

## **Worry in Biblical Perspective: The Worshipful Displacement of Worry**

**Philippians 4:4-9**

By [Lynn Downing](#)

*March 14, 2010 – Evening Sermon*

Good evening, the text for this study is in Philippians 4:4-9 which says,

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, 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. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven we thank You for this instruction that has come to us by Your Spirit, recorded in Your Word. We thank You that it's available for personal reading and that it's available for public reading and public study. We pray that all of us will be arrested Spiritually speaking in the way that we need to be in order to be encouraged, edified and helped in the way we each need that and we pray that the church here and in other places will be strengthened through this handled and receiving of Your Word. We pray this in the Name and for the glory of Christ, in whose Name we pray, Amen.

The title for this study is *The Worshipful Displacement Of Worry*. We won't get to that part until near the end of this study but we will work toward it in preparation for it. I want to point out that in Philippians 4 there are number of different kinds of subjects that are dealt with. We could go along and pick any one of them and be well instructed or we could survey each of them and see how they fit together. That is what we are going to do. We are going to survey Philippians 4:4-9 and we're going to wind up with an application of different parts of this as to how they

support and teach matters having to do with worry and how we can respond to that.

The passage starts out with an emphasis that is enjoyable to read but not always easy to do. It says, "Rejoice in the Lord always" and then as if to just drive the nail deeper He says, "Again I say rejoice." The idea of this rejoicing has to do or is understood more clearly I think if you realize that it says "Rejoice *in the Lord*" which gives an emphasis on the fact that His being the Lord is a basis or a foundation on which we can have the confidence of rejoicing in Him.

There are several different places in the New Testament that when I read them I just humanly speaking can't believe the width, the depth, and all of the resourcefulness that's in the passages. I want to read several of them in this study because they back up or give strength to this passage which talks about our need and our availability to rejoice in the Lord. One is found in 1 Corinthians 1:5-7 which says, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. I'd say that's *carte blanche* as to the provision that the Lord makes.

Along similar lines is an even more familiar passage in Ephesians 1:3 which says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." There is another verse in Philippians we didn't go over but it comes beyond our passage for this study is Philippians 4:19 which says, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." There is a similar emphasis where it says we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. That's the kind of thing you can't really comprehend. We can certainly be impressed with it. We can capitalize on the resources and the richness that's here but it will take us forever to grasp what's being given there. The point however is it's certainly gives us reason to rejoice.

Colossians 2:3 says, "in whom (referring to Christ) are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Another one of these mind boggling are found in 2 Peter 1:2-4 says,

2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness (Is there anything left out here? There doesn't seem to be.), through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

What is important to understand there is becoming a partaker of the Divine Nature doesn't mean we become little gods but it does mean that the nature of the Lord is in and available to us not only to give reinforcement to our times of need but also to give us this mindset and this practice of becoming perpetually rejoicing believers.

With that in mind we go to the next idea that's here that says, "Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice" and then it shifts a little bit and gives a different emphasis but they are connected. I will show you how they are connected when we come toward the main point of the study. It goes on then to say, "Don't worry" ha ha. What it does say is, "Do not be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

A number of years ago I got hold of a book by the evangelist and author of several titles named John Haggai. He had written quite some time prior to this a book titled How to Win Over Worry. He did a number of crusades across this country and other places in the world. He made a habit of always setting aside a night, announcing when it was going to be that he would preach a summarized version of this book; How to Win Over Worry. The interesting thing was that while there was a heavy attendance on most all of the nights of his crusade meetings, the number of people who came to hear this message would sometimes triple what there were on average nights. The reason is understandable. People would come anxious.

We become anxious, not just they, you, others. No, worry, anxiety is a part of our lives. It's interesting that the Lord gives us such crisp, clear commanding type instruction here. He says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything..." and He begins to tell us how to get over this. I'm not going to share the things that are in Haggai's book but I do recommend it to you. I've read it. It's a very helpful book. I've been advised not to ever recommend books without telling our bookstore first and now I have gone and done it so there it is. It's a wonderful book for you to have available. Here are some things to keep in mind about this matter of worry and anxiety as we move toward ultimately seeing how this passage helps us. Another passage that I think is not as quite well known as the one in Philippians 4 is the one in Psalm 139. It is a very well known passage. Psalm 139:23, 24 says, 23 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! 24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Some versions say 'know my anxious thoughts.' That's calling on the Lord to make our errors, our sins, our shortcomings before Him known to us. The interesting thing is we are so prone to be anxious that we don't think of it as a violation of God's requirement and His provision but it is contrary to the nature that He makes available to us with all of this resourcefulness in these verses we read earlier – being blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Being blessed to such a degree that we are made partakers of

the Divine Nature and now here it says “*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*”

In a passage that deals with our concerns about the material things of life Matthew 6:33 speaks very clearly and articulately. After talking about the birds of the air, the flowers of the field and how the Lord takes care of them then the very specific instruction comes to us. So instead of being anxious about those things here’s what I want you to do, Matthew 6:33, “*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*” That gives us a sense of priority and an area to place our emphasis, not only has a matter of priority but when we’re anxious about things we are reminded here that there is a place for us to go. There is a place for us to shift our thinking. It says to seek first so in other words it’s our first priority to seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added to us.

Then there is a matter of prayer here in Philippians 4:6; “*do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving...*” Notice the mounting of the emphasis here. There is obviously the praying about the things that are a concern to us and is something that the Lord makes available and commands us to do but there is a particular way this is to be done and you see it in the passage here. “In everything (first of all) through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.” If you pick up on the word everything you discover right away that what’s being called for is not the practice of spurt praying. It’s not the practice of emergency praying. It’s not the practice of “O help Lord” all of a sudden. No, it’s saying in everything so that what’s being instructed here is that this is implying and requiring this kind of praying to be a way of life. The guarantee of peace that comes out of this is not a guarantee of peace in our “fox hole” praying or emergency praying or spurt praying in the urgency of the moment.

These are not urgent calls although there’s nothing wrong with urgent calls unless that’s all we do. If our urgent calls are all we do we have no assurance from the Scripture there will be the kind of peace given as a result of those that are given to one who has an intimate communion with the Lord and who brings everything perpetually to Him in prayer. *In everything through prayer and supplication...* prayer is the way we would normally think of it, supplication is a way of intensifying that way before the Lord. Then it ends up by saying “with thanksgiving...” thanksgiving for what? It is thanksgiving for the sovereignty of God.

We come then after we have heard the Lord say, “Rejoice always and again I say rejoice. Don’t worry but instead pray” in a certain ongoing lifestyle content of prayer. Then we come to Philippians 4:8. I know that verse 8 is in a different paragraph and that needs to be noted but I also believe that the various parts and sections of this fourth chapter all have to do with each other or they wouldn’t

be in this close proximity arranged in the way they were or are. So while verse 8 is in a new paragraph don't leave it out in considerations of things having to do with how to handle anxiety or how to pray about things that worry us.

So what is Philippians 4:8 saying again? Philippians 4:8 says, "*Finally* (Importantly), *brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, 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 is this doing here? It's giving something very practical, very helpful, very workable in this matter of how to manage worry, anxiety or even thought life. If you have problems with your thought life, a substance abuse problem, whatever would become an obsession with you, whatever would grab your mind and not want to let it go, whatever would draw you in a particular direction so that you feel the power of that and you wish you didn't but you do then verse 8. Think differently. Give your mind a place to go. That is the reason for the title of this sermon – The Worshipful Displacement of Worry.

How do you do that? Do you remember Archimedes, the eureka guy? This is the guy who ran indecently through the streets once he all of a sudden discovered the displacement of water in the tub and he was studying these things in his scientific pursuits. All of sudden when he put his foot and his body in the water came up and he said, "Eureka! I've found it!" He was so preoccupied and exhilarated that he went out in the streets indecently yelling his discovery. I imagine that people were not concerned with displacement when they saw him running through the streets.

Here is the way I would like to illustrate this. The passage says "don't worry." If I say to you "I don't want you to think about elephants." What are you thinking about? If I say "Instead of thinking about elephants, I want you to think about golf" your mind has a place to go. That's exactly what's going on in this passage. Rightly He instructs us "I don't want you to be anxious ridden. I don't want My people to be worrisome." Then He shows how a perpetually ingrained communing prayer life with Him will bring peace in this but then He adds to it this very practical, helpful in formation which says "Now here's where I want your mind to go as well."

I've used this in counseling over the years particularly with people who had substance abuse problems or areas of their life where they felt overwhelmed and couldn't always manage themselves about it. I got this idea from an acquaintance of mine that I was with a number of years ago. I won't use his name. I observed that I thought he might not be a very good conversationalist. Now many of us have that dilemma but as I was riding along in the back seat of the car with this man I noticed him every once in a while bringing a card out of his pocket, put it back in his pocket and then he would start a new conversation. I'm convinced he had conversation ideas on that card because his changing of the subject or his regaining of speed so to speak in conversation had to do with looking at that card

and putting it back in his pocket. It began to dawn on me in matters of worry, oppression, harassment, our hearts, our relationship with the Lord to take the words of Philippians 4:8 and make them into a list, write some thoughts beside those which when we find ourselves being distracted by worry or anxiety we can either take out the mental card or maybe even the physical tangible card, look at it and give our minds somewhere to go. Give our preoccupation, our fixations, somewhere to go. If I say "Don't do this..." all I am doing is reminding you to do this unless I give you a solution to it. It's the same in this passage. That's exactly what's going on.

So what does He say here? He says that we're to rejoice because of the things that are in Philippians 4:8. I want to go through them and give you a brief description of each one and encourage you even now or very soon to do what we were talking about. Make a list. Write thoughts and use this for relief, for liberty when the time comes. These ideas and words are not ends in themselves. Every one of them comes from Christ. Every one of them is understood as having to do with Him. So that's where the title means the "Worshipful Displacement of Worry" because when we look at these words and we begin to use them to give vent or escape such as is talked about in 1 Corinthians 10:13 which says, "*No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*" Here is the way of escape.

One of them is – will make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it. So when it talks about *whatever is true*, it's a reference at least indirectly if not more vividly directly to the fact that Jesus Himself, is truth. Anything that is truly true is true because He made it so. So when you are writing down ideas of things that are true don't leave out Jesus because He is Truth in and of Himself. Jesus said in John 14:6, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*"

*Whatever is noble or honorable...* that means noble or honorable to the level of worship. What is more honorable and noble for worship than our Holy God and our Savior, Jesus the Son of God?

*Whatever is right...* right here means right from the standpoint of justice being done. What did Jesus come to do? He came to establish the availability or the return of justice in the minds and hearts of those who believe and trust in Him. So it's justice according to the standard of Christ.

*Whatever is pure...* the purity here is stainlessness. For those of you who are in the Sunday school class that I'm teaching right now, it's along the lines of expiation which is one of the parts of the work of Christ where He took away our impurity, our uncleanness and made us stainless before Him by the cleansing of His blood. So it's purity having to do with matters of morality and the cleansing of our sin.

*Whatever is lovely...* that means loveable, gracious or pleasing. Nobody is more loving, gracious and pleasing than Christ. So you see the reference to Him is saturated through this list but you could do things such as referring back in your mind to some place you've been that you enjoyed tremendously. I think back to a time when my family and I were at the Grand Canyon and I got up early to go watch the change of the colors in the sunrise. You could do the same thing through the sunset and that is lovely, but who made it? It is also a reminder of the brilliance of the graciousness and loveliness of Christ.

*Whatever is of good repute...* means that of good reputation. There will always be things that we have to take out our spiritual tuning fork and check the validity, accuracy, acceptability or what we are thinking or doing before the Lord and that's what this is referring to. It's whatever meets the criteria the Lord would establish.

*Whatever is excellent...* means virtuous. *Whatever is worthy of praise...* meaning worship. Then He winds up with something where He says "think about these things." What He does not mean, is think in passing. No, He means as we said earlier that you're prayer life should be a certain lifestyle – praying without ceasing, being in communion with the Lord, a sense of communion with Him on an ongoing basis. It's the same kind of thing here when He says "Think about these things." It doesn't mean think occasionally. It means let your thought life be preoccupied, let your knee jerk reaction go to these things. Let your reflex to be like this.

A. T. Robertson wrote something I want to share with you. He says, "Put your mind on these things (just mentioned), it's not the mere flash of thought like the flitting of a sparrow but a deliberate and prolonged contemplation as if one is weighing a mathematical problem. Reckon up the pros and cons of the moral values of life. Too many of us fail just here. They do not give Christ worthy consideration. Make your mind move in the realm of elevated thoughts. High thinking is essential to holy living. We must let Christ control our thoughts so that casting down imagination and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5)." A.T. Robertson has captured it well there that this is not a passing way of thinking. This is a perpetual way of thinking so that as we are by ourselves we worship the Lord with this kind of thinking. As we are with people in a sanctuary like this, we should be thinking about the Lord along recognizable lines such as these.

So whether it's a problem with anxiety or some other kind of problem that causes you distraction and diversion that's referred to in James 1 as the division of the mind. Whenever the mind is divided and you would like it to be whole and one again, let it be natural for you to think through things like this so that we don't just hear somebody reminding us not to worry but we hear the Lord also saying,

“Don’t worry but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, talk to Me about this and I will give you peace and then continue on with this kind of preoccupied content filled thought life.” That’s exactly what He is saying. “Think this way.”

Now it’s obvious to some of us and not so obvious to others that the prerequisite in all of this is to have a conversational availability with Christ and if that’s not there none of what I have said will make any difference. So do you know Christ? Do you understand the efficacy of His gracious blood shed and has it drawn you “coram Deo”, before His face, with repentance and trust and commitment to Him so that the communication is already there, already available? If you haven’t, then repent of your sins and trust in Him and you too can have the benefits of this marvelous passage of His Word, plus many other things. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Our Father in heaven we thank You for Your loving kindness and tender mercy. We thank You for the fact that You have given us such richness in that loving kindness and tender mercy. These passages we read earlier about being blessed with every Spiritual blessing in the heavenly places and actually being made partakers of the Divine Nature and not lacking anything we need and having our needs supplied and then You guide us as to what should preoccupy our minds, we thank You that You’re not only a Holy and loving God but You are also detailed to us in these ways. We pray anyone reading this who has never yet repented of sin and placed trust and confidence in Christ for forgiveness and salvation for eternity, cause them in their own words even right now to simply say to You, “I repent of my sin. I trust You. I want You Lord Jesus to be my Savior” and then may we live in these benefits for Your Name sake and praise, Amen.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).