



JOY

Philippians 4:6-7

Vaccine Options

Now that we are well and truly into a new year, our minds are turning to the COVID-19 vaccine process.

The Food and Drug Administration and so many other entities have worked long and hard to help alleviate the continuing threat of SARS-CoV-2.

The January edition of *The New Hampshire Journal of Medical Research* struck a cautious note, encouraging readers to be careful of surprising potential side effects of vaccines developed overseas:

- The British vaccine leaves one with a stiff upper lip.
- The French vaccine refuses to work after four hours.
- The vaccine from India can be hard on the digestive system if you are not used to it.
- The vaccine originating in Spain causes you to be sleepy in the afternoons.
- The Kenyan vaccine is currently running trials and will probably go the distance.
- Canada continues to develop a diplomatic response to the vaccine.
- New Zealand did not develop a vaccine as there is no demand.
- The Russian vaccine appears to not work, but leaves you impervious to criticism.
- The Irish vaccine is only available in liquid form, minimum of 8 pints.
- The vaccine developed in Scotland has entered the digital age and comes with audio instructions to download directly to your phone. Unfortunately, no one can understand them.

Despite my silly sense of humor, most of us are glad that 2020 is behind us, and we are looking forward to a better 2021.

And the peace of God... (v. 7)

The New Testament book of Philippians is one of the great Pauline Epistles, worth immersing yourself in as you continue through January into a new year. It stands out as being one of Paul's most personal letters. No sharp rebukes mar its joyful spirit, no disturbing problems threaten the growth and progress of the reader's relationship with Christ, and

Paul's warnings are of a cautionary and preventive nature. This friendly, forward-looking, warm epistle, well received by the Philippians, is filled with practical advice on how to live the Christian life amid significant challenges and demands.

Within this outstanding epistle are particular passages that have spoken into the lives of millions, so much so that they have memorized them and then applied them to their own lives. This is one of those passages: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:6-7).

Given the year we have just experienced, it seems appropriate to ask when Paul writes "do not be anxious about anything," what does he mean? Is he suggesting we live in blissful ignorance of the reality that surrounds us? Should we pretend that a global pandemic, significant unemployment, an uncertain educational future for our children, and the closing of countless small businesses is no big deal?

In fact, Paul is suggesting the opposite. He recognizes that there are issues in our lives that create anxiety and stress and rob us of joy. They are the first thing we think about in the morning and the last thing we think about at night. These are often things we cannot change, things outside our control.

When chatting with individuals about the issues that cause them anxiety, I often suggest that wrestling with cares, concerns, stress, and tension is like carrying them around in a backpack—they are such a part of our lives that they have come to define who we are. We feel unable to be free from them.

So let me be as practical as I can. When you are under serious pressure and an issue is dominating your every waking moment, remember the principles contained here: *Do not be anxious about anything, but by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:6).

Understand this: When you bring a prayer request to God, you can trust Him for the answer. Have you noticed that when you pray for your children or grandchildren, or for a personal concern, and you bring it to God and leave it with Him, you leave utterly satisfied and content?

What I suspect happens more often is this: You pray hard, open your heart, express your deepest

concerns, take off your concern-filled backpack, lay it down, and finish your prayer. But then as you leave the presence of God, you casually pick it back up and put it on again.

Because that is the only pattern you know. In fact most of us struggle to change that pattern.

Yet if you are ever to grow in your faith, you need to learn to leave your prayer requests with God and trust Him for the outcome. Most of us find this incredibly difficult. We know what we are supposed to do, yet those anxious thoughts, tensions at work, stress within family relationships, and day-to-day concerns fight and scream for our attention. They plead for our time and even make us think we have done the right thing by calming their nerves.

But Paul powerfully reminds us that the heart is quietly sustained and empowered by prayer. Prayer energizes, motivates, and enables us to joyfully strengthen our relationship with Christ and to rely on Him for every need.

Paul teaches us that with prayer and thanksgiving, we can absolutely trust God for the outcome.

Perhaps our prayer for this new year needs to be:

Father, please allow me to hand over to You the unhealthy habits of worry and anxiety, stress and strain. Let me understand that my life is shaped and fashioned in the quiet surrender of a selfless life, prayerfully given over to You each day. Remind me that the quiet unseen moments of prayer move me to obedience and holiness. Enable me to recover from living in the grip of fear, held captive by the chains of tension and dread, and to release my preoccupation with worry.

Let me sense You walking beside me, relieving my tension, altering difficult circumstances, bringing peace, and enabling me to rest in You. Let me focus on who I am becoming rather than where I have been. Let me experience, in this new year, *the peace of God, which transcends all understanding*. Please *guard my heart and mind in Christ Jesus*, and fill me with Your joy. Amen.

To view messages by Dr. Gibbons,
visit FirstPresGreenville.org (Media tab);
and tune in each Sunday at
10:30am on Fox Carolina.