DIFFUSE ANXIETY BY RENEWING YOUR MIND

Feeling anxious these days? You are not alone. Anxiety is on the rise in our country in adults, and especially among adolescents. But while many of the precipitating pressures may be unique to our day, anxiety itself is not.

The ancient King Solomon addressed it in his book of Proverbs (circa 965 BC), in the Bible's Old Testament: "Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad" (Proverbs 12:25). "A good word" may sound like a flimsy remedy for the oppressiveness of anxiety, but it means far more than just saying, "Don't worry, be happy."

While medical intervention is sometimes a necessary aid when contending with anxiety, the loving wisdom of God contained in the good word of the Bible is a powerful remedy. We can see that in the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, written while he was imprisoned in Rome. His circumstances could easily have induced anxiety, but instead, the whole letter exudes joy.

It includes a double exhortation to rejoice in the Lord, followed by this timeless, divine antidote to anxiety: "The Lord is at hand; 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 minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:5b-7).

That first step -- being mindful of the presence of Almighty God in any situation -- readily reduces anxiety. That is the same truth

conveyed so powerfully in the 23rd Psalm: "Even thought I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me."

The next step is to pray to Him, "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1), thanking Him for his constant companionship and asking Him forthrightly for help. Then, having given the matter over to God, we can receive his distinctive "peace which surpasses all understanding."

But importantly, Paul did not stop there. He went on to explain that we can embed that peace in our hearts and minds by consciously breaking the loop of anxious thoughts. He wrote, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about *these* things" (Philippians 4:8, emphasis added).

Admittedly, this is not always easy to do in anxious moments, when our minds want to revert to the troubling matters we just turned over to God; but I can attest that peace does settle in when you intentionally renew your mind in this way.

Having a mental stockpile of lovely, commendable, excellent and praiseworthy things ready to ponder helps us be prepared to exchange our anxiety for God's peace. The Bible is full of noble stories exuding God's faithfulness, so reading God's word and memorizing some of his hope-filled promises proactively builds that stockpile.

Jesus personifies every praiseworthy thing Paul said to think about, so meditating on his life and his incomparable, unchanging love will also guard our hearts and minds in Him.

Seeking out accounts of the good and beautiful things going on in the world -- they are many, and really available if we look for them -- and adding those to our stockpile of commendable and praiseworthy things to think about also helps us abide in God's peace. I use Nice News, a daily online supply of uplifting news stories, to add to my anti-anxiety stockpile.

By practicing these God-given steps with faith, natural anxiety will subside, giving way to the supernatural peace that Jesus bestows. So friends, commit this -- his loving truth -- to your mental stockpile: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27).

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux