

Session 11

finding peace

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 4:2–9

BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God offers unflappable peace to those who trust and obey Him.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will adjust their prayer lives to deal with any anxiety they may be experiencing.

MEMORY VERSE

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6, 7).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ “I’m a worrier.” Why might people think that about themselves? Is it healthy? Does it somehow convey that a person cares about other people more than the average person? Or is chronic worrying evidence of a sinful outlook on life?
- ☐ Read Philippians 4:2–9. What does God have to say about worry? Do you think He might find it commendable in some way? Would he thank the Philippians for worrying about him while he was in prison?
- ☐ While worrying might make us feel like we care about ourselves and those we love, it doesn’t put us in good standing with God. Christ won’t give a worrier’s crown to those who worried their way through life. God provides us with peace. Paul wrote to the Philippians about how to know both interpersonal and inner peace. Everyone should return to his teaching often, but especially those who consider themselves chronic worriers. Paul’s instructions work. We can be victorious over the temptation to worry.

Session Summary

Paul instructed believers on finding both interpersonal peace and inner peace. Interpersonal peace comes as we humble our hearts and adopt the mind of Christ. To help in the process, intermediaries should address those who are hurting to help them work out their differences in a godly manner. Rejoicing in the Lord helps resolve issues too. Being gracious to those who want to hurt us defuses conflict. Personal peace is found through prayer, planning our thinking, and putting into practice God’s Word. God’s peace protects us from worry in an indescribable way.

Session Starters

Option 1—Picturing Anxiety

Gather

- Paper.
- Markers or colored pencils.

Steps

1. Give your learners a few minutes to draw a picture or illustration of anxiety.
2. Learners share their pictures with the class or in small groups if you have a large class. Have them explain their illustrations.
3. Discuss dealing with anxiety.

ASK: What are some common ways the world might deal with anxiety and worry? *Medication, distraction, becoming a control freak, denial, indulgence, yoga, meditation.*

ASK: Would you say they are finding cures for their anxiety? Explain.

4. Transition to the Bible lesson.

Paul gives believers a prescription for gaining both interpersonal and inner peace. Paul's prescription is the cure for anxiety rather than simply ways to mask anxiety. Paul's instructions are practical and beneficial, teaching us to live with joy and peace. We will do well to heed his instructions.

Option 2—Protective Measures

Steps

1. Discuss measures the learners take to protect their houses.

ASK: What have you done to protect yourself while in your house, especially at night?

ASK: When have your protective measures paid off?

ASK: How do your protective measures affect your peace of mind after you go to bed? Will you get up in the middle of the night to check to see if you remembered to lock a door or shut a window?

2. Transition to the Bible lesson.
3. Paul wrote about protective measures individuals can take to guard

their hearts and relationships from unwanted conflict and anxiety. Following his measures will give us peaceful relationships and minds. We can go to bed at night without being bombarded with anxious thoughts. This session presents those protective measures that lead to peace.

Bible Study

Continuing to emphasize his themes of unity and humility, Paul offered the Philippians some brief but important instructions that would yield peace among the believers as well as inner peace for individuals.

I. Finding Interpersonal Peace (Phil. 4:2–5)

A. Humble your heart (4:2)

READ: Philippians 4:2.

Paul addressed a specific problem within the Philippian church. He pleaded with Euodia and Syntyche to resolve their differences. These two women, along with other believers, had labored with Paul for the sake of the gospel. Apparently, a disagreement arose between them, causing a rift in their relationship, marring their effectiveness for Christ.

ASK: What happens to a person's focus when he or she becomes embroiled in a disagreement with a fellow believer? *The person takes his or her focus off growing spiritually and off sharing the gospel. Getting his or her way becomes the person's obsession and goal.*

A literal translation of Paul's appeal shows he held the women equally responsible: "Euodia I exhort, please, and Syntyche, I exhort, please" (4:2). Both parties in the dispute were guilty of a sinful, selfish mindset. Paul wouldn't take the side of someone driven by sinful thinking. He didn't even suggest one might have a better argument than the other. He urged both women to adopt Christ's humble mindset.

ASK: Why will mutual humility defuse disharmony? (See Phil. 2:3, 4). *Both parties will consider the other person better than themselves and will look out for the other person's interests.*

ASK: When has pride or a desire to get your own way ballooned an otherwise simple disagreement with someone in your life?

When there is a disagreement over doctrine, the Bible needs to be the guide. God doesn't call us to compromise doctrine for the sake of getting along. But a doctrinal disagreement still demands humbly esteeming the other person above self. The goal should be to loving help the fellow believer see his or her error. The case of Euodia and Syntyche didn't involve doctrinal error. They both took sides on a personal preference, dug in, and refused to budge.

Believers who have the mind of Christ don't demand their preferences rule the day. Instead, they are willing to set aside their demands. That doesn't mean one side always becomes a doormat for the other side or that one side will always hold out until the other side gives in. Mediators can help bring the disagreement to a peaceful and positive resolution.

B. Address the hurting (4:3)

READ: Philippians 4:3.

Paul appointed a mediator to help Euodia and Syntyche achieve reconciliation. We don't know whom Paul addressed directly. Some have suggested that *Syzygus*, the Greek word meaning "true yokefellow" or "loyal companion," was a man's name and that the apostle was asking one particular person to help promote unity. Others think it was a more general term. The identity of the mediator, however, is not as important as the mediator's mission. Note that Paul didn't instruct the mediator to determine guilt and dispense blame. He wanted the situation resolved so the church could move forward, unhindered in its work for Christ.

ASK: What should a mediator ensure happens in the process of resolving the conflict? *That both sides admit and confess any sinful pride; that both sides show humility and a willingness to esteem each other better than themselves; that both sides love and value each other.*

Mediators should proactively address those in disagreements to restore Christlike thinking and preserve the church's effectiveness.

C. Rejoice in your Helper (4:4)

READ: Philippians 4:4.

The command to rejoice naturally follows Paul's command to address the ongoing conflict in the Philippian church. The Lord provides the wisdom, strength, and humility necessary for successful conflict resolution. And when the mediator brought Euodia and Syntyche together, the church would rejoice in the Lord.

ASK: How might consistently rejoicing in the Lord help prevent conflict? *When we rejoice in the Lord, we become enthralled with His greatness rather than our own. When we rejoice in ourselves, we expect others to do the same and let us have our way.*

Paul's command is not to rejoice or be happy about circumstances but to rejoice in the unchangeable truths of the Lord and in one's relationship with Him. Despite his circumstances, even Paul had reasons to rejoice in the Lord.

ASK: What would you list as your top two reasons to rejoice in the Lord?

D. Be gracious to the hurtful (4:5)

READ: Philippians 4:5.

Paul challenged the Philippians to be known for their gentle and gracious character. To be gentle or gracious means to be charitable toward others' faults and merciful in judgment of their failings. Showing gentleness and graciousness also involves not retaliating when others lob shots at us. When someone disagrees with us and begins firing insults at us, we shouldn't shoot back. We should graciously work to diffuse the situation instead.

ASK: What does the world tell people to do when they feel their rights have been violated? *To use violence and insults to get attention, to fight until they get what they think they deserve, to cancel the violator.*

ASK: How did Christ show graciousness? *He was willing to die a humiliating death for the sake of our salvation and our reconciliation to the Father.*

To emphasize his point, Paul coupled his admonition with a reminder that the Lord is at hand. Remembering that the Rapture could occur at any moment should encourage prompt reconciliation within the church. Why is that? Consider that Christ died for both believers in the argument. When they refuse to show love for each other, they are hating or despising someone Christ loved in the deepest way possible. Furthermore, Christ stands ready to forgive both offenders and restore their relationship. To refuse reconciliation is to reject His offer of forgiveness.

Living in light of Christ's any-moment return should motivate us to defuse our arguments, work toward reconciliation, and get back to the business of teaching and sharing God's Word while we still have time. Differences and grudges will look so petty in Heaven when we realize we robbed ourselves of the limited time we had to serve the Lord humbly and joyfully. Once the Lord returns, our time to serve Him will abruptly end. Don't waste time fretting, arguing, gossiping, and slandering.

II. Finding Inner Peace (Phil. 4:6–9)

Paul continued with his emphasis on peace, giving the individual believer instructions for creating inner peace. Believers who have inner peace will be far less inclined to be at odds with other believers.

A. Pray about your troubles (4:6, 7)

READ: Philippians 4:6, 7.

Paul counseled the Philippians not to be worried about anything but to pray instead. In prayer, believers can turn their worries over to the One Who is in control.

We generally think of prayer as making our requests known to God, but the words “prayer,” “supplication,” and “thanksgiving” tell us that a little more is involved in the type of prayer that cures worry. “Prayer” refers specifically to addressing God as an act of worship. Pausing to remember the holiness and majesty of the Lord helps calm anxieties and gives us confidence as we bring our requests to Him.

ASK: What attributes of God can give us peace in worrisome situations? *Love, sovereignty, omnipotence, omniscience, faithfulness, goodness.*

“Supplication” means bringing burdens and needs to the Lord. We may pray about our own concerns and problems, but we should also be faithful to pray for the problems and needs of others. Paul set the example in his prayers for the Philippians (1:4, 9–11).

ASK: Why does praying for the spiritual needs of others help us find peace? *It helps us see our problems as opportunities to grow in Christlikeness.*

“Thanksgiving” is too often the missing element of prayer. Giving thanks helps us to remember God’s faithfulness in the past and His promise to be faithful in the future. We can thank God for answering our prayers as we make our requests because God is faithful.

ASK: Does a believer need to feel thankful before giving thanks to God? Explain. *No. Believers should give thanks to God because He deserves it. When we will to give thanks to God He responds by helping us feel thankful to Him.*

ASK: When has your decision to give thanks to God helped you feel thankful to God?

When believers bring their concerns to God, demonstrating complete trust in His control, an unexplainable peace replaces worry. Paul described this peace as one that guards a believer’s heart and mind. God’s peace will post a guard to keep worry out of our hearts, where worrisome feelings start, and out of our minds, where worrisome thoughts begin. Through prayer we can take our eyes off the situation and turn them to God, Who has the situation under control and is working all things together for our good (Rom. 8:28).

ASK: Why might believers want to worry? *It makes them feel as if they are serious about the problem and as if they care more about*

the person who is the object of their worry. It gives them a sense of control. It motivates them to act.

Worrying about someone else doesn't show concern for the person; it shows frustration in not being able to control the person's life. The best way to show concern for a person is to pray for the person and trust the omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient God to meet the person's needs in His time and by His wisdom.

B. Plan your thinking (4:8)

READ: Philippians 4:8.

We are constantly thinking either about our own ideas or someone else's ideas. When we understand and memorize Scripture, we are thinking God's thoughts, and we will act in godly ways. The Holy Spirit uses the Bible to direct our lives (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12).

We should never think our private thoughts are inconsequential as long as we don't act on them. When we are consumed with the world's thoughts, we will adopt worldly actions and attitudes. God wants believers to fill their minds with the right kinds of thoughts, which will produce godly actions and attitudes as well as peace.

Paul listed eight characteristics of right thinking and challenged the Philippians to make time to contemplate, or meditate, on things that meet these criteria. First, Paul instructed them to think true thoughts. More than simply being truthful, this requirement includes things that have a genuine character. Believers should dwell on things that line up with the truth of God.

Second, Paul listed honest, respectable thoughts. These are noble thoughts that are worthy of reverence or respect.

Third, we are to think about things that are just or right in relation to those around us. We are fill our minds with unselfishness concern for others.

Fourth, we are to think about pure things. "Pure" means free from contaminants. We should not entertain sinful thoughts. Nor should we view impure content.

Fifth, we must think about things that are lovely, or things that we love. Family members, an enjoyable day spent with a good friend, or a symphony could all fall into this category. Thinking on lovely things helps us remember how God has blessed us.

Sixth, we should think about things that would receive a good report or be considered commendable or admirable by others. Such thoughts are attractive and admired for wholesome reasons. The thoughts are constructive rather than destructive.

Seventh, our thoughts should focus on what is virtuous or morally excellent. And last, Paul promoted thoughts that are worthy of praise, meaning ideas worth passing on because they will encourage and help others. Praiseworthy ideas deserve to be commended because they focus on things that God would praise.

This world is terribly deficient in providing appropriate “mind food” for the believer. Few conversations, writings, songs, or actions meet the eight criteria of right thinking. Christians must maintain a steady diet of God’s Word to remain “mind healthy.” A healthy mind is vital to a believer because thinking leads to action. The attributes Paul instructed us to look for in our thoughts are the same attributes found in Jesus Christ. Aligning our thoughts with the character of Jesus will lead to Christlikeness in our actions and will bring peace to our hearts and eliminate the anxious thoughts.

ASK: When have you disciplined yourself to think about things deserving of praise? How did such thinking affect your actions?

Trying to drown our anxious thoughts with sinful thoughts will only make our anxieties worse. We must discipline our minds to think on things pleasing to God to find relief from doubt and fears.

C. Practice your training (4:9)

READ: Philippians 4:9.

Paul had done his best to give the Philippians good teaching and a Christlike example. The Philippians had learned and received right doctrine from Paul as their teacher. They had also seen him live out that doctrine in everyday experiences. Paul urged the believers to make right living a habit. As believers follow Paul’s example and obey God’s instructions, they can share in Paul’s peace, regardless of their circumstances.

ASK: How might a peaceful believer affect the world for Christ?
The world longs for peace, so a person who can be peaceful even in difficult situations is a bright testimony to the work Christ can do in a person’s heart.

Session Application

Gather

- Paper.
- Markers or colored pencils.

Steps

1. Learners illustrate the peace of God that guards their hearts.

They can draw their illustrations in their study books or on their papers.

2. Learners share and explain their illustrations.
3. Discuss finding peace in the midst of anxious thoughts.

ASK: What exceptions did Paul give in Philippians 4:6 that might give a believer an excuse to worry? *There are none.*

ASK: What adjustments will you make to your prayer life to address any anxiety you might be experiencing?

4. Pray for class members or church members who are facing worrisome challenges. Thank God for His prescription for victory over anxiety.

living contentedly

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Philippians 4:10–13

BUILDUP THEME



INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God teaches us contentment that transcends our lot in life.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will list reasons they can find contentment in Christ.

MEMORY VERSE

“Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content” (Philippians 4:11).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Facebook and other social media sites are great for sharing updates and keeping people connected. But they also provide a medium for people to show and tell. People post pictures and tell stories about their lives to generate comments and likes. If some were honest, they are also motivated to make others feel bad about their own lives. For those people, their show and tell becomes showoff and tell.
- ☐ Read Philippians 4:10–13. Suppose Paul had put these verses out as a social media post. On whom does Paul focus? What might you write as a response? Paul learned contentment the hard way. He learned to trust God as he endured painful, dangerous, and miserable conditions.
- ☐ This session will help your learners understand that contentment comes from God and not from things. Challenge your learners to consider how content they are with their present circumstances. Encourage them to find joy and contentment from God rather than from Facebook likes and comments.

Session Summary

Paul wanted to thank the Philippians for their gift to him. He also wanted to let them know that he had learned contentment, which allowed him to be just fine whether he had a lot of resources or whether he had very few. We know from other passages in the Bible that Paul had suffered greatly in many ways. He’d also had times of peace and refreshment along the way. But whether he found himself destitute and hungry or cared for and full, he would be content because Christ would strengthen him and give him courage for whatever path he was called to walk.