

THE DIVINE EXCHANGE

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Scripture: Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This past week, I had the privilege of being with a group of people, and the theme was prayer. I was so encouraged because there were over a hundred people who joined on that zoom link to pray together for the needs of people, among themselves and then later. I was so blessed because prayer has been on my heart, my mind for some time.

When we started CAP (and CAP is going to be 25 years in April) we were wondering what to do about launching it. So, a couple of families got together and brainstormed the whole day and came up with nothing. Finally, everybody just bailed and said, "It's up to you; you decide." The next day I spent time writing down things and planning some kind of a launch for the first service. And I felt the Lord saying, "You're not going to need it." And I said, "Why, Lord?" he replied, "Because you're going to be on your back for a whole month." I thought to myself: No. this can't be. I'm hale and healthy. I'm keeping well. how can I be on my back? And the next day, I went down with jaundice and was on my back the whole month.

But the Lord spoke to me during that time and said, "The one thing that you forgot to put in, was the foundation of prayer to build the church." So, Sheila and I spent the whole month praying together; we got prayer requests from different people, and then sent prayer requests all over to friends who were in different parts of the world, asking them all to pray and undergird the starting of The Church At Powai with prayer.

Prayer is so important. Sometimes we look at prayer only in terms of "What can I get from God?" or "What can He do for me?" or "I have a need right now." And we forget that there are also results and consequences that happen when we pray. Look at our own lives. to live the Christian life isn't easy, because we are called to live a life that is often contrary to the principles and norms and givens of the world.

Consider these requirements upon us:

- To love our neighbors
- To turn the other cheek
- To live humbly before Him
- To have compassion for people
- To live under the authority of God
- To submit to the Holy Spirit
- To emulate the life Jesus lived

All this is pretty nigh impossible without the power of God's grace and the empowerment that comes from Him working in and through us. God's power enables us to live a life worthy of our calling, as the Amplified Bible puts it. Today I am going to read from the Amplified as I found that the way it brings out the nuances of the Word, kind of sat with me and the scriptures that I want to present to you.

Ephesians 4:1 *So I, the prisoner for the Lord, appeal to you to live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called [that is, to live a life that exhibits godly character, moral courage, personal integrity, and mature behavior – a life that expresses gratitude to God for your salvation]*

To live a life worthy of our calling – that’s why we have prayer. Prayer enables us to call out to Him, to Him who is able “to accomplish all things.” As John Piper says, “God has established prayer as the means by which we receive supernatural help. Without supernatural help, we cannot live a life worthy of the gospel.” Prayer therefore, must be central to our lives, not peripheral; not something we kind of add on, not something we do when we are in some kind of need or desperation. It must be central to who we are as children of the Most-High God.

Jesus, when He was teaching His disciples about the generosity of His Father, said, “Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door shall be opened unto you.” And when we examine this text found in Matthew 7:7, we find that in the original Greek, it is in the present continuous tense. In other words – keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking, and you will get what you ask for, you will find what you are seeking, and the door will be opened.

Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:16 *“Pray without ceasing.”*

Prayer must be central; it’s not something we just add on, as I said. It must be something that just comes out of our lives, from our pores, out of our very being, that we are in communion with God, constant conversations with Him. Pray without ceasing – present continuous tense.

Let’s consider Paul’s words in Philippians 4:6-7. What is he saying? Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Paul is saying: Don’t just think that you are being told you’ve got to pray, you’ve got to pray continuously. He says that when you pray, something else happens. And he says that the peace of God which surpasses all our human comprehension and understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Let’s unpack this.

Don’t be anxious about anything.....

Anything! Not your children, not your relationships, not your groceries, your provisions, your rent, your job, anything. Don’t be anxious about anything, however little; maybe sickness, maybe nagging ailments, or exams, studies. Don’t be anxious about anything.

Mentioning studies, I thought about the time when I was in the 10th grade, and I remember coming towards that final exam and I was nowhere near prepared. I remember sitting in church and the preacher spoke about how God is available to us when we ask, and all of that. then he said, “I know this is exam time and many of you would love to get a first class. Come and meet me after the service.” I was the first one out after the sermon was done. I was ready to find out what technique he had that would get me a first class. There were others like, and we all sat down. Then he said, “I want you to go home and clear your desk. Then put a big piece of paper there and some things that you need to study about. Then pray and ask God to help you to get that first class. Then do whatever God wants you to do.”

And my heart sank. Here I thought he had a wonderful secret technique that didn’t involve studying and all of that to get that first class. I remember going home and I was quite disappointed, but I went to my desk and I saw the clutter of things and thought, “Well, why don’t I give it a chance?” So I cleared my desk and put all the books that I needed there. And then I prayed, “Lord, please help me.

Show me how I need to study. I want to get that first class.” And beloved, I kid you not. God did. I began to find out things that I hadn’t seen. I was able to memorize things. In my prelims, when I took the Algebra exam, I got 17 marks. My teacher had given up on me. But during that time that I spent with the Lord, asking for His wisdom, God showed me things about my studies that helped me. Do you know – I got 93 in my final exam! I can see you youngsters looking at each other and saying: 17 to 92 is a great trajectory! Yes, it is! But we need to understand that God is the one who is able to help us. There are no magic tricks that happen. God tells us what to do, we put in the work and we see the results.

Paul is saying the same thing. He says, “When we pray, there’s a consequence that happens beyond what you are asking for. There’s a consequence that settles upon us. What did connecting with God and praying to Him have to do with my marks? Well, it brought God front and center into my life. It reinforced and reinforces the centrality of prayer in your life and in mine. That’s where Paul is going with this message – he’s moving from anything to everything.

In everything.....

Do not be anxious or worried about anything, but in everything, every circumstance and situation, everything that has the potential to steal your joy, destroy your peace and increase the worry and the anxiety and tension in your life, everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, continue to make your specific requests known to God. Bring all of those things to the Father.

Anything and everything. An all-encompassing word. Everything – bring it to the throne room of grace and leave it there. What happens then?

God’s peace....

Paul says: And the peace of God, that peace which reassures the heart, that peace which transcends all understanding, that peace which stands guard over your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus is yours. What a wonderful promise, to just think about it.

This begs the question – have you felt and experienced that peace? A peace that steadies your heart and calms your troubled mind. Maybe sometime in the past, maybe it’s been a while, maybe you’ve forgotten what that kind of peace is like. I’ve seen that peace. I’ve known parents who lost their little child exhibit that peace. I’ve seen ones who lost their jobs for taking a stand exhibit that peace. I’ve seen students in seminary who had no way of paying their fees rest in this peace. I’ve seen it in a dad praying next to his son who had three times the medication that his body could handle – I’ve seen him be enveloped in that peace.

Have you, beloved? Have you experienced or are you experiencing that peace even now, the peace that comes from bringing anything and everything to the feet of the Master? This peace that reassures the heart and transcends your own understanding? It doesn’t add up, it doesn’t make sense, it can’t be explained. And yet, there’s this peace. Why? How come? I think the prophet Isaiah would try to answer that because he writes about God: “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you because he trusts you.”

Or as the Amplified bible says, “You will keep in perfect and constant peace the one whose mind is steadfast [that is, committed and focused on You – in both inclination and character], because he trusts and takes refuge in You [with hope and confident expectation].”

So, troubled parent trying to juggle the needs of children and home, overworked underpaid employee trying to make the money last through to the end of the month, anxious entrepreneur wondering if the latest creative advertisement will work, desperate youngster unable to make sense of what’s going on in your life, ailing one weighed down by debilitating medical issues – to you I say,

have you exchanged anything and everything for this peace that defies your human comprehension and ability?

Amazing Peace....

Paul hasn't finished yet. He still has something else to say. Here's what this amazing peace can do for you. When we pray, God gives us this amazing peace that settles upon our hearts as we do this exchange – take our anything and everything to Him in prayer and accept the peace. But the peace does something else in our hearts. It will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus. The NASB and the Amplified says: It stands guard over your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. This peace is yours. This peace stands guard over your heart and your mind.

Why do you need your heart and your mind to be guarded?

Proverbs 4:23 *Guard your heart above all else for it determines the course of your life.*"

Jesus puts it like this, "But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these things defile a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony and slander. However, the things that settle on your heart, these things they come originally from thoughts that come into your mind.

That's why Paul goes on in the very next verse to say, "Finally believers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable and worthy of respect, whatever is right and confirmed by God's word, whatever is pure and wholesome, whatever is right and confirmed by God's word, whatever is admirable and of good repute; if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise – think continually on these things." Center your mind on them and implant them on your heart.

I had a bible teacher who used to say: "When thoughts come to us, they come down into our place where we have to make a decision, our wills. Above there are two valves that open – one is the valve of the Holy Spirit and the other is the valve of the flesh. We have an opportunity at that time as we look at it to say, 'Holy Spirit, You tell me – is this good or not?' And the Holy Spirit helps us understand what is good and noble and of good repute, something that is right and pure and says, "Okay, you can allow it, or don't allow it." The flesh on the other hand says, "Allow it, allow it." – things that will bring you down. the mind allows these thoughts and the Holy Spirit tells us.

Here's the thing, beloved. The peace that God gives us, that peace guards your heart and your mind. You have this peace that passes your understanding. You cannot understand it. You look and say, "Why? When nothing has changed, how am I so peaceful?" Because you have that peace, the Holy Spirit is now able to work and guard your heart and your mind so that the things that come in are good and wholesome and pure.

So what happens? This peace that is now guarding your heart and your mind will ward off distrust, will put away doubt, will overcome fear, will stop anxious thoughts from overwhelming you. Temptations will remind you of promises from the Word, to resist it and help you with some of the frustrations of life. This peace that comes because you have handed over anything and everything to God, then guards your heart and your mind from all of these things. If we allow God's peace to take root in our hearts because we have handed over the anything and the everything to Him.

I love this hymn:

My faith looks up to you
O Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine.
Now hear me while I pray
Take all my guilt away
O let me from this day be wholly Thine.

Wholly Thine! The centrality of prayer becomes a part of our continued existence. We breathe in and breathe out communication with God. We enjoy this peace that comes and lifts us and guards our hearts and our minds. I want to ask you this morning: Do you need this peace in your life? are you tired and weary and exhausted by the things you are doing, the burdens that you are carrying or the troubles that you are facing? Then beloved, it's time to take it to the Lord in prayer. Take it to the Lord in prayer, your anything and everything that produces these anxious thoughts – take it to Him because His peace is waiting to invade you and capture you and overwhelm you and be the guardian of your heart and your mind.

As we come to a close, will you do that divine exchange that is offered in the Word. We probably know this hymn by heart, but I believe that the Holy Spirit is giving it fresh meaning right now. This hymn is coming to you with the power of the Holy Spirit to move you, to reach out to God and say, "I want to do the exchange.

What a friend we have in Jesus
All our sins and griefs to bear.
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer.
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged.
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful?
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness.
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Dearly beloved, if you are ready to do this – exchange your burdens for His peace, I want to invite you to stand. If this is what the Spirit of God has been speaking to you and saying, "You don't need to be carrying this burden or these burdens. You don't need to be in a place where you don't have peace. My peace is being offered to you, the peace that will pass your human understanding." If that's what you want this morning, I want you to stand. Don't worry about family members; don't worry about who is in the room. This is between you and the Lord. if the Lord has been speaking to you, if you've been weighed down and you're just saying, "Lord, I'm done. I've had it. I'm carrying this for too long. I want to do this divine exchange with You, my burdens for Your peace", will you stand?

Let us pray. Lord Jesus. I'm tired of carrying this burden. I'm tired of walking alone. I have heard Your voice today inviting me to give You anything and everything. I bring them before You right now. Lord Jesus, this is the area of my life that I can't handle. (Go ahead and tell Him the area. Be specific) I turn it over to You Lord. in its place, give me Your glorious peace that passes my understanding and comprehension and continue to guard my heart and enable me to walk and enjoy this freedom. In Your name Lord Jesus, I pray. Amen.