

# COMMUNICATION

## *FIVE STEPS TO SUCCESSFUL LIVING*

*Philippians 4:4-9*

*July 21, 2002*

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When Diane and I moved to Rochester twenty-one years ago, our house bordered one of the busiest streets in southeast Rochester. One morning a nine car pile up occurred in front of our house. One car went sailing toward our yard. A light pole kept it out. You can imagine we never let our children play in the front yard. However, one Saturday, I let my oldest pretend to drive while I washed the car. The next day returning home from an errand, I left the car in neutral with the parking brake on. I just wanted to check-in with Diane before I left again. My daughter having enjoyed her play the day before decided to pretend to drive to a library. She slipped outside without our knowledge, got into the car, pulled the break release cable, and off she went on an unexpected journey. As I talked to Diane, I looked out the picture window and saw the car begin to roll toward that highway. I couldn't believe my eyes. Then I saw my 4 year old screaming at the steering wheel. My mind flashed with a vision of a car or truck slamming into her. Fear seized me. I may have got off an "Oh no!" Anything else was unintelligible because the adrenaline closed off my throat. I couldn't talk, but I could run. I didn't reach the car before it entered the highway. Miraculously there was a break in traffic, and it was long enough for me to run after the car. Once the car crossed the highway and headed down a side street, the peril for my daughter lessened. I was now running to prevent damage to the car, other property and my pocketbook. I made it to the car door and opened it, but Sarah was frozen to the steering wheel. She wouldn't budge. I tried to depress the brake but slipped and fell. Hanging onto the car door, I dragged along the ground in my three-piece suit. Now Diane was running inflamed with fear. When the car finally came to a rest, I said nothing. I pulled myself up, grabbed my daughter and handed her to her mother.

What Diane and I experienced was more than fear. We felt the rush of adrenaline. Scientists call it the *Fight or Flight* Syndrome because the rush prepares the individual to run away or turn and fight. God designed our bodies to direct our energy to motor functions like running or fighting in moments like these. God prepared our bodies to deal with fear, not live with it. When Paul told the Philippians to be anxious about nothing, he was not coaching them to be stoics unmoved by any events. He was not teaching us to be emotionless.

When John was two, his sisters brought him to us with a bloody nose. Diane examined him and found bruises all over his arms and legs. We quickly got him to a doctor. John had caught a virus that was causing his body to attack his blood platelets. Blood platelets help the blood clot so that one doesn't bleed to death. John's platelet count dropped so low that one small fall could take his life. During this critical period, his life hanging in the balance, John got away from me and crawled up on top of our piano! I spell parenthood "**a-n-x-i-e-t-y, anxiety**"! You can not be a parent without anxious moments.

In truth, you can not live any time on this earth without anxious moments. Children face all kinds of anxiety-provoking things like nurses with needles immunizing them, neighborhood bullies, school tests, discipline and so on. Why then did Paul counsel us to not be anxious?

When Jesus faced the prospect of crucifixion, he broke into a sweat. Generally people don't do that when they are calm and collected. The physician Luke commented, "***His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.***" Apparently, Jesus' blood mixed with his sweat. On rare occasion, individuals have become so anxious that their capillaries, extremely small blood vessels, rupture and bleed into the sweat glands; and out from the pores comes a mix of blood and sweat. According to the gospels Jesus was so bothered that he was (in the words of the King James translation) "*sorrowful unto death.*" He wished he was dead. Tense energy shot through Jesus's body like a bolt of lightning, rupturing his capillaries and causing him to despair.

In view of Jesus's experience, the command, "*Do not be anxious about anything*" can be seen more as a battle cry than a moral prohibition. It is a call to action. When we are attacked with anxiety, we are called to action. We are to deal with the anxiety, not simply live with it. When attacked with anxiety, Jesus modeled what the Apostle Paul tells us to do in Philippians. He took a critical step. He communicated with his heavenly Father.

We are examining five steps that are crucial for successful living, five steps that Paul exhorts believers to take. The first was celebration. The second was vision. The third is communication. Communication is especially important in times of intense concern.

A major problem for so many of us is that fear has a grip on us. We are hindered by anxiety or worry. Fear paralyzes. It cripples. We will never live successfully as long as we think in fear, talk in fear or act in fear, it steals our potential and obstructs our purpose. Some people are intensely private because of fear. It is not discretion. It is fear. They let no one near them. They exclude everyone from what is really going on inside, so no one can help them or bless them. Some Christians are afraid to pray aloud. They fear other people's judgment. Consequently, they squander much of their ability to help others. Some people never attempt new things because of fear. Some people are insurance poor because they fear all kinds of calamities. Their fears eat away at their finances just like other fears rob us of help, sleep, relationships and potential.

Fear may come at us from many directions, but Philippians 4, verse six says:

***Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (NIV)***

The text tells us not to allow anxiety to dominate us, but instead to communicate with God.

Jesus did this. He went straight to the garden to pray. *"Father," he cried, "I don't want to go through this. It scares me. Is there another way? Father, I trust you. If this is what you want, it's okay!"* Jesus invited his closest friends to join him in the conversation with God. *"Pray with me," he pleaded, "and watch! Let's see what God will do."*

Prayer did not immediately alleviate Jesus's anxiety. It was during his prayer session that Jesus suffered the bloody sweat; however, Luke reported that Jesus was strengthened as God sent a messenger, an angel, to encourage him in answer to his prayer.

When anxiety attacked, Jesus did not give up and live with it. Instead, he took the steps we're to take. He communicated with his father. We have that same privilege. We don't have to email, fax, telephone, telegram or UPS God. We don't have to slaughter a lamb or undergo some ritual. God is our father, and our father can change everything. Thus the best thing to do is communicate with him.

There are actually three things that will help us communicate. **First, realize anxiety is an alert signal.** When you are anxious, your body, soul and spirit are on alert. They are signaling that you need to do something now. It is important to act immediately, and then turn the signal off. You are not intended to live with the signal on. If you do, you will wear out. You will be preoccupied, nervous, worried, and eventually sick. You must not allow anxiety to live with you. It may alert you, but not be your companion.

You might be thinking, "It's fine for you to say, 'Turn the signal off,' but how do you do it?" How do you get rid of worry? How do you rid yourself of fear? **You get rid of fear by communicating with the one who holds the solutions.** Prayer isn't magical, but it's crucial. Prayer doesn't give you instant peace; it didn't Jesus. Prayer led Jesus to peace, and it will lead you there as well. In prayer Jesus found direction for his actions and reassurance.

Jesus additionally sought out prayer partners in his anxious moments. You may want to follow that pattern. By bringing other believers into his concern and conversation with God, Jesus could see the bigger picture. You will too. Jesus didn't sugar-coat his fears. Like him let's be direct, and watch for God's direction and response.

Third, Paul advised us to **pepper our communication with God with thanksgiving.** He tells us to present our requests to God with thanksgiving. This returns us to our call to celebrate. Celebration and thanksgiving give us a grip on reality. We soon begin to see more than the alert signal of anxiety. We see the world around it. We can evaluate what is triggering our anxiety. We can identify Satan's work and root him out.

When you pray, "*Thank you, Father, that I mean so much to you; thank you for your many promises; thank you that you are greater than all the evil; thank you, Father, for your incredible sacrifice and for the great future you have planned for me; thank you, Father, that things change as I talk to you,*" you deal anxiety terrific blows. As a result, peace comes to guard your thinking and emotions. This peace results from your relationship with God. It may not come immediately, but that's alright. Peace is not meant to come until you and your heavenly father are in sync over what triggers the anxiety; and communicating with your father helps you get in sync.

Don't let Satan use your divinely created alert signal against you. Don't ignore the signal. Communicate while you continue celebrating your relationship with Christ. Communicate and deal with the anxiety, then you will find yourself embracing more of your potential and fulfilling your purpose.