



This week was our penultimate sermon in our topical series considering how Jesus is such good news for our current culture. Our focus today was anxiety and mental health issues.

People are agreed that the current younger generation is significantly more prone to anxiety than previous generations, there is some disagreement though as to why this is. Some think it may just be that we are better at diagnosing them, others think that perhaps people are more open about mental health issues now... but there is a growing consensus that being constantly online has a significant part to play.

Firstly it impacts what we are NOT doing

1. Being online means we are not doing other things that increase our well-being such as being active or spending time outside or exercising so much
2. It also means we don't sleep as well because often people are staying up into the night surfing the net or scrolling on phones and tablets
3. Also it means we're not interacting as much in a real bodily face-to-face sense, but rather behind screens.

It also means that we ARE doing things online that can exacerbate anxiety and mental health issues

1. We can be potentially bombarded by all kinds of information that can make us fearful. Real-time news for eg is both a blessing and a curse as we learn of awful incidents happening around the globe as they happen that can fuel awareness or prayers, but can also play on our minds as we slip into 'what-if' scenarios...
2. As we talked about in previous weeks the social media comparison game can cause real anxiety for us as we see what everyone else is doing, how fulfilled they look and compare ourselves with them.
3. We can also feel FOMO (fear of missing out) partly because we may have left the phone at home and so feeling anxiety about not being connected, but also the reality of missing out as we see other people's lives and things that are going on.

4. Fourthly (and as in the news this week) there is a growing concern about the reality of self-harm and suicide as it is related to social media. Whether it be online bullies, or simply the ability and privacy to find unhelpful posts that advertise these things.

We also briefly listed a whole other selection of possible sources of anxiety in our world at the moment for example (1) our current polarised culture, or (2) the uncertainty about our economy or Brexit, or (3) the fact that many modern families are decreasingly stable and so that wider community context is not always there, as well as (4) the fragility we've spoken of in previous weeks with much of the younger generation.

The final source of anxiety we mentioned (5) is perhaps the fact that in our world we are able to control many things and live in relative comfort, however at times we get glimpses of the fact that we are not as in control as we thought we were, and that can cause anxiety.

We spent our time in Philippians 4v4-8 and noted initially that the Christians are facing opposition as they trust in Jesus. Paul's command for them though that sets the agenda for the entire passage is that they always be those who 'rejoice in the Lord' (v4).

Easier said than done! He's not simply telling them to rejoice though, but rather to rejoice in the Lord. The problem with problems however is that they have a way of overshadowing and affecting everything. Thus Paul's foundational answer, as we rejoice 'in the Lord' is that Jesus is bigger than whatever is going on.

We must be a people who increasingly preach that truth to our hearts, because so easily we forget it.

Then Paul gives us three 'hurdles' to rejoicing:

#### 1. gentleness (v5)

Usually our tendency in the midst of hardship is to not be gentle but rather harsh with people. However Paul urges gentleness because the Lord is near. Perhaps that's a comfort because it means you are not alone and can rejoice, or perhaps it's that we don't have to retaliate because God has seen and one-day justice will be served.

#### 2. anxiety (v6)

Fundamentally anxiety comes from us trusting the wrong things. Which means that Paul's command in this verse is challenging. He is aware of the fact that anything can bring us anxiety and yet his solution is simple (in theory!). The solution is that we pray. Problem is we can be slow to pray because we trust the wrong thing - we trust in ourselves.

Perhaps that's why thanksgiving is in there? Because in the midst of the panic if we can remember to press pause and take stock and give thanks for what we do know, then anxiety can be perhaps less of an issue.

### 3. thought-life (v8)

Increasingly we need to be those who trust in the right things and so in v8 Paul urges us to change what we think about. What seems most likely is that Paul is using a common idea of wisdom from the time and redefining it for the church. In the context of Philippians Jesus is the perfectly true-noble-right-pure (etc) one so as we focus on him (rather than trying to distract ourselves or forget our anxieties) it is then that we may find we are more able to 'rejoice in the Lord always'.

Here are some questions to start your group off"

- What things make you most anxious? How do you generally deal with them?
- Do you think phone or Internet usage helps or hinders anxiety? In what sense?
- Are you one who is able to rejoice in the Lord always? Why do you think we struggle so much to do this?
- Why do you think Paul talks about gentleness here and how might that relate to our rejoicing in the Lord?
- What is Paul's antidote to anxiety? Why does he focus on these things? What does he promise? Does this ring true with you?
- Why do you think Paul wants the Philippians to change what they think about and reflect upon? Have a read through the song about Jesus in chapter 2. What elements here can lead us to rejoicing and reducing our anxiety?