

West View Methodist Church

Home Group and Bible Study Notes

'ARE YOU OKAY?'

"The Path to Perfect Peace" (Session 3)

The Biblical Foundation for this Session

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."
(John 14:27)

As Your Group Gathers: Getting The Discussion Started

As the leader of the Bible study group, welcome your group members and make them feel comfortable. Then share / read the following information with / to your group:

In Philippians 4:4 – 9, Paul plots a path towards experiencing God's perfect peace in the midst of life's pressures and stressors. Paul's letter to the Philippians is a lengthy thank – you note of sorts for their generosity to him. Let When the believers in Philippi heard about Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (For an account of his arrest, trials, and incarceration see Acts 21:27 – 28:30; especially Acts 28:30), they sent a messenger named Epaphroditus to minister to him (Philippians 2:25). Along with the emotional and physical support he provided, Epaphroditus also brought financial support to meet the apostle's needs (Philippians 4:18). Three times before – twice when Paul was in Thessalonica, and once when he was in Corinth (vv. 15-16; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:9) – the Philippian saints ministered to his needs. Unfortunately, while Epaphroditus was in Rome, he became so ill he almost died (Philippians 2:27). But fortunately, he recovered, and after he did, he returned to Philippi with Paul's letter.

Philippians 4:4 – 7 is found near the end of the letter's body just before Paul thanks his readers for their generous gifts (vv. 10 – 20) and closes the letter with final greetings (vv. 21 – 23). The paragraph contains five commands delivered in staccato fashion – "rejoice" repeated twice, "let your gentleness be known," "do not be anxious," and "present your requests to God." Paul's command, "Rejoice," first issued in Philippians 3:1, is repeated twice for emphasis in Philippians 4:4. Clearly, rejoicing is not optional; it's imperative. The accompanying term "always" implies Christians are to rejoice in any and all circumstances and at any and all times. It implies that Christian joy is not the temporal kind that comes and goes, but the permanent kind that is rooted in one's relationship to the Lord.

Many circumstances fill the heart with sadness and despair – fatal accidents, terminal illnesses, natural disasters, human suffering in general and injustices in particular. But Paul is not commanding Christians to rejoice in these. He is commanding them to rejoice "in the Lord," that is, to rejoice in who the Lord is and what he has done and will do for them regardless of these. As one commentator says: "Paul was not urging us to be unrealistic. He was not saying that we should never feel sad. Even Jesus wept (John 11:35). However, he was advocating focusing on the blessings we have in Christ, and being grateful for these regardless of how sad we may feel at any particular time" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Philippians," 2021 ed., 108).

Paul's third command, "Let your gentleness be evident to all" – where "gentleness" connotes forbearance, graciousness, and a non – retaliatory spirit, is especially applicable to Christians whose lives are being made miserable by others, either inside or outside of the church. According to one commentator, "This is the Pauline version of 1 Peter 2:23, spoken of Christ but urged of Christian slaves,

“when they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (Gordon D. Fee, Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, NICNT, 407). A gentle person does not insist on his rights. “The Lord is near,” a reference to Jesus’ imminent return, serves as an incentive to encourage obedience to the apostle’s command.

Paul’s fourth command, “Do not be anxious about anything,” would make no sense apart from his fifth command, “present your requests to God,” since the second is anxiety’s antidote. He makes this clear in verse 6, using a contrast introduced by “but.” In a nutshell, Paul commands his readers to pray rather than worry, because when they “by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving” tell God what they need, he in turn gives them “peace” beyond anything humanly imaginable. This peace, which comes from God, then quells their anxiety. One commentator puts it this way: “Guard’ is a military term, implying that peace stands on duty to keep out anything that brings care and anxiety. For these reasons prayerful people are peaceful people” (Richard R. Melick, Jr., Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, NAC, 150).

As the leader of the Bible study group, ask and discuss the following questions together as a group:

- **In your opinion, what is the difference between happiness and peace? Why do you think humans generally seek after and pursue either one of these realities?**
- **Do you think that there’s a kind of peace that comes from believing in Christ that those who don’t know Christ can’t experience? Why or why not?**
- **In your opinion, how does the Gospel of Christ re – define what genuine peace is? How have you experienced that peace in your journey with God?**

Opening Prayer (Pray the following prayer or one of your own):

“Lord Jesus Christ, as we come to the end of our Bible study series that has focused on our mental, emotional and physical well – being, we ask once again that your Holy Spirit lead, guide and teach us as you make us aware of His permanent presence with us.

We ask that as we engage in Scripture, practice prayer and encouragement of one another; that you enable us to be receptive your transforming and life – changing grace. May we know the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding so that we may be your ambassadors wherever we go. In Jesus’ name, amen.”

Worship Segment (Optional):

- **“Let the Peace of God Reign” by Hillsong Worship:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wkobguypdR4&list=RDwkobguypdR4&start_radio=1
- **“Keep Praying” by Maverick City:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGaAIDKhGmw&list=RDfGaAIDKhGmw&start_radio=1

Bible Study and Discussion Questions: Exploring God’s Care for Elijah During his Depression and Discouragement

As the leader of the group, share the following information with the Bible study participants. Then invite a Bible study participant to read ***Philippians 4:4 – 9*** to the group, before discussing the questions that follow:

Philippians 4:4 – 9 (NIV)

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, 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. ⁹Whatever 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.

Let's have a look at some particular words in Philippians 4:4 – 9 that might be of interest to us, especially as it relates to God's peace in the midst of the pressures and stresses of life:

In verse 4, Paul uses the word "rejoice". "Rejoicing in Christ is something the apostle had commanded earlier (3:1), and had illustrated abundantly for his readers throughout this epistle. He must have felt that there was a great need for this attitude in Philippi. There were many reasons why the Philippian saints could have felt discouraged. Paul's imprisonment and the possibility of his death, Epaphroditus' illness, and the antagonism of unbelievers were a few. The attacks from legalists, on the one hand, and libertines on the other, plus friction among certain members of the church, contributed to this spirit. To counteract this attitude, Paul prescribed rejoicing in the Lord: 'Rejoice in the Lord always.' He repeated this charge in this verse for even greater emphasis: 'Again I will say, rejoice'" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Philippians," 2021 ed., 107-108,).

Furthermore, in verse 4, Paul reminds the Philippians that this rejoicing ought to take place "in the Lord always". "Christ is the One in whom the sphere of rejoicing was to take place" (Robert P. Lightner, "Philippians," in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament, 663). "In the Lord may signify 'because you are the Lord's', or 'because of what he has done', or the entire phrase may be the Christian equivalent of the Old Testament exclamation, 'Praise the Lord!', which is familiar to us in the Psalter" (Ralph P. Martin, Philippians, TNTC, 138).

"The term 'gentleness' (epieikes) in verse 5 was often used of an attitude of kindness where the normal or expected response was retaliation" (Frank Thielman, The NIV Application Commentary: Philippians, 218). "The Greek word contains connotations of gentleness, yielding, kindness, patience, forbearance, leniency, and magnanimity. It recalls Jesus Christ's humility in Philippians 2:5 – 11. The forbearing person does not insist on his or her own rights or privileges. He or she is considerate and gentle toward others. Of course, there is a time to stand for what is right. The forbearing person is not spineless but selfless" (Constable, 108, italics added). "Perhaps 'graciousness' is the best English equivalent" (Martin, 170).

In Philippians 4:5 "Paul reminded his readers of the imminence of the Lord's return at the Rapture ('The Lord is near.') When He comes, He will right wrongs – and vindicate those who have given up their rights for the glory of God and the welfare of others (cf. 3:20-21; James 5:8). 'The Apostle is not speaking of the nearness of the Lord in his abiding presence with us, but of the imminence of his coming'" (Constable, 109). Or is it an example of a double entendre? "Since their present suffering is at the hands of those who proclaim Caesar as Lord, they are reminded that the true 'Lord' is 'near.' At the same time, by using the language of the Psalter, Paul is encouraging them to prayer in the midst of their present distress, because the 'Lord is near' in a very real way to those who call on him now" (Fee, 408).

In verse 6, Paul commands the Philippian Christians not to be "anxious". "Do not be anxious is a negative command based on the idea that anxiety (merimna) betrays a lack of trust in God's care and is

a species of ‘unconscious blasphemy’ against him (so Oswald Chambers); see Matthew 6:25-34; Luke 12:22 where the same verb is used” (Martin, 171). “To care and be genuinely concerned is one thing. To worry is another. Paul and Timothy cared for the people they ministered to (2 Cor. 11:28; Phil. 2:20), yet they retained trust in God. Jesus warned against worry which obviously eliminates trust in God (Matt. 6:25-33)” (Lightner, 663).

In verse 6 he makes reference to “prayer, petition and requests”. “Prayer, *proseuchē*, and petition, *deēsis*, are frequently found together in the apostle’s writing and are distinguishable in two ways, according to G. Abbott-Smith’s *Lexicon*. He says that *proseuchē* is used of prayer in general, while *deēsis*, gives prominence to the sense of need. On the other hand, *deēsis*, is used as well of requests from man to man, while *proseuchē* is limited to prayer to God. Requests, *aitēmata*, is a word which specifies the content of prayer as the formulating of definite and precise petitions (cf. Lk. 23:24; 1 Jn. 5:15)” (Martin, 172). “Prayer is to be offered ‘with thanksgiving.’ The attitude of gratitude accompanies all true approaches to the Father” (Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, NAC, 149).

In verse 7, the “peace of God”, that is, the peace from God stands in contrast to the anxiety mentioned in verse 6, it is probably an inner sense of contentment supplied by God” (Thielman, 220). This peace transcends all, as it “...is beyond man’s ability to comprehend” (Lightner, 664). “We may be freed from all fretful care and feverish anxiety because we may refer all our distresses and problems to God in prayer. Thus anxiety and prayer are more opposed to each other than fire and water” (Martin, 171).

- 1. Why does Paul call the Philippians to rejoice in the midst of difficulty? Have you ever felt grief or frustration on days when everything felt out of control? If so, how did you respond?**
- 2. What steps can we take to cultivate a spirit of rejoicing in our daily lives, even amid challenges?**
- 3. Are you living your life in such a way that it is obvious to everyone else that you believe the Lord is in control – or are there moments where you wonder if everything is spinning out of control? Why do you say so? How does coming to God in prayer and praise help relieve anxiety?**
- 4. How does the concept of gentleness manifest in your life, and how can it impact your relationships with others? Paul instructs not to be anxious but to present our requests to God in prayer and thanksgiving. How can we put this into practice when faced with anxiety-provoking situations?**
- 5. How does Paul's "secret" of contentment challenge the societal understanding of happiness and satisfaction? Can you recall a time in your life when you experienced contentment in a difficult situation, much like Paul?**
- 6. What kind of worldly noise do you find yourself being distracted by in these days? How do these things contribute to anxiety? How can we, as Christians, block out the noisiness of life that causes stress and pressure?**
- 7. How can focusing on what is true and honourable impact your daily decision-making? What practical steps can you take to encourage others in your community to think on things that are excellent and praiseworthy?**
- 8. What does the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, mean to you personally? How can the themes of unity, joy, contentment, prayer, and God's provision apply to the challenges in your life today?**

9. What role does community play in your spiritual life, in light of the communal aspects presented in Philippians 4?

10. How do you interpret Paul's emphasis on thought control (v. 8-9) for our mental and spiritual health? How can the teachings of Philippians 4 help you deal with uncertainties in life?

Close the session by praying this prayer (Or one of your own):

Leader: For the times that we have erected barriers to exclude those who we experience as different from ourselves,

Lord, have mercy

All: Lord, have mercy

Leader: On the occasions that we have avoided contact with those who behave differently from ourselves,

Christ, have Mercy

All: Christ, have Mercy

Leader: In situations when we have failed to see the light of Christ in those who appear different from ourselves,

Lord, have mercy

All: Lord, have mercy

Leader: May the Source of all life forgive out excluding instincts,
remove the fear of difference from our souls,

And enable us to embrace all who are created in God's image.

All: Amen