When Worry Returns

A devotional on prayer, provision, practise, protection, promise, peace, and presence in Philippians 4

Read Philippians 4:4-13, John 14:25-27, Colossians 1:19-20.

Key verse

"the God of peace will be with you."
Philippians 4:9.

Focus We bring our concerns to God in thankful **prayer**. His **provision** is **peace**, and that peace is our **protection**. Paul's lived example shows what it means to put what we have learned into **practice**. The **promise** is God's **presence**.

You finish **praying** and return to the same conversation in your head. You **rehearse** what might happen, what you should have said or what you could still do to keep things from going wrong. What do you do when the concern returns?
Before Paul speaks about anxiety, he calls the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord and let others see their gentleness. He reminds them that the **Lord is near** (Philippians 4:4-5). The next thing he asks them to do makes sense in the light of that nearness.
The prayer Paul describes makes room for **pleading as well as thanksgiving**. Bring every concern to God. Tell Him plainly what you fear and what you need, and thank Him for what you already know of His care.
Thanksgiving can begin while the answer is still pending. We can thank God that He hears us while we ask Him for help with the very thing that unsettles us.
What have I gone over many times in my mind that I have yet to name plainly before God?

The first promise

In verse 7, the **provision is peace**, beyond what we can understand. The first promise is that God's peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. The **Peace-Giver protects** us through the peace He gives.
Think of what is at stake when fear takes over. It can govern what we want, what we decide and how we interpret what others say. **God's peace stands guard over that inner life** even while the concern that brought us to prayer is still before us.
Where is worry beginning to make my decisions for me?

Think about these things

After speaking of guarded minds, Paul tells us what to give our minds to. Think about what is true, honourable, right, pure, lovely and commendable, whatever is excellent and worthy of praise (v. 8).
That gives us somewhere to turn when we catch ourselves rehearsing the worst.
What do I actually know about this situation?
What has God said that I can rely on?

The truth may include something painful that needs our attention. It may also include a kindness we overlooked or a faithful way to respond that fear had crowded out.
What thought have I been treating as true simply because it keeps coming back?
As I bring that thought before the Lord, what does His Word give me to dwell on?
Lord, help me see what is true and give it my attention.

The practice

In verse 9 Paul asks the Philippians to practise what they learned, received, heard and saw in him. They had watched him live what he taught. The practice begins when something we have received becomes something we do.
Later in the chapter we glimpse what that looked like for Paul. He had learned contentment in abundance and in hunger through the strength Christ supplied (vv. 11-13). His trust had been tested in both circumstances.
What have I learned from Scripture and seen lived out in another believer that I can now put into practice?
The second promise is His presence. As you put into practice what you have received, the Promise-Keeper gives you His word that He Himself will be with you.

The One who makes peace

In verse 7 it is the peace of God that guards us. In verse 9 it is the God of peace who will be with us. Hear how personally Jesus speaks to His disciples before His departure.
"My peace I give you" (John 14:27). **The peace He gives is His own.**
Colossians 1:19-20 takes us to the cross, where God made peace through Christ's blood to reconcile us to Himself. **Jesus is the Peacemaker who brings us near to God**, the Peace-Giver who shares His own peace and the Protector who guards our hearts and minds through it.
When worry returns, take a moment to remember who is with you. The One who gave Himself to reconcile you to God hears you as you bring Him this concern again.
You can take the next step of obedience in His strength, even while you wait for an answer.

A practical response

Name one concern in prayer. Ask God for what you need and thank Him for one way He has cared for you. Choose one true thing to return to when the concern resurfaces, and take one step of obedience you can put into practice today.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me understand the peace You give. Teach me to bring You what troubles me and to thank You while I wait. Guard my heart and mind, steady my thoughts in what is true and give me strength to practise what You have taught me. Help me trust Your promise that You are with me. Amen.

Quote

“The Peace-Giver is with you.”

Food for thought

- Where do I most need to trust the presence of God while I wait for an answer?
- What would change in my next conversation if I acted in the assurance that God is with me?

