



Peace on
Earth



5 WEEKS TO PEACE ADVENT STUDY

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-13

REJOICE

Week 1 | Peace in Rejoicing | Philippians 4:4

Philippians 4:4

“Rejoice in the Lord always.
I will say it again: Rejoice!”

History

The book of Philippians is a letter written to the church in Philippi. Paul wrote this letter while he was incarcerated in a Roman prison.

The church in Philippi was the first in that region and was started by Paul and Silas during their journey mentioned in Acts 16. A wealthy merchant, Lydia, was the first to lead the church there and welcomed them into her home. Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned in Philippi for their ministry. However, God miraculously freed them and lead them to baptize the prison guards there. Paul and Silas had a special connection to the church in Philippi.

Advent begins here...

Gifts, gifts, and more gifts...stressful family gatherings, awkward obligatory work parties, holiday festivities & traditions, traveling, school parties & concerts, eating & cooking alllllll the things, decorating & cleaning, and the list goes on. The holidays often don't feel like the peaceful Hallmark movie moment we all strive for. It can be tough season for many of us. With all the added activities and expectations it's often exhausting, and anything but peaceful. There are also many of us that battle with seasonal depression or that might be experiencing a first holiday season without a loved one. For many reasons the Christmas season can be anxiety triggering, soul weary-ing, and may not resemble the "Peace on Earth" that Jesus intended it to be. So how do we find Peace in our Christmas chaos?

As we go through this Advent series the next few weeks, let's take a look at the lasting, forever, unconditional kind of peace that can exist in our hearts and souls no matter what chaos going on around us. Lets look at the lasting Peace on Earth that only Jesus can bring. Not just for the Christmas season, but throughout the year, let's begin 2026 with a new found peace in our hearts and minds.

Share this guide with friends & families, or maybe a co-worker that needs it. While the chaos of our circumstances might not disappear, prayerfully God will use His word to transform our hearts and lead us to a lasting peace that can't be shaken by the world around us. Living a life trusting in the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6)

Weekly Guide

- Daily Study: 5 day per week study guide & reflection questions
- Deeper Dive: Additional scriptures for reflection or memorization
- Practice: As a family or individually, Day 5 is an call to put into practice what you've learned each week.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Colossians 3:15** ~Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.
- **Psalms 9:1-2** ~I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.
- **Proverbs 17:22** ~A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bone
- **Psalms 34:18** ~The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

Day 1 - Rejoicing with Gratitude

The last thing you want to hear when you are stressed, in pain, grieving, depressed, or anxious is a flippant response like, "Look on the bright side", "Count your blessings", or "It could be worse". It can be hard to convince ourselves to rejoice, to be gracious, or to celebrate when all we can see and feel is our pain.

The word "rejoice" in Philippians 4 can be translated to the Greek word *Charo*. This means to have a deep, joyful state of being that is not dependent on circumstances. It is a joy deeply rooted in being grateful for God's goodness and not a fleeting emotional feeling of happiness. This type of rejoicing & joy is a state of being. Rejoicing is the response that comes from a heart of gratitude towards the goodness and grace of God. When we focus on what we are grateful for, instead of our pain, then we will experience more consistent rejoicing in our lives. Gratitude is the key to keeping this joy & rejoicing sustainable even in challenging times.

This is not a mindset of toxic positivity, where we ignore our pain and pretend it doesn't exist. God never asks us to do that. God wants us to be honest, both with ourselves and with Him. We don't need to try and convince ourselves that everything is good when it's not. God can handle our anger, our tears, our grief, and our frustrations. Just a quick reading throughout Psalms we can see the lamenting prayers of King David. God already knows the pain in our hearts, and He wants us to turn it over to Him. It says in His word that he is near to the brokenhearted and crushed in spirit. (Psalm 34:18). We are not called to be grateful because *everything* is good and perfect, but we are called to be grateful because *God* is good. God is always good and always worthy of our rejoicing and our gratitude, no matter our current circumstances.

Daily Reflection:

- Can you remember a time in your life that you were able to have gratitude & rejoicing, even when things were hard or painful? Reflect on that time and thank God for His gift of peace during that hard season.
- Are you walking through a painful season right now, where it's hard to rejoice? Does rejoicing in how God gave you peace through a previous struggle give you hope today?
- As you think about your spirit of gratitude & rejoicing, are you more grateful for the blessings of God, or for God himself? Have you ever spent time just rejoicing and praising God for being God? Take a moment to worship Him today!

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Isaiah 12:4-6** ~In that day you will say: "Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world. Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion, for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.
- **Psalms 118:23-24** ~the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.
- **Matthew 14:30-31** ~But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

Day 2 - Rejoicing to Physical Peace

As our divine creator, God made us to physically and spiritually need to rejoice with gratitude in order to receive physical peace. It is literally in our brain chemistry. Neuroscience has proven that our brains physically respond to rejoicing & gratitude with chemicals that produce increased gray matter, enhanced contentment, better memory function, immune support & basic emotional well-being. At the neurotransmitter level, being grateful regulates the sympathetic nervous system which controls our anxiety levels. This causes our brains to boost serotonin and dopamine, and reduce cortisol (or stress hormone). Just by simply being grateful and rejoicing, God designed our bodies to reduce the stress of our circumstances.

A study done by Psychology Today took 200 High Schoolers and gave them gratitude journals. After 6 weeks, those that journaled received higher scores on emotional regulation, relational satisfaction, achievement in school and general motivation, with lower scores for anxiety. In a similar study with adults, after 10 weeks of gratitude journaling, participants scored an average of 25% higher in happiness, positivity about the future, lower physical aches & pains, better sleep, and lower levels of depression and anxiety. An interesting find in this study was that those who expressed being specifically grateful to God scored much higher than the others when it came to the lasting stress tolerance testing. It seems that rejoicing in God is the key to long lasting peace.

God knows our bodies, and He knows what's best for us. He isn't asking for our rejoicing & gratitude because He needs our praise. God is fully complete without us. He knows that if we look to Him, instead of our uncertain circumstances, then we will have lasting peace both in our bodies and in our souls. Just like the story in Matthew 14, Peter was walking on water until he looked away from Jesus. Once he focused on the wind and waves, he began to sink. Even in Peter's fear & disobedience, Jesus did not let him drown. God loves us and desires for us to have His lasting physical peace.

Daily Reflection:

- Take time today to pray & examine your physical peace. How is your sleep, your mental health, your anxiety & pain? What is keeping you up at night?
- Like Peter, are there areas you need to re-focus on the goodness of God verses the wind and the waves crashing around you?
- What would it look like for you to truly rejoice in gratitude for who God is, and not just in what He can do for you?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **1 Peter 5:7** ~Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:18** ~Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.
- **Psalms 100:4** ~Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name.
- **Habakkuk 3:17-18**
~Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.
- **Romans 5:3-4** ~Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope

Day 3 - Rejoicing is Hard

It's not always easy to rejoice and be grateful. Many barriers can get in the way of us being able to see the goodness around us. It's important to remember that while rejoicing & gratitude affirms God's goodness, it is not a statement that life is perfect. Many times we get this confused. We only rejoice when everything seems to be going our way. However, God never promises us a life without struggles. Instead, He promises to never leave us and always be with us. Rejoicing & trusting in God's promises will lead to peace, but waiting to rejoice dependent on life's circumstances will never lead to sustainable "charo" or a peace in all circumstances. Let's take a look at some of our barriers to rejoicing in Him:

- **Humility** ~ Expressing gratitude through rejoicing recognizes that the source of goodness is outside of ourselves. This requires a humility that unselfishly appreciates the power of the goodness of God in our lives, and in the ways He is working through our circumstances and through others around us.
- **Control** ~ Rejoicing minimizes our illusion of control and accepts that we can't earn, deserve, or manufacture God's goodness in our lives. Worship and rejoicing pushes us to take ourselves off the throne and recognize that God is the only reason we have anything good in our lives.
- **Comfort Zone** ~ Gratitude & rejoicing are often outside our comfort zone. We live surrounded by a culture of stress, anxiety, greed, pride and ungratefulness. We can easily believe the lie that if we don't worry or stress about it, or try to fix it, then we must not care about it. The truth is that God says to cast all your worries on Him because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7)
- **Consistency** ~ Gratitude has to be practiced consistently to produce lasting peace. As with all spiritual practices, and fruits of the Spirit, this can't be done alone. Consistent gratitude that leads to the "charo" rejoicing Paul speaks about can only happen through the power of the Holy Spirit actively working in your life.

Daily Reflection:

- Pray over each of these barriers. Which one is your greatest struggle? We were never meant to do this alone, pray and ask God for His help with this today.
- Do you have other barriers to gratitude and rejoicing in your life that are not on this list? Pray and ask God for His strength in overcoming those today.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Job 1:21** ~The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised..
- **Luke 17:15-19** ~One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."
- **1 Samuel 2:1-2** ~Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the Lord; in the Lord my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance. "There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.
- **2 Samuel 6:14-15** ~And David danced before the Lord with all his might, wearing a priestly garment. So David and all the people of Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with shouts of joy and the blowing of rams' horns..

Day 4 - Sorrow to Rejoicing

Throughout scripture we can see examples of great anguish & sorrow, leading to gratitude & rejoicing, and ultimately to peace. Take time to read these accounts in the Word today.

- Job ~ Job is one of those books in the Bible that many of us avoid. It's such a heartbreaking story of loss, and we can read it in fear that something might happen to us as well. However, it's a beautiful example of how rejoicing & praising God, even in dire unimaginable circumstances, can lead to peace in sorrow.
- 10 Lepers ~ Jesus healed 10 lepers of their disease, however, only one returned in gratitude & rejoicing to Jesus. The one that returned, Jesus blesses with His lasting forever peace by saying that his faith made him well. This leper was healed in more ways than just his physical body that day. His soul was healed as well.
- Hannah's Prayer ~ In 1 Samuel 1 Hannah prays a bitter and anguished prayer to the Lord. She isn't able to conceive a child and is in deep distress. After her prayer, the Lord blesses her with the promise of a child. Hannah's heart is changed by God as she fully trusts in His provision and goodness. She begins to rejoice in the Lord and receives His peace, even as she waits for healing.
- David's Dance ~ When we think of expressing gratitude & rejoicing worship, David's dance may come to mind. David danced in a physical act of rejoicing when the Ark, symbolizing God's presence, was brought back to Israel. He wore a priestly garment, and he danced in an uninhibited and humble way that made others uncomfortable. David's eyes were on the Lord, not on others around him or his circumstances. He had freedom and peace in his rejoicing solely for the presence of God.

Daily Reflection:

- Which story can you relate to the most? What is the Spirit trying to teach you in reading in the Word today? If you aren't sure, pray that God would open your eyes and heart to see and hear His voice today.
- Do you need to pray a bitter and sorrowful prayer today? Do you need to painfully release some of your barriers to rejoicing & peace to God today? In each of these stories, they were painfully honest with God. God doesn't get angry, instead He changes their hearts. When they re-focus on God, their rejoicing gives them peace. He can do the same for you today. Trust Him with your fears, tears...& maybe even a little dancing or singing in worship. He is worthy of your praise!

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Lamentations 3:22-23**

~The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

- **Psalm 9:2** ~I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.

- **2 Corinthians 13:11**

~Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

- **Isaiah 61:10** ~I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Day 5 - Practicing Rejoicing

Each week, Day 5 will be an activity that you can either do with your family or individually. We will also include dinner table reflections to include younger family members.

As we learned this week: moving towards practicing daily rejoicing & gratitude will open our hearts to the goodness of God, and this will truly lead us to a lasting consistent heart of peace in our Spiritual and physical beings.

- **Gratitude Journal** ~ If you haven't already, begin a gratitude journal. Write down big and small blessings from the Lord. Include it in your daily time with the Lord, and make it a daily practice to see God's goodness in as many places as possible.
- **Gratitude Visit** ~ Pray about who God has placed in your life for the purpose of showing you His goodness. Take a moment to write them a letter, an email, a text, a phone call or maybe even a coffee date. As an act of rejoicing in God's goodness, thank those in your life that God has blessed you with today. Encourage the ways God is using them to further His Kingdom in you.
- **Gratitude Walk** ~ As you walk (or even just driving home from work), pause and be present. Prayerfully take notice of everything around you. Spend time rejoicing and thanking God for everything you see, hear and feel. Notice all your senses, and allow Him to open your eyes to His goodness all around you.
- **Gratitude Prayer** ~ As you pray, take deep breaths, breath out saying "take my ____ today" (put your struggles here - ex: job, family, etc...). Then breath in saying "thank you God for ____" (put a promise of God here - ex: your mercy, your love, your provision, etc...) over and over focusing on the ways you can rejoice in God's promises that overcome all our struggles.

Dinner Table Reflections (with your kids, spouse or a close friend):

- Everyone share their struggles this week. Give time to share, without judgement, or trying to "fix"...just allow the sorrow in this moment. Then take time to pray over everyone's struggles out loud together.
- Everyone share their rejoicing & gratitude for the week. Celebrate, write it down in a place everyone can see, turn on a worship song and dance in the kitchen together. Take time to pray and rejoice in God's goodness this week. If someone can't think of anything, it's okay, we've all been there. Pray and ask God to reveal His goodness to them this week.

PRAYER

Week 2 | Peace Through Prayer | Philippians 4:5-6

Philippians 4:5-6

“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

Deeper Dive

- **Matthew 3:2** ~“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come **near**.”
- **James 1:8** ~You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is **near**.”
- **Matthew 10:7** ~As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come **near**.’
- **Mark 1:13** ~and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels **attended him**.

Day 1 - Prayer is Nearness to God

When you think about God, how do you imagine Him? Is He far away looking down on you from heaven above, or is He as close as a best friend sitting right next to you? How we view God’s nearness, has a lot to do with how we pray. Prayer isn’t just talking to God from a long way off. Prayer is listening to God and joining in conversation with God. Prayer is spending intentional time in the very presence of God. In verse 5 Paul talks about the “nearness” of God, or being in God’s presence. These same words are used by John the Baptist and Jesus in our “Deeper Dive” scriptures for today. This same phrase is used in Mark to describe the angels ministering to Jesus. There was a nearness to God in that moment.

Paul is sharing in Philippians that this “nearness” to God leads us to peace. So, how do we enter into God’s presence in this way? In other words, how should we pray? Jesus’ disciples asked the same question in the gospels, and Jesus gives us a starting place for prayer with an outline for how we should pray: “The Lord’s Prayer”.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Daily Reflection:

- Read the Lord’s Prayer, but instead of word-for-word put it into your own words. If you need something today ask for it as your “daily bread”, if you need forgiveness for something then name it specifically, if you need to forgive someone else do the same, and keep going through the entire prayer making it your own.
- Now take time to listen. Prayer isn’t just speaking to God, it’s listening and spending time with Him. Set a timer for 10 minutes. Close your eyes and imagine yourself sitting next to Jesus, listen for His voice and allow yourself to sit and be near to God.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **John 14:27** ~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..
- **2 Thessalonians 3:16**
~Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.
- **James 4:8** ~Come near to God and he will come near to you.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:17-18**
~pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
- **Psalms 139:7** ~Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
- **Isaiah 41:10** ~So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Day 2 - Prayer Brings Peace

As we discussed yesterday, prayer brings us into the presence of God. Experiencing God's presence brings us peace because God is the foundation of all peace. In fact, God IS peace, and is therefore the only one who can provide us with true and lasting peace.

As it says in James, when we draw near to God, He draws near to us. Of course, this doesn't mean that God is far away and then we somehow summon Him by praying. God is always near to us, even if we don't see or feel Him. This drawing near isn't for God to do, it's for us. If we want to see & feel Him, then we need to turn our eyes towards Him. If we want peace, then we have to keep our eyes focused on the Prince of Peace. Knowing and believing in God's constant and unconditional nearness allows us to respond in gentleness vs. panic or irritation when we are faced with a peace stealing moment. Just as Paul says, "let your gentleness be evident to all". This is only possible through the presence or nearness of God in your life. Gentleness and peace are fruits of the Spirit working inside your heart.

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul talks about being in a state of constant prayer, or nearness to God. This may seem impossible, right? How are we going to work or go to school while bowing our heads with our eyes closed all day long? When we realize that prayer is so much more than just bowing our heads or reciting a memorized blessing at dinner, then we can imagine a different way to be in a state of constant prayer. If prayer is the practice of being in the presence of God, then what if we walked through our day in constant communion with God. What if we were focused on the presence of God, instead of the chaos around us? Just like the story of Peter walking on water, what if we focused on Jesus instead of the wind and waves of our life's struggles. Living in God's presence gives us the freedom to live in a place of calm assurance and peace instead of anxiously striving alone with the waves of life's chaos crashing over our heads.

Daily Reflection:

- What would it look like for you to live in constant prayer and communion with God during your daily life?
- How does shifting your view of what prayer can look like open the possibilities of a more meaningful prayer life?
- How does understanding the constant nearness of God change the way you approach your stress and challenges? What could you do to remind yourself that He is always with you and that you are never alone?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Jeremiah 17:7-8** ~“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”
- **Matthew 26:38-42** ~
Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”
Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping.
“Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”
He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”

Day 3 - Worry Steals Our Peace

Worrying can be defined as the mental distress or agitation resulting from anxiety, usually coming from a place of anticipatory fear or fear coming from a present threat. Worry is the opposite of peace, and is often considered the thief of our peace. This is why Paul warns us “Do not be anxious about anything”. Initially that may seem a bit flippant and it might even make you a bit frustrated if you struggle with worry & anxiety like many of us. How are we supposed to just “not” be worried or anxious?

We certainly can’t control our emotions and feelings. Whether it’s worry, anxiety, fear or anger, our emotional response is part of how we are made in the image of God. We can read in scripture that God himself feels anger, sadness, and even deep anguish. One of the most memorable moments is during Jesus’ last days on Earth when it says He was so anguished that He was sweating drops of blood. Our emotions and feelings are not a sin, however, what we do with them can be. Jesus gives us a perfect example of what to do. He immediately brings His fears and anxiety to God in prayer, and also surrounds himself with a community of support (even though they fell asleep). Jesus never sins in his fear or anguish, He surrenders fully to God saying “your will be done”. This is exactly what Paul is talking about in these verses of Philippians.

Paul isn’t suggesting that we need to somehow learn to control our feelings. The phrase “do not worry” is an invitation, and not a command. God is inviting us to choose not to stay in that space of deep anguish, and to surrender it to Him. He knows that anything we focus on other than Him can grow deep painful roots in our lives. Focusing on our anxieties can steal our peace, our joy, and even our presence. It can embed itself in our confidence, our relationships, our identity, and even affect our physical health & well-being. Many times those with chronic anxiety due to past trauma or mental health challenges need support of a community or with therapy & medication to be able to break free from it’s powerful grip. Deeply rooted anxiety is certainly not something that is as easy as telling yourself not to worry. We cannot do this alone, and we were never meant to. God wants us to trust Him with all our worries and surrender all our cares to Him. By trusting God, and receiving support from those around us, we can find peace from our worries.

Daily Reflection:

- Where is anxiety and worry stealing your peace?
- What do you need to surrender to God today in prayer? How could you surround yourself with a supportive community, and daily focus on God verses your worries and fears?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Luke 18:1-8** ~Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones
- **Matthew 7:9-11** ~"Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!

Day 4 - But FIRST, Pray!

When Paul writes "by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, bring your requests to God", he is writing about prayer. The answer to our worry, or absence of peace, is prayer. There are many ways we stumble when we are bringing our requests to God.

The first stumbling block is our pride. We often do everything we can to fix it ourselves, and after we are burned out and exhausted, we use prayer as a last resort. It's those moments we say "well, all I can do is pray about it now" as we throw our hands in the air. This is the opposite of the peace filled surrender that God wants. This is certainly not the prayer with thanksgiving that Paul is speaking of. God doesn't want to be our last resort, He wants to be our first step.

The next stumbling block is that we are impatient. Maybe we pray for something for so long that we give up on God. We start to believe the lie that if God doesn't meet our timing, or if the answer isn't in the way we want, then He must not hear us. Nothing could be further from the truth. God wants us to trust in His goodness, His timing, and His peace.

We can see examples of this throughout scripture.

- **Widow and the Judge** ~ In this parable in Luke, Jesus gives his disciples an example of how persistent we need to be in our prayers. This is certainly the type of "petition" Paul is speaking about. Jesus tells us not to give up hope, and to trust in God's timing. We can trust God and have peace knowing that a loving God would do so much more for us than an unjust judge would do for a persistent widow's requests.
- **Good Gifts** ~ In Matthew 7, Jesus compares an earthly father granting the requests of his child verses our Heavenly Father answering our requests. He asks his disciples the question, how much more would your Heavenly Father bless you than an earthly father? If we can trust those that are imperfect to give us what we ask for, then we should be able to trust the one who is truly perfect to do the same or better.

Daily Reflection:

- What are the barriers for you in your prayer life? What would it take for you to bring all your requests to Him?
- Is prayer often a last resort? How could you begin to make prayer your first step?
- Have you given up or lost hope for a specific situation in your life? Pray and give that over to the Lord today. Ask Him to give you a renewed hope in this area in your life.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Matthew 18:20** ~For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."
- **Matthew 6:6** ~But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
- **Psalms 139:2** ~You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.
- **Joshua 1:8** ~Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.
- **John 10:27** ~My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Day 5 - Practicing Prayer

Each week, Day 5 will be an activity that you can either do with your family or individually. We will also include dinner table reflections to include younger family members.

As we learned this week: Practicing being near to God will bring peace to your heart. God wants us to bring our worries, anxieties and fears in full surrender to God through prayer & petition.

- **Create Space** ~ Dedicate daily time in prayer. This should be a place and time that is without distraction, where you can fully focus on God. Just as you would on a date with your spouse or best friend, give God your full undivided attention. If you have a busy schedule, then mark it on your calendar as a "divine appointment". If we would do this for a client at work or doctor's appointment, then why not do this for our Heavenly Father as well?! It will be your most important appointment of the day!
- **Be REAL** ~ God already knows what's in your heart, before you even say it, and He can handle anything you bring to Him. Be honest, raw and authentic. Share your tears, fears, laughs, joys, anxieties, questions, doubts and struggles with Him. There is no need for fancy words or phrases, just speak to Him as you would your closest friend. (Spoiler: You don't even have to close your eyes, fold your hands, or say "amen"...there is no wrong way to pray and spend time in God's presence)
- **Meditate on the Word** ~ As you spend time with God, read & pray over His Word. Meditate on scripture that speaks into what you are going through. Speak God's promises out-loud and praise God for who He is. Worship Him through His Word.
- **Listen and Trust** ~ Don't just talk, be sure to listen. God has all your answers, He knows all the plans, and He wants to give you His wisdom and grace. Make part of your time together each day a listening time. Set a timer if you need to and sit in His presence. The more you listen, the more you will learn to hear his voice.

Dinner Table Reflections (with your kids, spouse or a close friend):

- Make a prayer wall in your house. A large poster board, bulletin board, or dry marker board. Everyone share their prayer requests, or questions and worries, big and small, that they want to give to God. Write them on the board and continue to add to it daily.
- Take time as a family to pray together. If you live alone, then call a close friend or family member to pray with. Lift up your cares and worries to God.

MIND

Week 3 | Peace In Your Mind | Philippians 4:7-8

Philippians 4:7-8

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, 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.”

Deeper Dive

In ancient Rome, a military garrison referred to a group of about 1,000 soldiers stationed to maintain order & control. They were typically located in regions that were under Roman occupation to prevent uprisings from within. They were a powerful physical & symbolic force of Rome's strength. Therefore, when Paul uses this term to describe the Peace of God guarding our hearts and minds, this should give us a powerful image of how God's peace protects us. Not only does He protect us against outside enemies, but also from within ourselves.

Day 1 - Peace is a Guard

The word “guard” in verse 7 is a military term meaning to “stand guard” or “to protect by a military garrison”. (See the Deeper Dive section for additional historic context).

Imagine a group of Roman soldiers standing in front of our hearts and minds, fully armed and ready to defend against any enemy that might try to attack our peace. As the gate keeper, this guard would monitor anything entering or exiting, as well as, a force to quell any uprisings from within. This is not passive protection, but a strong, active, defensive, and vigilant force. Having the peace of God as our guard should reassure us that we can trust Him fully with our mental & spiritual wellbeing.

This type of strong impenetrable peace of God doesn't make sense to the world. The world offers us a counterfeit, fleeting, emotional type of peace. This peace is self-made, self-maintained, and completely dependent on our circumstances. This peace can be stolen with one bad phone call, one negative thought, one doctor's visit, one conversation with your child's teacher or your boss, or even just turning on the news. This is certainly not the version of peace that could stand guard over your heart and mind.

God offers us a peace that “transcends all understanding”. When this type of peace is guarding your inner peace, nothing can shake it. Your thoughts and your heart are literally under His divine protection. No matter your circumstances, your peace cannot be stolen. Your peace no longer depends on your emotions, or your mood, or what has happened that day. Your peace solely depends on your faith & dependence on the promises of God.

Daily Reflection:

- What stole your peace today? Was it from within yourself, or was it an attack from outside circumstances? What would it look like for you to allow God's peace to guard your heart and mind instead of trying to fight it on your own?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Romans 12:2** ~Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
- **Romans 8:6** ~The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.
- **Psalms 34:18** ~The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.
- **John 1:5** ~The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.
- **Matthew 4:1-11** ~Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.
- **Isaiah 26:3** ~You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Day 2 - The Battle Begins IN Your Mind

If we made a list of all the things that stole our peace and brought anxiety into our lives this week, we would probably list a host of outside circumstances, challenges, relationships, and situations. However, if we take a deeper look at the root cause of these struggles, we would likely realize most of our issues begin INSIDE ourselves. Our internal thoughts are often at the root of our struggles in life. This is why guarding our hearts and minds is so incredibly important.

Our minds are truly the battlefield where our peace is won and lost. We need to protect this space at all costs. Of course, this is not suggesting that we need to ignore our struggles, and try to pretend everything is good. It is okay, to not be okay! God can handle our tears. In Psalms it says God is near to the broken hearted and the crushed in spirit. Part of letting God guard your mind is being honest with yourself and bringing those negative thoughts and emotions to Him. We can't face what we can't admit or see. When we bring our darkness into the light, healing starts to begin. The key is not trying to fight alone, but instead inviting God to fight for you.

The enemy will whisper worry, fear, shame, guilt, comparison, jealousy, and plenty of negativity into your heart & mind. We can't control our negative emotions that come with these attacks. There is no need to add guilt and shame on top of feeling low. This is not from the Lord! Jesus himself was spoken to by the enemy, and was tempted. The whispers & lies of the enemy are not sin alone, it's what we do with the lies that God cares about. If we follow Jesus' example in the desert, we can speak God's truth over the lies. Whether it's quoting God's exact words through scripture, or surrendering it to God in prayer, or even bringing it to the community of believers around you, and allow God to use others to speak into your life.

The enemy tries to make us feel alone and isolated in our thoughts, but truly God didn't create us to ever be alone. Allow God to guard your heart & mind through His Word, your community of believers, and His presence. It doesn't mean that the enemy won't try to break through, but what it does mean is that the one fighting for you has already WON!! We can trust in the promise of God's peace..

Daily Reflection:

- What negative thoughts are you battling in your mind today? Ask God if this is from Him, or a whisper of the enemy. If you are believing a lie of the enemy, open your Bible and search for the contrasting truth of God. If you aren't sure where to begin, reach out to a Bible study leader, pastor, counselor or trusted friend. Pray and ask God to begin healing this area in your mind today.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **TRUE: John 17:17**
~Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
- **HONORABLE: Psalm 29:2**
~Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.
- **RIGHT: Isaiah 1:17**
~Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.
- **PURE: Matthew 5:8**
~Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- **LOVELY: Psalm 19:1**
~The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands
- **ADMIRABLE: Hebrews 10:24**
~And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,
- **EXCELLENT: 2 Peter 1:5**
~For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge;
- **PRAISEWORTHY: Psalm 147:1**
~Praise the Lord. How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!

Day 3 - Think about it

When Paul says "think about these things" referring to the list of good and pure thoughts in verse 8, the word "think" means to "dwell, meditate, or to continually consider". We are called to dwell and cling to the goodness that God offers us in living an obedient life with Him. Even though negative thoughts will come, God doesn't want us to dwell on them, or allow them to control our lives. Let's take a deeper look at each of these truths as we seek to dwell on them continually in our hearts and minds.

- **Whatever is TRUE:** Aligning our thoughts with God's truth through His unchanging Word, character, and promises. Rejecting false rumors, half-truths, doubt, and deceit. **ASK - Does this reflect the truth of Christ?**
- **Whatever is HONORABLE:** Aligning our thoughts with what is worthy of our respect, reverence, and dignity. Rejecting shameful humor, dishonoring talk, disrespect, or a lack of integrity. **ASK - Does this bring honor God?**
- **Whatever is RIGHT:** Aligning our thoughts with what is just and righteous, even if it's hard. Rejecting injustice, revenge, cheating, or wrongdoing. **ASK - How would Christ justly respond to this?**
- **Whatever is PURE:** Aligning our thoughts with what is morally clean, Holy, innocent, and free from corruption. Rejecting impurity, lust, corruption, greed, and bitterness. **ASK - Does this reflect the Holiness of God?**
- **Whatever is LOVELY:** Aligning our thoughts with what is kind, beautiful, joyful, harmonious, hospitable, uplifting and delightful. Rejecting criticism, bitterness or negativity towards others. **ASK - Does this reflect the beauty of God?**
- **Whatever is ADMIRABLE:** Aligning our thoughts with what is commendable, faithful, inspiring and of good repute. Rejecting gossip, judgement, scandal, or tearing others down. **ASK - Does this bring glory to God?**
- **Whatever is EXCELLENT:** Aligning our thoughts with what is focused on growth, virtue, and improvement. Rejecting laziness, mediocrity, or giving up easily. **ASK - Does this reflect the best I can do in His strength?**
- **Whatever is PRAISEWORTHY:** Aligning our thoughts with gratitude, thankfulness, blessing, appreciation and goodness. Rejecting complaining, negativity, or focusing on what's wrong. **ASK - Is this worthy of praise or worship?**

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

• Ephesians 6:10-18

~Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Day 4 - We Need Peace Keeping Armor

Daily we experience attacks from the enemy. From our worth, to our identity, to guilt & shame, to overwhelm & anxiety, to fear & despair, our peace is constantly attacked. It's important to remember that these battles are not against the things of this earth, but are a deeper spiritual battle. This is especially true with the hidden battles within our hearts & minds. While we can't stop the attacks from coming, we can put on the full armor of God! Daily wearing this armor will allow us to stand firm in the peace of God during any attack or circumstance that life brings our way.

- **Belt of Truth** ~ The soldier's belt held all of the other armor in it's proper place. Similarly, God's truth holds everything in place, and protects us against the "father of lies". Spending time in the Word keeps the truth of God securely fastened over our lives.
- **Breastplate of Righteousness** ~ The soldier's breastplate protected vital organs in battle, even if he didn't raise his shield. Similarly, the righteousness that we have in Christ will never fail. Living in obedience to God will keep this breastplate in place.
- **Sandals of Peace** ~ The soldier's sandals not only protected their feet from blisters, but also had spikes on the bottom to secure their feet in battle. Similarly, the peace we have in Christ is our firm foundation, and will keep us from falling when we are attacked.
- **Shield of Faith** ~ The soldier's shield is their primary defensive weapon. Similarly, our faith and trust in God will deflect the enemy's attacks. Their shields could also be linked with another soldier's shield to create a defensive wall. This is like our church community and small groups, as we link together & support each other in faith.
- **Helmet of Salvation** ~ The helmet protected the soldier's most vulnerable area, their head. This was one of the most crucial pieces of protection, and it also let everyone know their identity or rank. Similarly, our salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit protects all our weaknesses, and proclaims our identity in Christ.
- **Sword of the Spirit** ~ The sword is the only offensive weapon worn by the soldier. Similarly, the Word is our weapon against any and all attacks of the enemy. This is why reading daily, and even memorizing scripture is so important in the battle for our minds.

Prayer is the last piece that it mentions in these verses. Without prayer, and the presence of God, we are powerless in the battle. The one who has WON the war is with us, we can trust in Him.

As you read over these pieces of armor, where do you struggle? Where have you left off a piece or two, where do you need to suit up?

It's not too late to start today...pick up your armor & pray!

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **John 16:33** ~“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
- **Romans 5:1-2** ~Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

Day 5 - Practicing Mind Training

Each week, Day 5 will be an activity that you can either do with your family or individually. We will also include dinner table reflections to include younger family members.

As we learned this week: When we hold every thought captive, allow God to guard our hearts & minds with His peace, stand firmly clothed in God’s armor, then we will have the peace that surpasses all understanding. A peace-filled mind is fruit of consistent faith, trust, and surrender to the Spirit. Let’s look at what steps you can take to practice training your heart & mind for this type of peace.

- **Pray** ~ Make a prayer “closet”. This can literally be a closet, or just anywhere you choose that you can daily uninterrupted time with God. Keep a prayer journal in this space, or even a wall of sticky notes. God’s presence will make this your “safe space” to be fully authentic, raw and open. He already knows the deepest darkest struggles you have in your mind. Bring that darkness into the light, and pour it out to Him in full surrender. Then praise Him, trusting that He is already working His goodness into the toughest of life’s circumstances.
- **Read** ~ Make it a priority to read in the Word daily. If you don’t know where to begin...read one chapter a day of any Gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John). Then read one chapter a day in the book of Psalms. If you don’t know what translation to pick, either the NIV, NLT, or ESV are a good place to start. There is also a Bible App for your phone (You Version) that will read the Bible to you if you learn best audibly. Remember, this is your sword against the attacks on your mind!
- **Focus** ~ Throughout your day take every thought captive and ask yourself those filter questions from Day 3. In your journal....list the thoughts you’re struggling with. Then decide...is this a lie, or a truth? List the lies on one side, and then the truths in Christ on the other. In this way you can begin to renew your mind daily and filter out the enemy’s lies through the power of Christ.

Dinner Table Reflections (with your kids, spouse or a close friend):

- **Peace Jar** - Get a jar (or a bowl) and place it in the middle of your table. On small cards write down meaningful scripture focused on peace. Of course, feel free to use verses from the deeper dive sections of these weekly studies. When you, or your family, are feeling the peace in your mind being attacked, pull out one of the verses...read and pray over it. You may even want to tape it to your mirror or wall if you need to meditate on it for a while.

PRACTICE

Week 4 | Peace In Practice | Philippians 4:9

Philippians 4:9

“Whatever 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.”

Deeper Dive

- **2 Timothy 3:10-14** ~You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,

Day I - Learning

Is it possible for us to learn to be peaceful? How do we become students of peace? An Italian psychologist more than 50 years ago studied this very topic and concluded that “the effective means to change inner attitude, both individual and collective, is the constant application of the good will.” Of course, he wasn’t a believer, and didn’t attribute this to the good will of God. However, we know as followers of Jesus that he actually didn’t discover anything new. His study only confirmed what has been written in the Word of God for 1,000’s of years! As it says in scripture, we learn peace by practicing the good will & teachings of God, the giver of all good things.

Do you remember the first time you learned to ride a bike? You probably fell a few times, and most of us probably shed a few tears. Like anything new that we learn, we aren’t going to be experts right away. We can’t go win a triathlon after just taking off the training wheels. At first we process every step: pedaling, steering, and how we are going to stop. Eventually, after tons of practice, we begin to enjoy the ride without even thinking about it. It becomes like second nature.

As with anything new we learn in life, including peace, we will only get better by practicing what we have learned. As we are learning peace, we need to practice the Lord’s teachings: daily prayer, living in faith, forgiveness & grace, time in the Word, surrender, and humility. Eventually, just like riding your bike, peace can be like second nature. As Paul writes, we need to practice what we have learned, and when we inevitably mess up and fall down, let God’s grace pick you up, dust you off, and get back on to ride again.

Daily Reflection:

- Where do you need to start practicing peace? As you think about daily spiritual practices, where do you struggle? Is it prayer, time in the Word, forgiveness, surrender, or something else? Pray and ask God to help you get back on the bike today, to begin learning to ride through life’s storms in His peace.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **2 Corinthians 12:9** ~“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.
- **Ephesians 2:8-9** ~For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast..
- **John 1:16** ~Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.
- **2 Peter 1:4** ~Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.
- **Romans 5:1** ~Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
- **James 1:17** ~Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Day 2 - Receiving

During Christmas, many of us will be giving and receiving gifts. We have probably all had the uncomfortable experience of receiving a gift from someone that we did not expect, and in turn didn’t have something for them. Eeek, awkward, right? Or maybe you’ve had a time in your life where you couldn’t return someone’s gift due to finances or other restraints. Receiving can be a humbling experience, even when we really need it. It might be the offer of a meal train after surgery or someone wanting to help with an unexpected car repair. Our first reaction is often “oh no, I am fine”. We let our pride gets in the way, and it’s hard to accept something we can’t reciprocate, or don’t feel we’ve earned.

This can be the same with the promises of God. Our pride can easily get in the way of receiving what God wants to freely give us. We might falsely believe that we have to “earn” God’s promises. Often our biggest hurdle when it comes to saying “YES” to Jesus, is humbling ourselves to understand that nothing we could ever do, or say, or achieve could EVER earn the promises of God. Receiving, opening, and accepting this gift is truly the most important choice you’ll ever make, and maybe also one of the hardest.

Of course, one of God’s promises is the peace that He wants us to freely give us by trusting in Him. This is a gift that He wants us to receive, open and accept in our lives. When we believe the lie that we have to work to earn our peace, this is literally pulling us in the opposite direction of peace. Peace is surrendering ourselves to the promises and presence of God, fully trusting in Him for our past, present and future needs and circumstances. This is a generous, and totally “un-earnable” gift of grace.

In order for us to fully receive this gift of peace, we have to open it. So often we have the “head knowledge” of God’s Word and His promises, but we don’t open it and put it into action in our lives. This opening of God’s gift of peace in our lives requires us to turn over everything to Him in full surrender, practice what we have learned and humbly accept that we can not do this life on our own. We truly need the Prince of Peace with us to be able to firmly withstand life’s many unexpected storms.

Daily Reflection:

- Have you fully received and accepted the gift of God’s peace in your heart? Have you truly and humbly chosen to open it and put it into action in your life? If not, what is holding you back?
- Are there areas that you have received His peace in, only to pick them back up again and try to provide peace on your own? Pray and release those back to Him today.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **James 1:22-25** ~Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.
- **Mark 4:14-20** ~The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. Others, like seed sown on good soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

Day 3 - Hearing

Have you ever been to a restaurant, and as the server puts the plate in front of you they say “hot plate”? Doesn’t it just makes you want to touch it? I mean we **heard** them warn us, but we still want to test it for ourselves right? This can be true for so many things in our lives. We hear the instructions, but our pride gets in the way and we just want to do it our own way. Sometimes we don’t even wait to hear the full instructions before jumping in and getting ahead of ourselves. It’s like making a recipe by only reading the ingredients, and skipping all those pesky steps, like the temperature, etc.

Hearing God’s word is the same way. We may hear His instructions, but did we hear enough to put them into practice? Jesus warns His disciples about this in the parable of the farmer and seed. In this parable, the farmer is God, the seed is God’s Word, and the various types of soil are the hearers, or ourselves. Let’s look at the types of soil, and what happens after they hear the Word of God. Do they let it sink in deep enough to practice God’s truth in their lives?

- **Along the Path** - Seeds in the path have no chance of growth, because there is no soil. These are the times in our lives when we hear God, but chose to ignore or reject His voice. The enemy steals away that seed immediately, and we never have the chance to practice any peace or goodness in our lives.
- **Shallow Rocky Soil** - These are the moments when we hear from God, love and appreciate what we hear, but never allow it to change our daily lives. We prefer to remain in control, and only allow God to reach the surface level in our lives. Sadly, when life’s storms come, this seed has no roots and gets easily washed away.
- **Thorny Soil** - Many of us suffer from thorny soil. We hear God’s voice and start to experience life change. Then we get busy, become distracted, and we allow things take priority over God in our lives. The thorns stunt our growth, choke out our deep roots and keep us from producing fruit, or practicing what we’ve heard.
- **Good Soil** - This is exactly what James 1:25 is speaking of. When we have good soil, we not only hear God’s Word, but we allow it to grow deep roots in our lives. We surrender fully to Him, and allow His words to produce lasting change. This is the only way for us to see good and lasting spiritual fruit, including peace.

Daily Reflections:

- Honestly reflect: What type of soil do you have now, or have you experienced in the past?
- What are you hearing from God today? What thorns do you need to prune to grow deep roots, produce fruit and put it into practice? What do you need to change to develop good soil?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **1 Corinthians 11:1**

~Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

- **Ephesians 5:1-2** ~Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- **1 Peter 2:21** ~To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

- **Matthew 11:28-30**

~"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

- **Hebrews 12:1-2**

~Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Day 4 - Seeing

As with learning, receiving, and hearing, seeing is only beneficial if it leads you to following. Of course, in order follow God we have to be close enough to see Him, right? Honestly, it's hard to do any of these things from far away. Following literally requires proximity, focus, and obedience in order to work.

Ever tried to follow someone in the car? It's not easy on a good day, but what if traffic is heavy, or it's storming and raining out? Suddenly, you are laser focused on their tail lights. Are they putting on the brakes, or their blinker? Are they changing lanes, or getting ready to turn? Maybe they drive a bit slower or faster than you normally do, so you have to adjust and go at their speed to follow. You have to mirror their every move so that you don't get lost.

This is similar to following God. Especially when life throws storms our way, or we get in a busy season of traffic, it gets even more important to stay as close as possible and to be laser focused on seeing Him. Jesus explains this in Matthew 11 when He talks about being "yoked" to Him. A yoke in Biblical times was a wooden beam used between a pair of oxen to help them work together. Jesus wants us to be fully joined together with Him, following Him, and learning from Him. When those storms and circumstances of life come, He wants us to draw near to Him. Jesus is telling us to come to Him when we are weary, and He promises that the burden He shares with us will be easy and light. Following Him will lead us to the fruit of His peace. This a true commitment of seeing Jesus, following or imitating Him, and obedience to God.

If we are called to be imitators of Christ, and following what we see in His Character...let's look at those key characteristics to ponder.

Take a moment today to read these verses and ask yourself: ***What aspects of Jesus' character do I need to be better yoked to Him?***

1. **Love & Compassion:** John 13:34-35
2. **Servanthood & Humility:** Matthew 20:28
3. **Obedience:** John 6:38
4. **Forgiveness:** Luke 23:34
5. **Holiness & Righteousness:** 1 Peter 1:15-16

Of course none of this can be done outside of the strength and power of Jesus Christ. We **MUST** be yoked to Him in order to see Him, follow Him, imitate Him, or to learn from Him.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **James 2:17** ~In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
- **1 John 3:18** ~Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Day 5 - Practice

Each week, Day 5 will be an activity that you can either do with your family or individually. We will also include dinner table reflections to include younger family members.

As we learned this week: Knowledge, reception, hearing, and observation all push us to obedient practice. Daily practice is the only way that we will ever learn, improve, grow, mature, or move to fully experience the fruits of the Spirit in our lives. Putting our faith into practice takes patience, humility, intentionality, and consistency. Here are a few practical & fun ways to put faith into practice this week. You can tweak these to make them your own, do them as a family, individually, or with friends. Some of these might even find their way into your New Years Resolutions!!

- Practice imitating Christ ~ Choose one Christlike trait as a weekly focus. Write it on a board in your home (ex: kindness, gentleness, patience, honesty, thankfulness). Each day look for one way that you can imitate or practice this trait, then share your stories with each other at the end of the day or week.
- Practice encouraging ~ Observe your family members (or friends). Watch for those places where they are following Jesus. Write a note of encouragement about what you have noticed in them. Celebrate the light of Christ that you see shining from them.
- Practice serving ~ Serve together as Jesus served. Choose one of our Care 4 Community days, buy an Angle Tree gift, volunteer at church, gather food for the food pantry, or make "blessing bags" for the unhoused in our community. Serve together in some way over the Holidays as a family (or with friends).
- Practice hospitality ~ Make a New Years resolution to invite someone over for dinner once a month, a week, or a quarter... whatever works for your family. Let it be someone that Jesus would have invited...someone that truly needs a friend or a meal, or maybe they are a little different and just need a bit of love and acceptance.
- Practice forgiveness ~ We probably all have someone we could forgive this holiday season. Maybe it's even your spouse or your kids. Make a phone call or write a letter, pray and let the Holy Spirit guide you through the process. If you are a parent, model this by saying: "I'm sorry, I was wrong, or I forgive you."

Remember that none of these should be done on your own efforts. As with all practice, you have to follow a great teacher. What better teacher to lead us to peace than the one who IS peace!

PEACE ON EARTH

Week 5 | Peace on Earth | Philippians 4:10-13

Philippians 4:10-13

“I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

Deeper Dive

Paul and Silas' journey to Philippi landed them in prison. They were falsely accused, not given a fair trial, beaten severely, and put into a highly restricted area of the prison. They had a guard placed over them in an inner cell where they were locked down with stocks. The physical pain and the unjust way the magistrates had prosecuted them should have left them angry and bitter, but instead they worshipped!

Day 1 - Peace in all Circumstances

What happens to our peace when we get bad news from the doctor, or our boss calls begins to talk about layoffs, or we turn on the news and see tragedy unfolding around us? Our ever changing circumstances can absolutely place our peace on shaky ground.

Paul and Silas certainly experienced the ground shaking under their feet. When they first journeyed to Philippi, they were attacked and unjustly imprisoned there. The church in Philippi would have known about the treatment they had endured. In fact, the very guard and his family would have been a part of the church in Philippi by the time this letter was sent (see the Deeper Dive section for more context). The church members would have had a first hand account how Paul & Silas reacted to this shaky moment.

Take a moment to read **Acts 16:16-40**. Sitting in that prison cell, Paul & Silas had every right to be angry, bitter, hopeless, or destitute. Instead, they had peace. How is this possible? Paul explains in Philippians 4:13 that it is through the strength of Christ! We cannot do this on our own. When it seemed like all was lost, Paul & Silas began to worship & pray to the Lord. Their fellow prisoners & the guards listened as they continued their missionary journey in their prison cell. When we have peace in all circumstances, Jesus shines through, and others take notice.

Then, God literally shook the ground as an earthquake broke open the prison doors and the chains fell off. They could have easily run away in this moment, however, they chose to stay. The guard was so grateful that he and his entire family were baptized that day. Peace in all circumstances, through Christ's strength, keeps us standing firm when the ground is shaking & everything is crumbling around us.

Daily Reflection:

- Think of your shaky ground moments in life, either right now or in your past. Did you run away? Did you become angry or destitute?
- Pray & ask God for His strength to stand firm & find peace in all circumstances. Trust in His power & strength, instead of your own.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Mark 4:37-41** ~A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"
- **Luke 8: 23-25** ~A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."
- **Luke 8: 23-25** ~"Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

Day 2 - Peace in Uncertainty

How often have you prayed for something and given God a detailed project outline of how and when you want Him to move? Maybe you gave God a verbal flow chart or project checklist to complete? We are probably all guilty of this at some point in our lives. Instead of simply "God, I trust you to provide for my family"...we say "God, please help me to get the job at _____, and allow the pay to be \$_____, and on and on and on, etc". Of course, it's not bad to be specific in our prayers, however, we need to have faith that God alone truly knows what's best for us. If we don't get the job and things don't happen in the exact way we planned, what happens to our peace? Do we begin to believe the lie that God doesn't hear us, or that He doesn't care? Does our peace, and our faith, begin to suffer? If we are honest, most of us are VERY impatient when it comes to uncertainty, and we like being in control.

Imagine marching in a parade as a trumpet player. You can see the woodwinds in front of you & hear the sousaphones behind you, but you can't see what's coming around the corner. You can't see the whole parade because that's all our human perspective allows. However, God's perspective is like a drone flying over the whole parade. He sees everything, and knows everything. We can have faith in His plans and timing because He knows what is best for us.

Faith and peace in uncertainty have to grow congruently. As we deepen our faith in who God is, then we can receive the gift of His peace, even when things are uncertain. We can see this concept in action with the disciples & Jesus. As their boat becomes rocked by a powerful storm, they quickly lose all sense of peace in a panic. Even though they were literally walking with God, we can see their faith wasn't strong since it rocked with those waves. In the midst of their chaos Jesus calms the storm. However, instead of worshiping Him, they were surprised and fearful of His power over creation. If they had the faith to know who Jesus truly was, His power would not have surprised or frightened them. If they had a deep faith in who was in that boat with them, they would have had peace in the storm.

Daily Reflection:

- Do you truly know who is in your boat? What can you do in this New Year to grow your faith & knowledge of who He is?
- Where do you need to give up control today? Where do you need to tear up your spreadsheets & flow charts and let God lead you through life's uncertain storms?
- Where have you believed the lie that God doesn't hear you? Could this be a space where God has different plans or timing? Pray and ask God to help you in giving this over to Him.

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

• **2 Corinthians 11:16-33**

~I have been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

- **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** ~I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Day 3 - Peace in Lack

In Philippians 4, "lack" refers to a deficiency or absence of something that is necessary and/or desired. This could be in all areas of our lives: spiritual, physical or emotional. During Paul's ministry, we can see seasons where he certainly experienced lack in probably more ways than we could imagine.

As you read 2 Corinthians 11 in the Deeper Dive section today, we can see an unimaginable snapshot of the ways Paul suffered during his ministry. He was imprisoned, beaten, almost put to death, shipwrecked, living without - food, shelter or rest, and literally living in danger at every turn. It would be impossible for most of us to put into perspective all that he went through. However, despite all this hardship, Paul says he is "boasting in his suffering". Somehow he has peace even in all these dire & desperate circumstances.

As if this wasn't enough, we also know that Paul suffered spiritually and emotionally as well. In 2 Corinthians 12 we learn about a "thorn" that Paul battled daily. We don't know exactly what this was, but we do know that it was sent by Satan to consistently torment him. We also know that he begged God to take it away several times. However, God did not remove it. This was not because God couldn't do it, and it was not because God didn't hear him or care about him. Paul's reaction shows us that he understood this, and that he trusted in God's plans, even when he asked for something different. Instead of being angry with God, Paul sees God's purpose in allowing the thorn to stay. He can even "delight" in his own weakness for Christ's sake. Paul knew that just because God CAN do anything, doesn't mean that He WILL do anything. His Will is perfect and sovereign, His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8).

How is all this possible? How could Paul boast in suffering, or delight in weakness? How could Paul be at peace in all circumstances during seasons of such great lack and suffering?

As it says in Phil 4:13, Paul can only do this through Christ's strength. Paul fully understands that he receives his hope, joy, peace, power and strength from Christ alone! Therefore he can rejoice in a season of lack, because this is exactly when Christ's power can shine the brightest.

Daily Reflection:

- When you are experiencing lack, what is your "go to" reaction? Is it anger & anxiety, or is it rejoicing & peace?
- How could you rejoice in your suffering? What would it look like to turn your struggle over to God, and ask for His strength to shine through your weakness to find peace in all circumstances?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

- **Matthew 19: 16-24** ~If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."
- **Matthew 6: 19-20** ~"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Day 4 - Peace in Plenty

When we imagine ourselves having peace in plenty, many of us might be saying "duh, of course I would have peace in plenty". Interestingly enough, most of us in this country actually have MORE than plenty if we compare ourselves to the rest of the world. However, even with all these blessings, we still find ourselves anxious, angry, exhausted, jealous, greedy, and always striving for more. Peace in plenty isn't as easy as it may seem.

The struggle with plenty is that we can start to feel like we don't need God. If you have everything you think you need, then why do you need a savior? Pride gets in the way and we easily forget where our "plenty" came from. We start to set our security & our hope in ourselves, verses the one who gave us the "plenty".

As we read about the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, we see this very idea in action. Jesus knew that this man had put his "plenty" above God & had made it an idol. Jesus warns us of this temptation over and over throughout the New Testament. When Jesus asks him to sell his possessions and to get rid of this idol, sadly, the rich man chose his "plenty" over Jesus. When we put our "plenty" over God, then we are seeking to find our security, hope, peace and joy through empty possessions verses a living God. This will never bring us the lasting peace in all circumstances that God promises us.

In Matthew 6, Jesus again explains that this earthly "plenty" is fleeting. It can be here today and gone tomorrow. If our peace rests in our possessions then what happens when we loose our jobs, we get a medical diagnosis that will wipe out our savings, or some other circumstance threatens our illusion of control and safety net?

If our peace is dependent on anything other than an unchanging and unwavering God, then there is no pathway to peace in all circumstances. Many times in Paul's letters, he thanks the churches for their generosity. We know that he had times of plenty through these gifts. However, Paul had peace because he knew that it came from God, he trusted God with his provision, and he gave God all the glory. He didn't need to place his trust in the "plenty" itself, or in the earthy means that he received it. Paul could have peace & contentment because He wasn't trying to provide for, or hold onto, what he had. Paul knew that it was all gained through Christ's strength, and he fully surrendered his "plenty" to Him.

Daily Reflections:

- Examine where you have "plenty" in your life. Is that a space where you feel the peace of God? Or is it full of anxiety, greed, or fear? How could you surrender your "plenty" into the hands of God today? What is He calling you to do to find peace in that area?

Deeper Dive

Additional scripture to meditate on this week.

• Habakuk 3:17-19

~Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, **yet** I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights.

• Daniel 3:17-19

~Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. **But even if he does not**, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Day 5 - Peace on Earth

On our final day of this Advent Series, let's look at one of the most mis-quoted verses in scripture, Philippians 4:13, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength". This is not about a football game, and this does not mean you can do anything you want because you have God's strength. This is answering the question, "how we can have peace in all circumstances?". Paul is saying we can only have the peace that passes all understanding, in all circumstances through the power of God's strength in us.

Perhaps one the hardest moments to have this peace and full surrender to God's strength are the "yet" and "but even if he does not" moments. Let's take a look at the hardest moments requiring our hands open in full surrender to the Lord. This is a faith and a trust in God's goodness that doesn't change by the circumstances, our emotions, or our prayers being answered the way we want.

1. **Habakuk 3:** At this time, Judah was in deep peril. They knew they were about to be invaded by the Babylonians, one of the most ruthless & feared nations, and they were in deep distress. Even though they had such a grim outlook on their immediate future, we see a "yet" moment from the prophet Habakuk. Habakuk rejoices in this perilous moment, and says that his feet are planted firmly and surely like a deer. How is this possible? Habakuk, just like Paul, says the Lord is his strength. He had his hands open in full surrender and he was able to rejoice and have peace even though he knew the pain and suffering they were about to endure.
2. **Daniel 3:** King Nebuchadnezzar wanted everyone in his kingdom to bow down and worship him. However, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were faithful to God and didn't obey the King. The punishment was being thrown into a furnace to be burned alive. Just as they were about to be thrown in, they reply to the King (read verses in Dan 3: 17-19). Those key words "but even if he does not" show us their faith in God's goodness was not dependent on their circumstances. They had peace "even if" they got thrown into the fire. They knew God could rescue them, however, they had fully surrendered to God's plan & purpose for their lives no matter what happened.

As we have learned throughout this Advent series: The only way that we can have lasting peace on earth, in all circumstances, passing all human understanding, surrendering in the "yet" and "even if" moments, is through the strength and power of our Lord Jesus Christ! We were never meant to find our peace alone. As you think forward to 2026, make one of your resolutions be ~ to practice finding your peace **"through him who gives me strength"**.