

"Anxiety and Thanksgiving"

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! But is that how you've always felt? Our day and age has been described by some as "The Age of Anxiety." In fact, to be alive at this time and be an American and to be anxious appears to be synonymous. The pressures of life can be staggering. No wonder there are so many drugs for anxiety. Economic insecurity, where our country seems to be headed, acts of terrorism, violence, diminishing natural resources and mounting family demands can all contribute to a climate of anxiety. Even believers are affected by feelings of anxiety as they witness the general moral and spiritual state of things declining and feel helpless to do anything about it. It's not hard to feel anxious. Who doesn't know what Xanax is?

What do you do? Say "Woe is me – we're doomed!" Let me tell you – that's not a Christian response! I can say that because look at what the apostle Paul (who had more than his share of trouble and distressing circumstances) said: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Are you anxious? Turn to the Lord in prayer and do so with thanksgiving for God's many blessings in Jesus Christ. That, in fact, is the key – to be thankful! Realize it's difficult to remain anxious if you're giving God thanks for all He does and continues to do.

So – if you're anxious – it's absolutely necessary for you to examine your level of thankfulness! As I noted last week, Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi while in prison. He could have been anxious but he wasn't. Instead, he expressed thanksgiving and encouraged the Philippians to do the same. Most of us don't ever come close to matching Paul's attitude of thankfulness. Many of us are instead often almost overwhelmed by feelings of anxiety. But see how they're connected. Your anxiety is proportionate to the degree to which you are not thankful. Little thankfulness leads to great anxiety. The opposite is also true – it's hard to be anxious about life and what's going to happen when you're living with a grateful heart!

So if you're anxious – how thankful are you? Grumbled lately about the same old job, same old family, same old food, same old life? When things go against us or the state of affairs seems to be bad, we often lose our thankfulness. We wait to express thanks until we see how things are going to turn out – almost sitting in judgment on God and wondering if He's going to do the right thing! But again, understand this well – your level of anxiety is directly connected to the thankfulness or lack thereof that's in your heart! If all is "doom and gloom" you're making a statement about your faith!

During a stormy night in 1860, two vessels, one a freighter and the other a passenger ship, collided on Lake Michigan. The passenger ship, called the Lady Elgin, carried several hundred passengers. When the ship sank, the people jumped into the water, clinging to whatever came their way – lifeboats, floating timbers, even the large bass drum from the ship's orchestra. As the survivors struggled to the Illinois shore, people from the land waded out to extend a helping hand. One who tried to help was a university student by the name of Edward Spencer, an expert swimmer. Spencer succeeded in rescuing 17 persons from a watery grave. But so great was the strain on him that he lost his health and spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

In later years, this hero, Edward Spencer, was asked what he remembered most about that tragic night. You would probably never guess his response. Spencer replied, "I recall the fact that not one of the 17 people I rescued thanked me for saving their lives!" Have you thanked God for rescuing you? What are you saying about God – and your faith! – if all is doom and gloom? Realize how easy it can become to take Him for granted and forget His goodness to

you. Realize also that your anxious feelings are tied to your failure to see Him, His goodness and thank Him! Thankfulness is good for your heart and soul! Because why should you be thankful? Paul states succinctly the reason right here in this text – “The Lord is near!” You will be thankful when you see in a better way that the Lord is near! He came here, to this life, to your life, to win you back to God. The Lord is near. He came and was born to save you from your sins. He enjoyed the glory and majesty of heaven but decided, for our benefit, to humble himself. What Jesus did was more than an example of humility for us to follow. He did it to save us. But Jesus was also exalted to the right hand of God. However, remember His promise to His believers: “I am with you always.” The Lord is always near. Rejoice! Be thankful. Here is the key for living life in a positive, thankful way – by going up, Jesus overcame everything He met when He went down, including whatever problems you may be facing at this very moment. Believe this with all your heart – in your victorious Savior you are able to overcome whatever problem, whatever anxiety you may be facing. He has won for you the victory. And when life goes against you and is filled to the brim with disappointment and failure, that's when you especially are to realize you still have everything because you still have your Savior – or your Savior still has you! When you are weak, realize the strength that is yours in your victorious Savior! And He is near – in fact, He is almost ready to return to take His own to eternal glory.

You need to lower yourself, humble yourself and trust Him to lift you up. So if you're anxious, check your thankfulness thermometer. How high is your thanks, how great is your trust? Not where it should be? Turn to God: “in everything, by prayer and petition, present your requests to God with thanksgiving.” Humble yourself and also ask Him to make you more thankful. Not only will your anxiety decrease but here's the ultimate blessing: “The peace of God which transcends all understanding, will (then) guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus!” Amen.