

Daily Devotional, November 17, 2021 Giving Thanks Even in Anxious Times

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)

We continue to live in a time of heightened anxiety. As we draw ever closer to the Thanksgiving holiday, we carry a sense of accrued stress in our lives. The health and economic impact of the pandemic, mandate tension, and political bickering have all taken their toll. To make matters worse, many of us are living in some form of social isolation, which only adds to our angst. At first glance, anxiety and thanksgiving can seem like an odd match. However, it is widely believed that gratitude is one of the critical ways that we ward off anxiety. In fact, research tells us that people who regularly look for joy begin to reflect gratitude. These people focus more on the blessings in their lives than on their fears.

Recently I had been flipping through some old journals from some time ago. Though they are filled with times of great anxiety, they are also filled with many examples of God at work throughout those anxious times. As I read what I wrote, I became grateful for God's faithfulness in my life. In retrospect, I see how time and again God worked through difficult circumstances to bring me calm and resolution.

The concept that gratitude helps remove our anxiety is not a new concept, it is something that the Apostle Paul described long ago. As a prisoner, Paul had much to fear both for himself and for those that he loved. Earlier in the letter to the Philippians, Paul illustrated his situation by writing that he was "being poured out as a drink offering" and that he hoped to "have less anxiety." While he knew the accumulated stress of living in fear and uncertainty, he also knew the joy and peace that comes from thanksgiving: remembering the faithfulness of God who is working in and through our circumstances.

What are you most anxious about in this season, and what brings a sense of gratitude to your life? Take some time to dwell on how you might focus on all you have to be thankful for in the week ahead.

Prayer: Lord, you know all our fears, the things that keep us awake at night and distract our minds and our hearts. Help us to see all of our blessings in this time, and all the people and experiences that fill us with gratitude. Help us to see your faithfulness and to trust your goodness for the days ahead. In the name of Christ our Lord, Amen.