



**Being a Calm, Non-anxious  
Presence**  
*In an anxious world*

# Being A Calm, Non-anxious Presence; *In An Anxious World*

## SESSION 1: The pressure to make the most of life

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### BIG IDEA

**Secular society tells us we only have one life and we need to make the most of it.**

Q: In what ways do you feel like you are:

- Missing out
- Others are gaining



### A calm, non-anxious presence

Edwin Friedman (rabbi, organisational consultant, family therapist) wrote a book called: [Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix \(2007\)](#). His main thesis was that leaders fail not because they lack information, skill, or technique, but because they lack the nerve and presence to stand firm in the midst of other people's emotional anxiety and reactivity. (Friedman isn't referring to clinical anxiety but people's instinctive responses when they feel threatened).

Developing a calm, non-anxious presence begins with being clear on:

- Who am I?
- Where am I going?
- Why am I here?

Leader or not, being a calm, non-anxious presence helps to make a positive difference in our lives and the lives of others. It means for example that we don't just go along with what everyone else thinks. We can stay connected but take a stand even at the risk of displeasing others.

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## An anxious world

The book of Philippians in the Bible is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a young church in the city of Philippi (modern day Greece). He penned it less than 30 years after the death of Jesus. Paul was the one who started the church. They maintained a warm friendship even after Paul left<sup>1</sup>.

Paul writes from a prison in Rome. He had been gaoled for being a follower of Jesus and spreading the message of Jesus to others. Presumably Paul dies there or is executed<sup>2</sup>.

Both the writer and original readers were living in an anxious world. It will be interesting to observe how being a calm, non-anxious presence plays out for Paul.



## What is Paul saying here?

Paul believes his imprisonment isn't a setback but rather a positive. Firstly, everyone in gaol knows why he's there. Secondly, followers of Jesus are now speaking more boldly about their faith. This last point is surprising. One would expect that incarcerating the leader

### Philippians 1:12-26 [New International Version]

<sup>12</sup> Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. <sup>13</sup> As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. <sup>14</sup> And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

<sup>15</sup> It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.

<sup>16</sup> The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defence of the gospel.

<sup>17</sup> The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. <sup>18</sup> But what does it matter? The important

<sup>1</sup> For example, someone from their church even journeyed to another city to look after Paul when they heard he was ill (Philippians 2).

<sup>2</sup> The book of Acts finishes with Paul being imprisoned in Rome for two years – nothing is recorded after that.

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thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. <sup>20</sup> I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

<sup>21</sup> For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. <sup>22</sup> If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! <sup>23</sup> I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; <sup>24</sup> but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

**Q. What interests you in the above Bible passage?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

would intimidate the followers into silence, for fear of punishment. But instead it is having the opposite effect.

Paul is not the only one speaking publicly about Jesus. Some are speaking in support of Paul while others are taking advantage of Paul's absence to make a name for themselves. Interestingly, Paul doesn't feel threatened. What he cares about is that people are getting to hear about Jesus. He's not so concerned about the motives of the speaker in doing so. Paul actually sees his gaol time as something that will work out for his good ("deliverance"). He doesn't want to compromise his faith at all by acting in a way that brings shame to the one he seeks to imitate (Jesus). So for Paul, there's no backing down.

What motivates Paul is this: "to live is Christ and to die is gain". His whole life is about Jesus. Death is a gain because he gets to be with Jesus. That's why Paul can rejoice that he is in

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prison - because of his commitment to *Jesus*. That's why Paul can rejoice in the face of competition - because the message of *Jesus* is being heard. That's why Paul would choose life over death - so that he can help others trust *Jesus* more. That's why Paul can rejoice even though being in gaol looks like his life's work hasn't amounted to very much.

***Q. How does this help address some of the questions you have?***

***Q. What other questions do you now have?***



Takeaway

Paul could look at his circumstances and think his life's work hasn't amounted to very much. Yet instead he is a calm, non-anxious presence (who rejoices!)

***Q. How would Paul answer the questions:***

***Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here?***

We are told that we only have one life and we need to make the most of it.

***Q. When you feel you are missing out and others are gaining, how would you answer the questions:***

***Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here?***

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## SESSION 2: The pressure to be front and centre

2

### BIG IDEA

***Secular society tells us that the most important person in the world is...ourselves.***

Q. In what ways do you feel like you are being:

- Overlooked
- Undervalued



### A calm, non-anxious presence

In the first session we established that having a calm non-anxious presence has positives for everyone, whether or not you are leading other people. The book of Philippians in the Bible is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a young church in the city of Philippi (modern day Greece)<sup>3</sup>. Paul was the one who started the church. They maintained a warm friendship even after Paul left. Paul writes from a prison in Rome. He had been gaoled for being a follower of Jesus and spreading the message of Jesus to others.



### An anxious world

Both the writer and original readers were living in an anxious world. For both, their very existence was threatened. Paul's gaol sentence presumably ends in execution<sup>4</sup>. Locals would have viewed the Philippian church as a dangerous cult. It will be interesting to observe how being a calm, non-anxious presence plays out for Paul.

<sup>3</sup> Paul penned his letter less than 30 years after the death of Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> The book of Acts finishes with Paul being imprisoned in Rome for two years – nothing is recorded after that.



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## Philippians 2:1-16 [New International Version]

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.<sup>3</sup> Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death—

even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,

to the glory of God the Father.

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose.

14 Do everything without grumbling or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation[a].” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky 16 as you hold firmly to the word of life.

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

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[a] Paul is referring to around 1300 BC when under Moses the Israelites spent 40 years in the wilderness. This was punishment for the way they grumbled and complained about God and his way of doing things.



## What is Paul saying here?

Paul wants his readers to be “like-minded” or have “one-mind”. This doesn’t mean each person will think exactly the same on everything, allowing no room for preferences or personality differences. Rather, it means they will work together for the common good.

Paul knows that being of “one-mind” is only possible if individuals stop fighting for their own interests. This will mean putting aside personal ambition and personal pride (“vain conceit”). It will mean valuing other people’s interests above their own interests. The key here is *humility*. Humility is: “not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less” [C.S. Lewis].

According to Paul, Jesus is humble in the way he acted for the interests of others. He didn’t think of himself but rather gave up his rights and privileges as God’s Son to be born and to die as a human being. His self-sacrifice makes restoration of the relationship between God and humanity possible. God honoured Jesus by raising him to a position of power.

This humble Jesus is worthy of imitation. This powerful Jesus is worthy of transformation (“work out your salvation with fear and trembling”). What will motivate individuals to transform from self-interest to selfless-interest is the knowledge that someone powerful *and* humble is looking after their interests.

There is comfort too in knowing that God himself is assisting with this transformation (“God who works in you to will and to act”). Practical evidence that individuals have stopped fighting for their own interests is when there is an absence of grumbling and arguing. These behaviours naturally arise when individuals do not get what they want. An absence of grumbling and arguing marks out Jesus’ followers as being different.

## Q. How does this help address some of the questions you have?



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**Q. What other questions do you now have?**



## Takeaway

A community where everyone is working for their own interests is an anxious community. A community that follows Jesus must imitate the humility of its leader.

**Q. What would Paul say to his readers:**

***You are? You are going? You are here to?***

We are told that **we** are the most important person in the world.

**Q. When you are feeling overlooked or undervalued, how would you answer the questions:**

***Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here?***

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## SESSION 3: The pressure to excel

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### BIG IDEA

***Secular society tells us that we are only as good as what we can achieve.***

*Q. In what ways do you feel like you are:*

- *Being surpassed*
- *Surpassing others*



### A calm, non anxious presence

In the last two sessions we looked at the ways we are tempted to be anxious; we might fear missing out on things or fear being overlooked. The previous studies show that:

- Paul gives us an example of aiming to be a calm, non-anxious presence rather than concern himself with whether he is missing out on opportunities in life
- A community focussed on Jesus will strive for humility, not being important, which leads to healthy community rather than anxiety.



### An anxious world

This session looks at our temptation to continually excel to prove our value to other people. The world tells us we are only as good as our last success and to be looking over our shoulder to check that we are not being beaten by someone more talented or driven than ourselves.

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## Philippians 3:4-14 [New International Version]

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. 7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. 13 Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**



**What is Paul saying here?**

“Confidence in the flesh” means what people rely on in and of themselves to qualify or be accepted. Paul is saying that as far as being accepted by God is concerned - he is the complete package. He is the complete package in three ways: ancestry, law and zeal. When it came to ancestry, Paul is the “Jew of Jews”: circumcised and of a good bloodline. When it came to law: he kept it to the minutia (The Pharisees went so far as tithing - giving 10% - of

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the herbs from their garden<sup>3</sup>). When it came to zeal, he led the persecution of Christians and what he then believed was their false claim that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Paul sums it up: if being righteous or acceptable before God came down to who were or what we could achieve – Paul has it in spades. He is “faultless”. Inbuilt into a performance culture is the idea that one must look sideways and outshine others. And that’s Paul: he might not be perfect but definitely the star performer.

Paul used to think like that. Now he has realised that what made someone acceptable before God didn’t rest on what they could contribute. Righteousness didn’t come from someone’s achievements but it was something that God gave to the person. And God gave it to those who believed and trusted that Jesus had died for them. It was righteousness by faith. So all of Paul’s credentials and achievements he now considered garbage (the original word was “dung heap”!). He just wants to know this Jesus better – this Jesus to whom he owes his very acceptance by God.

He is willing to suffer like Jesus if that means being raised like Jesus. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...it’s all about Jesus. Paul is no longer looking sideways comparing himself to others – or internally to glory in his own performance. He keeps looking forward: to Jesus, and being with him. And that’s how the former star performer and persecutor of Jesus’ followers can keep the wrongs of the past in the past and “press on”.

**Q. How does this help address some of the questions you have?**

**Q. What other questions do you now have?**

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## Takeaway

Paul used to think that with God it was about being a star performer. Any type of performance culture is anxiety producing because it requires constant comparisons with others.

**Q. After realising that with God it's not a performance culture, how would Paul answer the questions:**

***Who am I? Where am I going? Why am I here?***

We live in a performance culture where we are only as good as what we can achieve.

**Q. When you feel you are being surpassed – or surpassing others - how would you answer the questions:**

***Who am I...Where am I going...Why am I here?***

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## SESSION 4: The pressure from an age of discontent

4

### BIG IDEA

***Secular society tells us that everything has to be bigger, brighter and better than what we have now.***

*Q. In what ways do you feel:*

- Unsettled
- Bored



### A calm, non-anxious presence

This final session may be the most difficult of all to apply. Perhaps you can resist the urge to feel like you are missing out or being overlooked, or suppress the urge to achieve just to be noticed. Paul's final tip for being a calm, non-anxious presence is contentment. His basis for the power of contentment may find its first direct mention in the New Testament, but it is an overarching theme throughout the Old Testament too.



### An anxious world

Our world is anxious to prove itself through possessions, achievements and status. This constant state of improvement, achievement and ladder-climbing leads to the opposite of contentment. Being constantly dissatisfied with what you currently have is not a calming way to live.



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## Philippians 4:4-19 [New International Version]

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, 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. <sup>9</sup> Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. <sup>10</sup> I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup> I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup> I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup> I can do all this through him who gives me strength. <sup>14</sup> Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup> Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; <sup>16</sup> for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. <sup>17</sup> Not that I desire your gifts; what I desire is that more be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup> I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup> And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

**Q. What interests you here?**

**Q. What questions do you have?**

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## What is Paul saying here?

Paul uses the word rejoice eight times in four chapters. Paul has found things to delight in, even though there are some aspects of his personal circumstances that he would have found quite challenging (like being in gaol, for instance). Paul thinks there is always a reason to rejoice because God is “near”. Having God in close proximity is only of value if God

has the power and willingness to act. One can be kind to others (“let your gentleness be evident...”) if one knows who is in your corner (God).

The antidote to anxiety is humility – humility before God in prayer. God will reward those prayers by giving his peace which “guards” hearts and minds to keep on trusting that God will act and do what is best. Paul exhorts his readers to focus their mental energy on what is true and right. Along with Paul’s example, this focus will give them confidence to act in a way that pleases God. The warm friendship that this community has with Paul is evidenced in the way they sent him financial aid when he needed it. Paul makes it clear that he is not fishing for more gifts – but rather, he sees their generosity as evidence of their faith (“what I desire is that more be credited to your account”).

Paul isn’t fishing for more gifts for two reasons. Firstly, he believes he is content. Secondly, believes God is looking after him (“My God will meet all your needs...” – presumably the same God will meet Paul’s needs). Interestingly, there is a secret to being content. It is something that one learns through the good times and the hard times. The secret is to not see circumstances as the source of contentment but rather God himself, as God is the one who gives contentment (“I can do all things through him who gives me strength”).

## Q. How does this help address some of the questions you have?

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## Q. What other questions do you now have?

Being a calm, non-anxious presence in an anxious world Paul could look at his circumstances and find every reason to be discontent. Yet instead he is a calm, non-anxious presence (who rejoices!).

## Q. How would Paul answer the questions:

***Who am I? ...***

***Where am I going?...***

***Why am I here?***

We live in an age of discontent where everything has to be bigger, brighter and better.

## Q. When you feel unsettled or bored how would you answer the questions:

***Who am I?***

***Where am I going?***

***Why am I here?***



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