...
And so Lord, we ask that You would renew our hearts;
Renew our minds;

That we would think on Your goodness;
And Your love;
And Your splendour...

And that we would feel and know Your peace.

In Jesus' Name,
Amen.

ⁱ Creighton, Adam. "Elderly fears over wealth, not health". The Australian, 3rd August 2020.