

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRUthe**BIBLE**

How to
Have Peace
in Anxious
Times

DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

HOW TO HAVE PEACE IN ANXIOUS TIMES

It's an epidemic that spans the globe and the generations and likely has invaded your home—and your heart, too. Call it “worry” or “anxiety,” most of us suffer at times through sleepless nights and anxious days with some worry on our mind that won't go away. Sound familiar?

Anxiety is a painful uneasiness that feeds our private fears. In its mildest form we simply churn. In its most severe form we panic. The word “worry” actually means “to strangle,” and that's what it does to our godly perspective. Eventually we lose focus on what matters.

But anxiety does do one good thing: It shines a spotlight for us on how much we need the Lord. That's what Dr. McGee reminds us of as we explore God's Word and discover God's solution to the things that keep us up at night. Be willing to do this one thing and be ready to receive God's unexplainable peace.

The letter to the Philippians may be one of the most practical—and most necessary—letters we have in the New Testament. Paul the apostle didn't write it to correct any doctrine or conduct, but he touched on all of the great and practical truths of the Christian life, including your secret of power—your prayer life.

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. –Philippians 4:6

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt and dark pants, is sitting on a rock. She is looking out over a vast landscape at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright, golden glow that fills the sky and the foreground. The woman's face is in profile, looking towards the left. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

WORRY ABOUT NOTHING;

Pray about everything

— DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

In other words: *Worry* about nothing; *pray* about everything. This is a direct commandment, not a suggestion. Most of us will admit to our shame that we worry. We know the Bible says it's wrong, even sinful, but we still do it.

Let's be encouraged now to change our ways. Instead of worrying, let's pray about everything.

Look at Philippians 4:6 again. Two little indefinite pronouns have tremendous significance. The first one, "nothing," is probably the most exclusive word there is in the English language—it excludes everything. We are not to worry about a single thing. The reason we are to worry about nothing is because we are to pray about everything. Just as "nothing" *excludes* all, "everything" *includes* all. That means we are to talk to the Lord about everything in our lives.

Years ago, a widow asked Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, "Do you think we ought to pray about the little things in our lives?" And Dr. Morgan, in his characteristic British manner, replied, "Madam, can you mention anything in your life that is big to God?"

May I say, when we divide things in our lives as big or little, we make a false division. All areas of our lives are very small as far as God is concerned. But even what we call little, He wants us to bring to Him. As believers, we need to get in the habit of bringing *everything* to Him in prayer—excluding *nothing*. So these two little pronouns are exact opposites. Nothing means *nothing*, and everything means *everything*.

When Paul says that a Christian is not to worry, he is not advancing a foolish philosophy of shutting our eyes to reality and denying that disease and sickness and death and trouble and pain are realities. Paul doesn't say we are to pretend those things don't exist. Instead, we need to move the things we want to worry about into the realm of prayer.

I'd like to illustrate that, here's a little joke. A man couldn't sleep one night. He rolled and tossed, until his wife finally asked him, "What is the matter? Why can't you sleep?"

He said, "I owe the tax man \$6,000 and the bill is due, and I can't pay it."

"Well," his wife said, "Get up, get dressed, go over and tell the tax man you can't pay him. Then come back and go to sleep and let *him* stay awake."

May I say to you, my friends, that is exactly what Paul the apostle is saying here. When we tell God everything, it becomes *His* problem. We have the right as His children to go to Him in prayer and say, “This is something for *You* to handle” and then turn everything over to Him. Worry about nothing; pray about everything.

I believe everything in the Christian’s life should be made a matter of prayer to God, no matter what it is. He is our heavenly Father, and we can talk to Him honestly. We can unburden our hearts to Him as we can to no one else.

WHAT ABOUT MY UNANSWERED PRAYERS?

Paul continues his exhortation to us with, “...*by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God*” (Philippians 4:6).

When you make your request, you are to thank Him *right* then for hearing and answering you. “But what about the prayers He doesn’t answer?” you may ask.

May I be bold enough to say that there is no such thing as unanswered prayer! God *does* answer prayer, and when you take your petitions to Him you are to thank Him because He is going to hear and answer. If you are God’s child, you don’t have unanswered prayers. He always hears and answers.

May I say, we don’t like for God to say no to our requests. We want Him to say yes, but He’s not always going to say yes. He’ll always hear and answer a request that is brought to Him, but sometimes the answer is no.

The story is told that when the Panama Canal was under construction the families of some of the workers came down to visit. One young engineer lived on a houseboat with his wife and boy. Every afternoon this young engineer would get into a rowboat

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An elderly man with short, graying hair is seated at a round wooden table in a cafe or restaurant. He is wearing a blue and white patterned button-down shirt. He is looking down at a white plate of food on the table, with his hands resting on it. To his left is a white mug with a spoon. The background is softly blurred, showing other people and interior lights, creating a warm, intimate atmosphere.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

and row out to the houseboat. He would take a great sheaf of blueprints of the Panama Canal with him to work on at home with his family near him.

One evening he had all of his blueprints spread out, and his little boy was playing at his feet with a toy wagon. A wheel came off the wagon, and the little fellow sat there and worked with it, but he just couldn't get the wheel back on. Finally, he did what little boys do and began to cry.

Do you think the father ignored his son? He could have said, "Son, go on and find your mother. I'm working on the great Panama Canal, and I can't have you bothering me." But he didn't do that. He put aside the blueprints, sat down on the floor, took up the little fellow, and asked him what was the matter. The little boy held up the wagon in one hand and a wheel in the other. To the little boy, this was a major project. To the father, it was practically nothing. With just a twist of the wrist, he put the wheel on. Then he kissed his son's tears away, patted him, put him down on the floor, and the little fellow began playing again.

Now, my friend, do you think our heavenly Father is any less kind than a human father? When a wheel comes off your wagon—and believe me, it will come off—take it to Him and ask Him to put it back on. It may look like an impossible problem to you, but He will hear and answer your cry. If He says no, it is because that is the best answer you could have.

I can illustrate that with a personal experience. My dad died when I was fourteen—just at the time when, I think, a boy needs a dad the most. I lived several years before I turned to God and found that I had a heavenly Father. I learned I could go to Him with my requests, and He would answer me just as my human father used to do. And, also like my earthly father, many times God's answers were no.

When I was a young pastor in Texas, I candidated in a church considered to be outstanding and strategic. The church extended an invitation to me, but the denomination disapproved. They needed a politician, which I was not. I felt the Lord made a great mistake by not letting me go to that church as pastor. But many years later, the church went astray into liberalism, and I said to my wife, "I thank God He heard and answered my prayer the *right* way—not the way I prayed it."

My friend, my heavenly Father answered my prayer, and I am embarrassed now that I didn't thank Him at the time. My advice to you is this: Instead of saying that God has not answered your prayers, say, "My heavenly Father heard my prayer, but He told me no, which was the right answer."

We are to let our requests be made known to God with thanksgiving—knowing that, regardless of how He answers, it will always be the best thing for us.

INDESCRIBABLE PEACE

What will happen when we don't worry but instead we pray?
Read on.


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

-Philippians 4:7

Scripture speaks of many kinds of peace. We can have world peace through the person of Christ, the Prince of Peace. We have the assurance that someday peace will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14). We can have the peace that comes with forgiveness of sins (Romans 5:1). We can also know the peace that feels like tranquility (John 14:27). That is a marvelous peace.

But none of these are the peace mentioned here in Philippians 4:7. This peace can't be described. It "surpasses all understanding." This is a peace that sweeps over our souls while we are in the troubles and trials of life. This peace gives us confidence, irrespective of the circumstances. We have confidence that things are going to work out for our own good and His glory.

This same peace enables us to face life full on, stand on the wide deck of life and know it makes no difference how hard the winds blow or how high the waves roll. For this peace "will guard [our] hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."



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- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

This peace “guards” our hearts and minds. This peace of God is like a sentinel on duty around our hearts and minds, protecting and keeping us in life’s most worrisome trials.

GETTING FROM ANXIETY TO PEACE

Have you noticed what's happened? We entered this passage with anxiety and worry. We come out now in peace. Between the two is prayer.

Have things changed? No, the problem is still there. The storm still rages, the waves still roll high, the thunder still resounds—nothing has changed outside, but the one who is praying has changed. Something has happened to our soul, moving us from a place of worry to a place where God's peace now controls our heart and life.

I'm convinced that the primary purpose of prayer is not to change *things* but to change *us*. We think prayer is a faucet we can turn on to get out of it anything we want. Or it's a magical, mystical hocus pocus to make our problems disappear. That's not prayer!


Prayer is when we go to our heavenly Father, tell Him everything, and then let Him take over. Once we take our hands off, He begins to move—not necessarily on the things outside, but inside our private hearts and lives. Sometimes He puts the wheel back on the wagon and makes it better, but sometimes He doesn't. The thing He's concerned about is changing our hearts.

Oh, this is the treasure of real prayer that He invites you into today! Real prayer changes your heart. It brings your thinking, your will, your plan, and your purposes into alignment with the will of God. Prayer does that!

Most of us stand on the fringe of prayer. We never really enter in. We never come as a child with absolute simplicity and absolute faith to a Father, knowing He will hear and answer us in the best way possible.

Say to Him, “Lord, I believe; please help my unbelief. Help me to enjoy that wonderful intimacy with You in prayer. Help me to enter into the glorious privilege of talking to You, an omnipotent, omniscient Father who knows what is best for me.”

When you pray like that, my friend, not only will He hear you, but He will rush to help You, to guard You with perfect peace that no one understands. Why not talk to Him right now?



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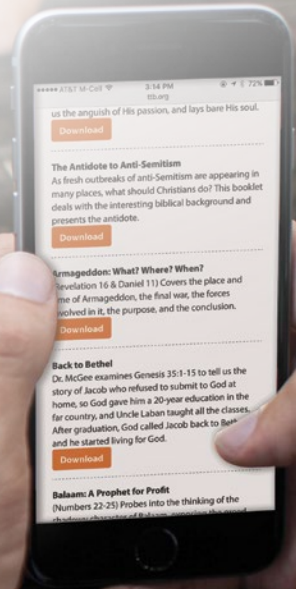
A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are both gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and greenery.

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