



Where do you find that your thoughts go when facing difficult situations?

So often we find ourselves in circumstances outside our control.

We speculate the outcome based on past experience and current information, often attempting to make accurate predictions of what will happen next. Kenya's presidential election is a prime example, as the anxiety of many was influenced by the events that occurred in the last one. Worrying is a natural response when feeling uncertain. Sometimes the anxious ruminations become a habit, as even the small "unknowns" trigger our imaginations to consider countless possible outcomes. But no amount of worry will improve a situation; the only likely repercussions are the negative effects on ourselves—physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Writing from a prison cell, Paul boldly instructs the Philippians: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God" (Philippians 4:6 NIV). It is hard to imagine never being worried. Yet Paul offers a good way to

respond to the concerns in our hearts and minds: prayer. Research has repeatedly shown prayer to be beneficial to emotional and physical well-being. One study (Whittington and Scher, 2010) looked at specific types of prayer, and identified three that produce positive effects in areas such as self-esteem, optimism, meaning in life, and satisfaction with life: "adoration (pure worship of God without reference to specific events or needs), thanksgiving (thanks to God for specific positive outcomes or circumstances), and prayers of reception (prayers focused on opening oneself up to closeness with God)."

While we are invited to bring our concerns to God, there is clear evidence that Paul's reminder to include thanksgiving and bring our focus back to God is a critical part of prayer! Indeed, Paul followed his instruction with a promise: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (vs. 7). We don't have to rely on our own capacities to

remain anxiety-free, but in our "prayers of reception" can receive his peace.

Paul gives a third recommendation for dealing with our anxiety: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things" (vs. 8). Rather than focusing our thoughts on the possible negative outcomes, considering the positive can quickly reduce anxiety.

Where do you find that your thoughts go when facing daunting tasks or difficult situations? Try bringing your worries back to God in prayer, receiving his peace, and re-focusing on the good around you, whether a smile on someone's face, a good deed done, or a beautiful piece of creation. When struggling to find that peace and overcome anxiety, also remember that we are called to encourage each other in the difficult times. Don't be afraid to ask for support from those around you.