**The Peace of God Will Guard Your Hearts**

**The Word**

Read together Philippians 4:4-7

**The Big Idea**

Paul calls us out of a posture of anxiety into a life of constant prayer and gratitude. We are called into a practice and discipline of prayer whereby we earn a “hard fought peace” as we turn our cares over to God.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. Consider the overarching theme of the next few weeks: “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Proverbs 4:23). As you considered that command and that image on Sunday, what issues or questions came up for you?

2. We talked about anxiety on Sunday. As you consider your life right now, what circumstance is creating anxiety for you? And as you consider your life as a whole, are there 1 or 2 key issues that are your main triggers for anxiety (e.g. conflict, failure, loss of control, safety, relationships, etc.)?

3. Read Paul’s commands and promise in v. 6-7. What phrase or idea is most meaningful to you? What phrase do you most want to hang onto this week?

4. Consider the challenge at the end of Sunday’s message to not go for peace but to go for God instead. Consider the challenge to pursue a “hard fought peace” that only comes with discipline and training. How did those challenges strike you and speak to your own thoughts about anxiety and God’s peace?

**Going Deeper: Sermon Outline**

I. Guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23)

A. The “heart” is our core, our inner person from which comes our deepest emotions, beliefs, motivations, and values

 B. The heart is a “wellspring” in that everything we do flows from our hearts

C. Since the heart is so important and valuable we are called to “guard” our hearts: to watch over, protect, and cultivate healthy hearts

 1. Our goal is to have “Christ dwell in our hearts through faith” (Eph 3:16-17)

 2. But we know that other things also dwell in our hearts

D. Over the next 3 weeks we’ll discuss enemies that threaten our hearts and how we can engage in practices and habits that protect our hearts

II. Anxiety

A. We all experience anxiety to some extent

B. We live in a culture of anxiety

C. Anxiety does unhelpful things to the heart

 1. Anxiety weighs down the heart and robs the heart of freedom and joy

2. Anxiety makes the heart smaller as the heart turns inward on itself and becomes self-absorbed and preoccupied with worry. It makes the heart less free to love well.

III. Paul’s encouragement

 A. The Lord is near (v. 5)

 1. God is a God of peace who is always in perfect control and at peace

2. God loves us, knows what we needs, and wants to provide good things for his children (Mt 6:25-34)

 B. Do not be anxious about anything (v. 6)

1. We normally group circumstances into things worth working about and things not worth worrying about, but Paul says we don’t need that first category

2. Worrying is always unhelpful and unproductive (“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”)

C. Pray about everything (v. 6)

1. Paul’s antidote to anxiety is bringing all of our cares and concerns to God in prayer

a. Prayer enlarges our hearts again: we focus on God and our world expands again

b. Prayer frees the heart from that weight and burden as we “cast our cares” on the Lord.

 2. With Thanksgiving

 a. Thanksgiving is such a helpful antidote to anxiety

b. It is very hard for our hearts to be anxious and thankful at the same time

 D. And the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds (v. 7)

 1. The peace of God is the peace that God himself possesses and lives within

2. His peace will “guard” our hearts and minds. The image is of a detachment of soldiers standing guard around a city and keeping it safe from enemy invaders

3. His peace “surpasses understanding.” It is more effective than all our reasoning power. And we can experience his peace even when we don’t fully understand it; even when we’re going through a hard circumstance and wouldn’t expect to experience peace.

IV. Conclusion

 A. Don’t seek peace; seek God

B. It’s easy to focus on wanting the anxious feeling to go away and wanting a peaceful feeling, but our role is actually not to get a peaceful feeling (that’s God’s job if and when he sees fit). Our role is simply to go to God with our cares in prayer and thanksgiving.

C. This is a “hard fought peace.” It doesn’t always come easily, but it comes over time as we engaging in a daily training of our hearts.

1. Jesus was anxious in the garden of Gethsemane, but he won a hard-fought peace through prayer

2. Paul was probably anxious at times in prison in Rome, but he won a hard-fought peace

D. Let the feeling of anxiety be the thing that triggers/initiates a process you go through of prayer and thanksgiving and entrusting your cares to God.

1. If you feel anxious 100 times this week, then you go through that process 100 times

2. This way, we always win. Even if anxiety comes upon us, that very anxiety triggers in us a healthy process of going to God and giving thanks.