

March 30 - Read Philippians 1:18, Philippians 3:1, Philippians 4:4-7.

In Philippians 4:6-7, the Apostle Paul challenges us to be anxious for nothing. Instead, we are to pray and give thanks. It's easy to express our thanks to God on the heels of a victory or after receiving a miraculous breakthrough. But we will see that we are called to do this in the midst of our struggles, as well.

At the time when Paul wrote this to the Philippian Church, he was in prison and facing a very uncertain future. Yet, he looked beyond his immediate situation and did not dwell on bad, potential outcomes. His letter reflects his deep joy and attitude of rejoicing. Just two verses before calling us to vocalize our gratefulness, he commands us to always rejoice. By telling us to "always" rejoice, this implies ongoing or habitual rejoicing. Then, to drive home his point, he immediately repeats the command, "Again I say rejoice." He shows us that even in the middle of our pain, we can choose joy and praise God.

I don't believe Paul is asking us to drum up insincere gratitude. I think he is challenging us to give thanks where we should, even in the midst of whatever current struggle we are going through. I have found that there is always something to celebrate. Even during some of the most difficult trials I have faced, there have also been things I'm thankful for. And meditating on those and voicing my gratitude to God helps transform my perspective and recalibrate my mind. An overload of negative or stressful thoughts can create a general sense of impending doom. But when I choose to state my gratefulness to God instead of focusing on a negative feeling, I often experience the weight begin to lift.

March 31 - Read Philippians 4:6-8.

Authenticity is an important value to me. So often I have found it difficult to muster up positive thoughts or statements when they simply do not line up with my feelings. For example, if I have flu-like symptoms, I am not going to repeatedly say, "I am not sick, I am not sick, I am not sick." However, one day as I listened to a teaching on Philippians 4:8 I realized just how often I do actually proclaim untruths in my mind instead of truths. The verse says, "fix your thoughts on what is true." When we fix our thoughts on what might possibly happen, or the worst that could transpire, we are meditating on untruths. When I worry that the pain in my head is a cancerous tumor, I am dwelling on untruths. Could it be cancer or something else serious? Perhaps. But until that is the case, it is not true.

I cannot tell you the number of ailments, financial crises, failures, and serious consequences I felt like I have experienced over the years because I chose to fixate on what was untrue. And most of them never even came close to actually happening. They were just bouncing around in my mind as mere possibilities.

It may seem obvious and simple, but I have found tremendous relief by reminding myself to only focus on that which is — not that which might be. My task is to only focus on that which is known to be true.

April 1 - Read Matthew 6:34, Hebrews 4:16

One day I was processing some worries with my mentor. As I talked about my biggest fears, I silently hoped he would reassure me that these things probably would never happen. However, he responded with something that proved more powerful and lasting. He said, "I have seen you face a lot of challenges and have seen God give you strength through many trials. I trust that if this does turn out to be what you most fear, He will do the same. You would get through it by His amazing strength and power."

Something clicked with me that coincides with Jesus' command in Matthew 6:34. In this verse about not worrying, Jesus specifically says not to worry about future things. Sufficient for today are today's concerns. Likewise, the author of Hebrews says that God will give us grace and help in our time of need.

When I enter into the arena of anxiety about a possible issue, it's as if I'm going into battle alone against that issue. His strength and power is available to us as we need it. I have seen Him provide peace, strength, and help so many times in my life when I needed it. But His Word does not promise strength and help before we need it. I might be facing the news of a bad diagnosis and all of the health challenges that come along with it, but until I am actually facing it, I do not have His strength and help for this particular issue or crisis. This reminder has helped me relinquish fears and trust that no matter what happens, He is mighty to save...when I need saving.

April 2 - Read Genesis 12:1, Joshua 3:14-16, Psalms 37:5, John 11:38-40, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 10:5

Over the years as I evaluate different things that I get anxious or stressed out about, there is one common thread in my response to them — a desire to be in control. It's as if playing out potential negative outcomes or imagining unsuccessful work projects puts me in the driver's seat. Nothing is going to happen without me being forewarned and prepared to face it.

The problem, however, is that trust and control do not coexist. You can have control or you can have trust, but you can't have both. This presents a challenge considering that throughout scripture, God's instruction to us is to trust Him. In fact, we often see that God's guidance does not include the final picture nor are all the details known.

Scripture tells us that God desires our trust and dependence on Him along the way. Abraham was instructed to leave his country but not given a specific destination ahead of time. The people of God were told to step into the raging river without a guarantee that God would part the waters. Mary and Martha were challenged to trust when Jesus instructed the stone be removed from their dead brother's tomb.

Evaluate your heart and motives today. How much of your stressing and worrying is an attempt to be in control? Make an attempt today to put your trust in Him again. Here are a couple of tips: Acknowledge your struggle to Him and declare that you want to trust Him.

Stop negative thoughts within 30 seconds of them entering your mind and replace them with healthy thoughts.

Many scientists believe that we can create new neural pathways by changing our thoughts because it changes negative thought patterns. The apostle Paul talked about taking thoughts captive in Second Corinthians, chapter ten, verse five. Ironically, one of the first steps in releasing control of your life may be gaining control of your thoughts.

April 3 - Read Matthew 10:29-31, 1 John 4:18, Revelation 21:1-7

Life is full of uncertainty. I have a natural tendency to worry that something bad is going to happen even if things are going really well. In fact, sometimes I do it more when things are going smoothly in my life. This propensity to assume the worst correlates directly with forgetting God's goodness and care. You and I must remember that God is always with us, and we will get to spend eternity with Him.

But if we're honest, eternity can overwhelm us because we are not positive about what Heaven will really be like. Yet, God allowed the apostle John to see and articulate enough to excite and thrill us about what's to come. Heaven is unlike anything our humanity can grasp — No more death, sorrow, mourning, or tears. I think it's safe to say no more anxiety or depression as well. God will be near, and we will forever feel His love and protection because we are His cherished children.

In this last day together, I simply encourage you to meditate on the first seven verses of Revelation, chapter 21. I pray that no matter how concerned or anxious we may be or how difficult our current circumstances are, we will find hope in what lies ahead. This is not just about clinging to the hope and peace that will someday be. This is about embracing just how much we are loved. The more we are reminded of God's deep love for us, the less fear's grip will be able to hold our hearts hostage because His perfect love casts out all fear.

Adapted from www.bible.com. This Bible Plan was written by Brian Russell — Executive Director at YouVersion.