

## 10/4 WEEK ONE Rejoice always?

For two years when I was studying to be a priest I was assigned to help out at a drug and alcohol treatment center for adolescents.

It was by far, the most rewarding assignment of my 8 years in seminary.

And I say that because I didn't just learn about addiction,

I discovered the vital role that spirituality plays in recovery.

### **SCREEN: stinking thinking**

It's also where I first heard the phrase: stinking thinking.

What is stinking thinking?

It's those thoughts that can torpedo someone's recovery.

Here are examples of stinking thinking I heard from the teens in rehab:

*I'll never get better, my life is ruined, no one loves me,*

*it's all my family's fault, I'll never amount to anything.*

With everything happening in our nation and our world right now,

I think we're all struggling with some stinking thinking.

Here are some examples from 2020:

*I'm afraid of losing my job and ending up homeless.*

*I'm worried that I can't provide for my family and they'll stop loving me.*

*I doubt that the pandemic is ever going to end.*

*I'm terrified that the election won't get decided.*

*I'm panicked that racial injustice is only going to get worse.*

These thoughts can dominate a person's every waking hour,

preventing any chance for happiness or peace.

### **SCREEN: Anxious For Nothing main screen**

So today we are beginning a new message series titled,

*Anxious For Nothing.*

It's based on a book by the Christian author Max Lucado.

And I'll be borrowing extensively from his book.

To get us started, let's define our terms.

What is anxiety?

Max defines it as a low grade, never ending sense of dread - an edginess about life and what's coming.

Anxiety is the belief that something bad is just around the corner,  
that happiness is fleeting,  
that the sky is falling and it's falling right on you.

Anxiety is a big heap of uncertainty and what if's, a lot of stinking thinking.  
If this description hits home with you, you're not alone.

This past week we sent out a survey and asked you to rate your anxiety  
on a scale of 1 to 10 - ten being the highest.

And we got back over 200 results and  
two thirds of you rated your anxiety as 5 or higher.

If that's where you are, you've got lots of company.

The word '*anxiety*' has its root in a Latin word meaning  
'to choke' - so anxiety can literally take your breath away.

Now, anxiety is different from fear and here's the difference:  
fear is your reaction to a very real threat.

Anxiety is when you imagine the threat.

Let me give a personal example.

Back in June a friend and I were hiking in the Shenandoah mountains.

As we neared a corner in the trail I spotted a snake on the ground in front of us.  
My first reaction was fear.

Why? The danger was real - I could see it right in front of me!

The snake slithered away and we continued our hike.

Anxiety would have been if I'd raced back to the car,  
drove home and vowed to never set foot in the great outdoors again  
because snakes might be everywhere.

See the difference?

Fear is reasonable, it's healthy and can save your life.

Anxiety is unreasonable, unhealthy and can control your life.

And as our survey reveals, churchgoers are not immune from anxiety.

In some cases it can be worse for us because of the tendency to  
view anxiety as a sin - thinking,

*'If only my faith were stronger, I'd never feel anxious.'*

But it's not a sin.

Anxiety is a very natural human reaction.

But it is possible to be 'anxious for nothing'.

Not only is it possible, it's what God wants for all his children.

And today, St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians, gave us a plan.

I'm going to read the full passage that we will be focusing on throughout this series:

As I read it, listen for Paul's step-by-step guide:

**SCREEN: "Rejoice in the Lord always.**

**I shall say it again: rejoice!**

**Your kindness should be known to all.**

**The Lord is near.**

**Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.**

**Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.**

**Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." *Phil. 4: 4-8***

Each week we will delve into one part of Paul's plan for anxiety.

I was a senior in high school the first time I read Philippians.

It was a point in my life when faith was become personal,

but I was struggling to figure out God's plan for my life.

My church youth group spent a summer discussing

St. Paul's letters.

When we got to Philippians my first reaction was that

it was easy for Paul to say 'don't be anxious' because he had really strong faith.

After all, Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus

and called him to be an Apostle.

Then I learned that Paul had plenty to be anxious about - a heck of a lot more than I had at the age of 17.

**SCREEN: blank red background**

When Paul wrote this, he was nearly 60 years old - which was old age 2000 years ago. He'd traveled far and wide preaching the Gospel and faced incredible hardships.

When Paul wrote this, he'd been a prisoner in Rome for two years, awaiting trial for heresy.

Few people came to his help - even some of his friends turned against him.

Paul could see that his life was coming to an end.

It would have been so easy (and understandable) for Paul to curse, rant, shake his fist at God:

*after all I've done for you!*

But he didn't.

Paul wrote this: *rejoice in the Lord always.*

Then wrote, *I say it again, rejoice!*

Now, for Paul to write this, after all he'd been through and with all that he was facing, this must be an important teaching.

And this is what I think it means:

**SCREEN: Rejoicing in the Lord is not a feeling, it's a decision.**

Rejoicing in the Lord is not a feeling, it's a decision.

It's the first step in Paul's plan to overcome anxiety.

*It's not a feeling, it's a decision -*

a conscious act of professing that God is in control of everything - the universe, the world, my life, your life, every single life.

Paul wrote these powerful words because he didn't see himself as a victim - he didn't believe that unseen forces were deciding his fate or that something deadly was about to strike.

No, Paul could rejoice because he was absolutely convinced that his salvation was near at hand.

And his savior was Jesus Christ.

With Jesus at his side, Paul could face any obstacle, any crisis, any setback.

**SCREEN: God is with me and God will deliver me**

And this was the central pillar of Paul's faith:

God is with me and God will deliver me.

*God is with me and God will deliver me.*

That's how he was able to surrender total control of his life and his circumstances to the Lord.

Paul was anxious for nothing and could say to us:

*have no anxiety at all!*

Notice Paul didn't say, "*it's okay to be anxious about some things, on some days, in certain circumstances.*"

He didn't say, "*You can be anxious when you're around your in-laws, or at work, or helping your child with their schooling.*"

*Didn't say we can be anxious about the pandemic, the economy, the election, racial injustice.*

No Paul wrote: don't let **anything** in life cause you anxiety.

We need to be like St. Paul.

We need to profess that God is almighty, all knowing and is always in control of our lives.

Paul, a prisoner for the Lord, is teaching us how to be free from anxiety.

**SCREEN: change your mindset**

If you and I can't change our circumstances,

we can change how we see them - we can change our mindset.

So much of what makes us anxious are things that *might* happen.

It's all those 'what if's' I listed.

At all costs, we must avoid stinking thinking.

I'm not saying nothing bad will ever happen.

There is no doubt life will bring us pain.

But even then we have a choice of what we focus on.

We can dwell on our hurt *or* our hope.

Our hurt or our hope.

We can say with Paul, that in all things God works for good for those who love him.

It is not God's will that you live in anxiety and fear and trepidation.

That your calm and peace of mind are robbed.

It is possible to learn how to live in calm or peace.

It's not easy, and it won't happen overnight.

And to be clear, I know that no one pep talk or message series will make everything alright.

In some cases, therapy or medication may be needed - as part of God's healing.

But when you trust in the sovereignty of God, and learn to rejoice in him, it reframes how you face your fear.

### **SCREEN: 5 reasons you have to rejoice**

In this coming week, I want to challenge you to take a few minutes every day and write down five reasons you have to rejoice.

If you do that every day, you'll be one step closer to tackling anxiety.

Meeting weekly with other disciples is another incredible way to overcome anxiety.

We formed new small groups this week, but it's not too late to join.

### **SCREEN: [spxbowie.org/smallgroups](http://spxbowie.org/smallgroups)**

Just go to this link on our website for more information or to sign up.

St. Paul has given us a road map, a plan for dealing with our worries and all life's challenges.

Let's commit to his plan, trusting that if we do we can truly be anxious for nothing. Amen. +