

PHILIPPIANS 2:12–30, July 27th 2025

“Focused Faith - Progressive Peace” Kent A. Tollakson

Kent Tollakson here, serving in youth, small groups, & Grace Marriage team.

It's is always great to be with you.

For the guys in my Thursday night small group or the folks who were at the last Grace Marriage night, you will recognize the statement that has motivated me tremendously for several days.

During some prep time for the Thursday night small group (we are studying *Philippians* with Michael DeFazio on RightNow Media), he dropped a statistic that hit me hard. He said:

“The average high school student today has the same level of anxiety as the average psychiatric patient in the 1950s.”

I mean—news about anxiety being a major problem in today's culture isn't new. You'd have to be living under a rock not to know that. But *that* statistic - it hit me like a gut punch.

The Bigger Picture: Anxiety by the Numbers

- According to the National Institute of Mental Health, **1 in 3 adolescents (ages 13–18)** will experience an anxiety disorder.
- Anxiety disorders in teens have increased by more than **20%** in the last decade.
- A recent Pew Research study shows that **70% of teens** say anxiety and depression are **major problems** among their peers.

- And for adults?
 - Over **42 million American adults** are currently affected by anxiety disorders.
 - Nearly **1 in 5 adults** experience an anxiety disorder in any given year.
 - Gen Z (ages 18–25) report the **highest levels of anxiety and depression** of any adult age group.

Let that sink in and get us focused this morning....

We live in the most connected, medicated, and informed generation in history...

...and also one of the most **anxious**.

It's not just that people are “worried or nervous”—this is soul-deep stuff. This is heart-rattling, joy-robbing, mind-spinning “anxiety” producing stuff.

The more we know, the more anxious we get, because of 2 reactions.

- the more we know the more we recognize the challenges and difficulties on our plate...that is a natural and understandable “anxiety” reaction.
- But a sinful reaction of anxiety comes from the more we know the more we **compare** our lives to others....(ignorance is bliss???)

That's why Teens Feel It More

While **we all** feel that pressure to compare—teens are especially vulnerable.

When you ask a teen how they are doing, they almost always smile and say “good” – but the reality behind that answer – is that a storm is brewing. The

fuel for that storm is predominantly advertising, entertainment and social media. All their messages create a constant high pressure storm battering the soul. The storm drenches us with how we should – look, who we should be, what we should own, what we should believe, along with nasty lighting strikes showing us how everyone else has a better life.

This advertising, entertainment and social media storm is the most complex deception system ever created. It has never been experienced by the older generation. I'm one of the older generation – (I'm sure you all needed to hear that...your older Kent...really...I thought you were like 25....)

I recognize a few similarities from my teen years, but they are nothing in comparison to what teens are up against today. This storm produces highlight reels about everyone else that teens can't help but compare to their own life too...which makes them feel like their highlight reel is just a black screen with that dreaded never ending - buffering circle - of death spinning away.

They're trying to sail out of the shallow waters of childhood into the deeper water of adulthood. The storm often pushes them off their course as they try to journey into who they are, where they are going, and what their calling is. And let us also remember that satan is very much involved. 1 John 15:1 reminds us that we are indeed children of God, yet we live in a world that lies within the power of the evil one. God does reign over satan, but the prince of lies has tremendous influence over the ideals and philosophies of this world. So satan makes our journey difficult, he tempts us with all sorts of sinful lies that make his lie seem like smooth and gentle water to sail on with ease. But

the truth is, once we chose to sail into the water of lies the storm rages, the waves batter us that rocks bash our hulls....and of course we add into this problem. James 1:14-15 clearly reminds us that WE chose to engage in satans lies because of our own desires. It's a storm of war...and we need to fight against all these lies, and our own desires, to stay on course.

So What Do We Do?

That statistic about a teens level of anxiety, was for me, a startling wake up statement...but with adults struggling more as well. We ALL need some answers. And the answer isn't just in therapy or mindfulness or cutting back screen time—though those things have their place.

The real answer?

SLIDE: Spiritual training – (as Barry said last Thursday....)

We need a faith that's alive.

Not passive. Not reactionary. Not “I go to church, read my bible, and pray when convenient.”

We need a Gospel-centered faith that empowers us to live actively—deliberately—in the presence of God.

Active faith corrects our focus – corrects our course:

- We move From *performance* to His *presence*.
- We move From *comparison* to our *calling*.
- We move From *fear & anxiety* to *faith & trust*.

This isn't about psychology alone—this is about our souls. This is about being rooted and grounded in love (Ephesians 3:17). Because when you are firmly planted in God's truth, the storm will always rage around you—but you don't get thrown off course.

Training for Joy

A study on Philippians brought this to mind, and, Philippians may be the best place to look for answers. *Philippians* is like a playbook about training for Joy within our souls – not anxiety.

The Greek word for “Joy” appears 14 times in Philippians—more than in any other book of the bible. 2 Corinthians comes close with joy showing up 13 times. But 2 Corinthians is 3 times bigger! So Philippians has the most joy per page of any book of the bible! That tells us how intentional Paul was about training for Joy in this letter. *Every page drips with joy.*

SLIDE: A few Pauline Pillars in Philipines to mention before we dig into today's verses:

1. God's grace → is what provides peace
2. Think Godly → is what helps us live Godly
3. Loving outward (unselfishly) → is what produces inward joy
 - This is the Transforming work God does in us through Jesus → we grow in loving others more than loving ourselves.

And Jesus is the Key...He always is, in Philippians chapter 2, we are reminded that Jesus is equal with God Himself, and yet, Jesus willingly

stepped out of heaven —switching glory for servanthood, meeting horror so we can meet hope.

If that is hard for you to understand, maybe a pathetic sermon illustration will do, ill use sports.

– “Jesus was basically the greatest football player of all time, the GOAT, like by a lot. With Jesus, the team never lost – in fact they always win by hundreds and hundreds of point. And yet, Jesus left the comfortable position of dominance with His Father in heaven, left the team in heaven to come to earth as a human being, and join the losing team. Not only did Jesus humble Himself by letting go of all that heavenly power and glory, He also took the form of a servant on our team. He didn’t just serve by becoming the team doctor who healed injuries (which He did), He didn’t just serve us by running a few 100 yard touchdowns with no help, or throw a few impossible 100 yard touchdowns to unimpressive receivers, (but He did). Jesus didn’t just lower Himself to being the team laundry guy and foot washer, (but He did). No Jesus left the power and glory as the GOAT in heaven to wash away every sin of every teammate in the history of the world by allowing the evil men to humiliate Him, torture Him and brutally murder Him – naked on a cross.

That’s powerful service. The truth of Gods great love - displayed through Jesus on the cross - is what Paul so clearly saw. Moved by Gods power and love - Paul stopped living for himself and began living for God by living for the benefit of others.

The end of Philippians chapter one reveals Paul’s clarity for living like Jesus. He wrote, (picking this up in verse 20... “Christ will be honored in my body

whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ; to die is gain.” Then in verse 23 “..my desire is to depart and be with Christ for that is far better. ²⁴But to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your account. 25..I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy...” He’d rather go to heaven, but he stays alive to serve the church. DeFazio says in in our study this way..’This is a Pauline way of thinking...“Not me, but you—because of Jesus.”

With those basics in mind, let’s look at

Today's text: Philippians 2:12–30

I’m going to take this in 2 parts. Verses 12-18, then verses 19-30

SLIDE: Philippians 2:12-18

1st part....verses... 12–13: ¹²Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

Obey Gods Word Within You

Its clear that Paul is writing to believers – “Therefore my dearly beloved, as you have obeyed...when I’m around and when I’m not”

And think about how cool it is that because Paul is writing to Christians....that Paul is writing to us!

We work out our salvation with “fear and trembling.” Which is not panic, but reverent awe. All of us, with pursuit of Him, continue to grow in clarity of who God is. As our clarify grows, so does our understanding of His power and glory...which develops an Awe of God that also produces a healthy fear – a healthy trembling at His awesome and tremendous rule and reign over all

things! “Fear and trembling” isn’t panic or anxiety for Christians, it’s reverent seriousness that impacts our lives. Our lives matter. Our choices point towards eternity.

And we also grow in understanding that it is God who causes us to love others and do His will. We grow in living a life of love because He first loved us (Jn4:19). Isn’t it wonderful to spend time with God and know - that within all His sovereignty, power, and glory - that you are **loved** by Him and that He is **with** you, that He is **in** you! And when we are overcome by the power of God’s love, we will grow in living like a child in comparison to God. Obeying Him as a loving Father and trusting Him to take care of us.

Verses 14–16: “¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶hold fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run or labor in vain.”

Attitude matters. Grumbling dims our light; joy fuels it. Think: a child basking in their parents’ love – they don’t whine—they smile. We’re called to shine like stars amid a broken world (Jn8:12). Our attitude is a testimony.

And this is one of the ways we witness to others. We are to live a “Not me” – “but you”, “because of Jesus” type of life, so that others see Jesus and the path to joy and peace. A crooked and twisted world *needs* straight and shining people!

Last point for these verses, “Hold fast to the word of life”—Grip Scripture tightly. Don’t let go. God knows we all live within a storm and need help. His word is several things all at once;

- His word is a rope and anchor – to keep us away from danger
- His word is a rope and a life saver – to keep us afloat when we go in the water.
- And His word is a rope – for us to climb out of sin and into His arms

And God himself is holding onto every word...God himself is holding the rope...tightly....so grab hold yourself and don’t let go!

SLIDE: Philippians 2:19-30

2nd part...verses 19–30 – Live Like Jesus Lived Paul wants us to see Jesus, and imitate Him (Eph5:1-2). But Paul also knows we can’t physically see Jesus anymore, so—He (God) provide us with 2 examples of teammates who are pretty good at scoring touchdowns to learn from - **Timothy** and **Epaphroditus**.

Ill run through these quickly -

- Paul sends Timothy to Philippi with this letter because Timothy has proven to be a rare kind of Christian who genuinely cares about others more than he cares about himself (v. 20).
- And, Paul is sending Epaphroditus back to them. Epaphroditus has proven to have extremely high Christian character because he has willingly served Jesus for the benefit of others at the very risk of his own life! (v. 30)

They embody Philippians 2:4-5 “Having a mindset of others being more important than themselves.”

Another lame football illustration; Timothy and Epaphroditus are like league MVPs who are not flashy - just GOOD, but play for almost no cash so everyone else can enjoy lots of money. They simply give of themselves so that others can grow.

All of us can grow by looking for the Timothy's and Epaphroditus's we find in the bible to get inspiration, conviction and encouragement from....tonight, tomorrow morning....soon....open up His work and find these gifts.

SLIDE: What About Anxiety?

I haven't really addressed anxiety directly yet. In fact, maybe I've made a few of you *more* anxious—because now you're thinking, "I really need to step up and 'get in the game.'" Which oddly enough – is a core piece of killing anxiety and training in joy – "getting in the game, being active in faith, TRAINING for joy!" Let's look at Philippians chapter 4:1-9 to help us out.

It says: "¹Therefore, my brothers, who I love and long for, my joy and my crown, stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

2-3 (paraphrase) help 2 awesome church members who disagree right now to make up and get along.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice. ⁵Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is

pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is anything excellent, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

And again, here’s where **Timothy, Epaphroditus** and now **Paul** too, should be kept in focus.

If we are going to help the next generation within the ever strengthening storm of anxiety. We must be growing ourselves so that we are examples for them to follow.

Timothy and Epaphroditus lived **unselfishly**. They weren't chasing applause, followers, or comfort. They were concerned about others more than themselves. They weren't perfect—but they were faithful. And why? Because they were following **Paul**, who was modeling his life after **Jesus**.

This is Gospel imitation at its finest:

- Jesus gave up His comfort and status to serve.
- Paul followed in that path—choosing imprisonment and hardship for the sake of the church.
- Timothy and Epaphroditus followed Paul—choosing care over convenience, **selflessness** over safety.

They weren’t anxious - because they were – “self-forgetful”. That’s one of the secrets of Gospel peace—**the less you focus on yourself, the more free your heart becomes.**

So if you want to reduce anxiety, ask this:

Who am I imitating?

- If you're following people who hustle after their own desires and comfort more than following Jesus—you'll feel the pressure to keep up.
- But if you imitate those who sacrifice for the joy of others—you'll discover real joy yourself.

Gospel imitation isn't about trying harder—it's about following someone who is following Jesus. And in doing so, your life becomes a path others can follow too.

That's why Paul says, "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). That's what Timothy and Epaphroditus were doing. That's what we're invited into.

To finish this, let's look at Philippians 4:1–9 to see 8 Faith Habits to Model for others and Teens

Verse Adult Application

4:1 Stand firm in Gods word (move from performance into His presence)

4:2–3 Get along (comparison into calling)

Impact on Teens and Youth

Don't let the news, trends, or dramas of life toss you around emotionally.

Resolve conflict instead of avoiding it—model

peacemaking and forgiveness, not bitterness & revenge.

Verse Adult Application

Impact on Teens and Youth

4:4 Rejoice always (comparison into calling)

Be joyful even when tired, stuck in traffic, or when dealing with difficult or selfish people.

4:5 Let gentleness be your hallmark (comparison into calling)

Create safe space for teens and youth to spend time with you and talk with you.

4:6 Don't be anxious—be thankful, and pray (comparison into calling)

Show the younger generation how to *talk to God, not just how to talk about God*

4:8 Think about excellent things (comparison into calling)

Say “no” to gossip, comparison, slander & negative talk

4:9 Live like Jesus, by also looking to gain by living like Timothy, and Epaphroditus, and Paul...and anyone else that did it well or is doing it well. (Anxiety into trust)

In doing so, God will be with you...brining His peace.

All of this is intended to lead us deeper into our calling to disciple each other and the next generation. I hope you all recognize our own battle with anxiety is

with a gospel fixated faith is what brings us peace and enables us to both; a. help others directly as well as b. provide godly examples for anyone and everyone to see and follow.

Michael DeFazio says it well with: “Imitate Timothy and Epaphroditus and Paul—because maybe someone is watching closely enough to end up seeing Jesus in you.”

Let’s pray.