SESSION 2

A Daily Pursuit

THE POINT
Deepen your relationship with God by spending time with Him every day.

THE PASSAGE
Philippians 4:4-9

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We need water. Every day. Water makes up 50-65 percent of a man’s body weight and 45-60 percent for women. To keep our bodies in this optimal range, we need to drink half a gallon of water a day. All this water protects our tissues, joints, and spinal cord. It aids our digestions and helps remove the waste. Every part of our bodies needs water.

Without water, dehydration kicks in—and that’s not good for a body so dependent on water! Dry mouth, headaches, dry skin, dizziness, muscle cramps, and tiredness are all signs we need water. We can get by for several weeks without food, but at best, we can survive only about three to four days without water.

Too many of us experience spiritual dehydration. We need daily contact with our Father. Dry souls, irritability, and difficulty in our spiritual walk are a few of the signs we need to be replenished through time with God. The cure is as simple as a time of prayer and praise to the One who keeps us going.

We need Jesus. Every day.

THE SETTING
In Paul’s letter to the Philippian Christians, he thanked them for the gift they had collected for him. Throughout the letter, he returned quite often to the theme of joy in Christ. He reinforced the call for believers to rejoice by teaching them how to experience the peace God gives. God’s peace resulted from spending time with Him in prayer and shaping their thoughts and actions in keeping with their devotion to Him.
GET INTO THE STUDY

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 21 of the Personal Study Guide (PSG): “When can you remember being especially thirsty?” Allow time for each person to respond.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 22 of the PSG. Introduce the importance of daily spending time with God by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read it on their own.

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of Pack Item 3, the “Book of Philippians” handout, and distribute them to your group members. Use this handout to give brief background information on the Book of Philippians.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 22 of the PSG: “Deepen your relationship with God by spending time with Him every day.”

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, using a phone or other electronic device, load the song “Psalm 63” or a similar song about seeking God. After the first verse, invite members to join singing. Following the song, ask members to share experiences of seeking God when they first awake in the morning.

Note: You can find a link at our blog: BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra.

PRAY: Transition into the study by asking God to give group members a lasting thirst for Him. Thank Him for the way He loves spending time with us.
Philippians 4:4-5

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:4-5 on page 23 of the PSG.

RECAP: Many things can rob us of joy. Doubt, death, challenges at work, illness, relational difficulties, and numerous other problems can cause Christians to lose their joy. But we need not lose our joy. We do not rejoice in our circumstances; we rejoice in the Lord. Joy comes from our relationship with Jesus, not our circumstances.

Paul didn’t tell us once to rejoice; he told us twice. He intentionally repeated himself. He viewed a spirit of rejoicing as critical in the Christian’s life. The word Paul used was chairo, a verb of action. The fact that it is a verb is telling. Rejoicing is not something that happens by accident or through osmosis. It is a daily decision to choose to find our joy in Christ—regardless of our circumstances.

GUIDE: Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to describe how often Paul encouraged the Philippians to rejoice.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 23 of the PSG: “When was the last time you really rejoiced over something?”

SUMMARIZE: Highlight the main points from page 24 of the PSG. Regardless of my state of mind or state of life, God never changes and for that I have a reason to praise.

- Rejoice because the King is still on His throne!
- Rejoice because death has lost its sting!
- Rejoice because we do not fight to gain victory; we fight because the victory has been won in Christ!

SAY: “Rejoice! What a way to start our day, rejoicing in who God is and what He has done.”

TRANSITION: We should begin our day with praise. The next verses further demonstrate that we should also pray and leave our concerns in the hands of God.
**Philippians 4:4-5 Commentary**

**[VERSE 4]** Take a close look at the number of times Paul encouraged the Philippians to rejoice. He urged them to join him in rejoicing even though he happened to be in prison (1:18). He challenged them to join him in rejoicing over the privilege he had been given to be an offering to the Lord (2:17-18). Later, he directed them to rejoice over the safe return of Epaphroditus (2:28). As he turned his attention to helping believers on the path of spiritual growth through difficult situations, he told them twice to rejoice (3:1; 4:4). Paul certainly intended for believers to learn the value of abiding in the joy of Christ.

The number of references has led many Bible scholars to suggest the theme of Philippians has to do with Christian joy. Paul's conviction about rejoicing in the Lord serves as a central idea that links the issues he addressed in the letter.

In Philippians 4:4, we notice a helpful and unique aspect of Paul's encouragement to rejoice. He underscored the foundation of joy: we rejoice in the Lord. Paul prompted us to understand that joy wells up from inside us because of the relationship believers enjoy with Christ. His work in growing us to be mature disciples cultivates joy because we have come to know, love, trust, and obey Him.

The presence of the Lord in our lives makes us rejoice. The source of our joy, Christ alone, makes us different from people who don’t know Him. They strive for happiness and associate being happy with experiencing positive circumstances in their lives. They’re happy when they get something they want or experience a moment that brings glee. In stark contrast, believers’ joy comes from the Lord who lives in us and walks with us.

Because people can’t count on only good things happening in their lives, they can’t be happy all the time. Dark times bring sadness, and painful experiences bring frustration, anger, or regret. But Christians can always rejoice in the Lord. Paul underscored that sublime certainty as he urged us to embrace joy. Believers can rejoice consistently, even when sorrow takes hold of us (2 Cor. 6:10).

To rejoice always implies each day finds us living in joy. As we begin the day, we rejoice over the gift of another day the Lord has given us. Our joy becomes more focused as we reflect on His Word and the insights He gives us as we serve Him. Our joy overflows when we remember He has given us new life in Him, lives in us now, and promises eternal life in heaven when we draw our last breath on earth. No wonder Paul told us again to rejoice.

**[VERSE 5]** Any believer who experiences joy in Christ can testify to the way it affects us. But how does rejoicing affect our relationships with others? Paul answered that question by encouraging us to think about everyone we encounter. As we go through our day, we encounter people. Some have given their lives to Christ, while others either have rejected Him or have never heard the good news about Him. When we encounter them, Paul directed us to seize the opportunities to exhibit graciousness. It comes out of the joy in Him that’s inside us. In other words, joy is the root, and graciousness is the fruit.

Getting a good grip on graciousness can be difficult because the Greek term doesn’t have a word that matches it exactly in the English language. The Greek conveys the idea of being selfless, but it also suggests the priority of being gentle and kind.

Paul’s challenge nudges us to think about people around us. Regarding the Lord, Paul reminded us that He is near. His reminder helps us in two ways. First, it helps us keep in mind that the Lord will come for us, and we look for His return each day. With His return in view, we think about people who have not yet given their lives to Him. Living out His joy by being gracious provides opportunities for people to hear the good news about Him and experience His grace. Second, it assures us He’s present in our lives right now. We can count on Him to help us as we display joy in Him.
**PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7**

6 Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:6-7 on page 24 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain how we are to have a conversation with God.

**DISCUSS:** Question #3 on page 24 of the PSG: “What are some obstacles to experiencing the peace of God?”

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from pages 24-25 of the PSG. Paul gave us a key to centering our focus on Christ with three words.

1. **Prayer.** Prayer seems like the obvious thing to do, but it’s often the most neglected spiritual discipline of the Christian life. Prayer is more than communication with God; it is communion with Him. Prayer includes a worshipful attitude in which we come before the throne of God.

2. **Petition.** Prayer is communion with God, and petition is a part of that. It’s asking God for something specific. Paul was telling us to communicate our needs—and things that tempt us to worry—to God.

3. **Thanksgiving.** Every night when my family sits around the dinner table, we share the highs and lows of our day, and then we discuss one thing we can each thank God for. I want my kids to see that life has inevitable highs and lows, but we can always be thankful to God. Those highs and lows will change, but our God never does. With God on the throne, we always have a reason to be thankful.

**RECAP:** Paul told us to run everything through prayer, petition, and thanksgiving. Everything. Not just the big things. Everything is to be filtered through prayer. Bring it all to the God who can handle it.

**TRANSITION:** The next verses demonstrate how we should fill our minds with the things of God.
Philippians 4:6-7 Commentary

[VERSE 6] Paul led us to think about the influence our joy can have on everyone around us. Next he urged us to think about the favorable effect praying can have on us. He pointed us in that direction by bringing up our tendency to worry. We understand a certain amount of anxiety may be helpful to us. Paul used the same term earlier in the book (2:20) to express genuine care that motivates action. If we’re anxious about passing a test, for example, we usually study harder. Also, anxiety over our health can prompt us to take care of ourselves. However, our anxiety level can reach the stratosphere if we’re not careful. Worry can consume us and we can get extremely anxious about everything.

The cure for such excessive worry comes in the form of prayer and petition. When we pray, we have conversation with God. In the conversation, we listen as well as talk. As we spend more time with Him in prayer, our relationship with Him grows deeper and more rewarding. Within the context of our intimate conversation with Him, we’re encouraged to ask Him for whatever we need as we serve Him. Because He has given us the honor of being His children through Christ, we can make our requests known to Him without fear or shame. That same assurance enables us to rest in the confidence He listens to us.

Observe a crucial feature of effective prayer that replaces excessive worry. Paul embedded it in the middle of this verse. A heart of gratitude shapes effective prayer. Because of the value of thanksgiving in praying that makes a difference, we do well to nurture thankful hearts. If we don’t, we will approach the Lord like a spoiled child. However, if we cultivate grateful hearts, the Lord will allow us to see the remarkable ways in which He blesses us each day. Accordingly, we’ll appreciate the gift of our salvation through Christ even more. Furthermore, grateful hearts lead us to a clearer impression of what we actually need. As a result, our long prayer lists will usually be distilled into only one request: Give us today our daily bread (Matt. 6:11).

[VERSE 7] When we pray, we take our concerns to the Lord and leave them with Him. We trust Him to answer our prayers in His own way and time. While we wait for answers, He gives us a sense of His peace. Paul brought up the peace that God alone can give so we will know what to expect when we pray.

God’s peace is more than a compromise or a truce. It’s a deep and abiding sense of the Lord’s comforting and sustaining presence in our lives even during the worst storm or the most vicious battles. When we go to Him with our needs and concerns, we remain confident He will answer our prayer. While we wait for His answer, He gives us His peace, a profound sense of His presence that settles and strengthens us.

Paul affirmed that our best efforts at comprehending God’s peace always fall short. When God gives us peace in response to our prayer, we find ourselves comforted and filled with the confidence He’s heard our need and He’ll respond. The distance between what we know and what we need is filled with His peace that surpasses our best attempt to understand it.

Even though we can’t comprehend God’s peace, we can experience it. Paul assured us God’s peace stands guard over our hearts and keeps out the anxiety that may overwhelm us. Our hearts can be filled with worry when we allow feelings of guilt, anger, regret, or apprehension to control us. Likewise, His peace guards our minds and halts anxious thoughts from creeping in and paralyzing us with worry. It protects us from notions about our relationship with Him that don’t conform with His Word.

Where do we go so we can embrace God’s peace? Paul pointed us to Christ Jesus. Our walk with Him renders His peace in ways that allow us not to worry but to leave our concerns with Him.
**STUDY THE BIBLE**

**Philippians 4:8-9**

8 Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable—if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy—dwell on these things. 9 Do what you have learned and received and heard from me, and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

**READ:** Ask a group member to read aloud Philippians 4:8-9 on page 25 of the PSG.

**GUIDE:** Use the Commentary for the verses on the next page of this Leader Guide to explain the spiritual transformation that begins the moment we receive Christ and doesn’t stop there.

**DISCUSS:** Question #4 on page 26 of the PSG: “What tools and strategies have you found helpful in dwelling on the things of God?”

**SUMMARIZE:** Highlight the main points from page 26 of the PSG. Paul called us to think on those things that are . . .

- . . . true, not false.
- . . . honorable, not dishonorable.
- . . . just, not unfair.
- . . . pure, not obscene.
- . . . lovely, not unlovely.
- . . . commendable, not wrong.
- . . . morally excellent, not corrupt.
- . . . praiseworthy, not shameful.

**DISCUSS:** Question #5 on page 26 of the PSG: “How can our group help one another live out these praiseworthy principles?”

**DO:** Direct group members to Engage with “Spending Time with Jesus,” on page 27 of the PSG (page 35 in this Leader Guide) to help them realize the importance of scheduling time with Jesus.

**GUIDE:** Refer back to “The Point” for this session: “Deepen your relationship with God by spending time with Him every day.”
**Philippians 4:8-9 Commentary**

[**VERSE 8**] Having shown us the importance of rejoicing and praying every day, Paul directed us to another area deserving our attention each day: our minds. When we gave our lives to Christ, He renewed us “in the spirit of your minds” (Eph. 4:23). In other words, He transformed the way we think so we could get His perspective on the world, and His plan for us. Such spiritual transformation begins the very moment we receive Christ, but it doesn’t stop there. On the contrary, it’s an adventure that will continue for as long as we live. For that reason, giving consideration to disciplining our minds is a wise choice. When we discipline our thoughts, we place ourselves on the path toward spiritual maturity.

Paul showed that path by directing us to qualities that deserve our focused attention as we discipline our thoughts. Each day will find us thinking through a variety of ideas, perspectives, notions, insights, and experiences. As we discipline ourselves in the way we think, we turn our thoughts to what’s true. If a thought rolling around in our heads is truthful, faithful, or dependable, we will allow ourselves the time to think about it. If it’s not, we won’t allow ourselves to give it any of our time. Ultimately, the best way to think about what’s true is to direct our thoughts to the Lord. After all, He’s the truth that sets us free (John 8:32). When we think about what’s honorable, we have in mind whatever builds us up and prompts us to be noble and respectable Christians. By focusing on what’s just, we allow ourselves to consider what’s right in God’s eyes. That’s when our thoughts about being right with God and right with each other come into view.

When we consider Paul’s instruction to devote ourselves to thinking that’s lovely, the reality of beauty comes to mind. We live in a world full of revolting realities that should turn our stomachs. If we intend to live above such repulsive influences, we must fix our minds on realities the Lord considers admirable. By the same token, we decide we’ll wrap our minds around what’s commendable. The word itself implies graciousness and kindness. When we direct our thoughts to what’s gracious and kind, we’re setting the stage for renewal of our minds.

Paul summed up the qualities by bringing up moral excellence. He challenged followers of Christ to give attention to what’s best as we think about our ethical standards, virtue, honesty, and integrity. Likewise, he cautioned us to turn our thoughts only to what truly deserves to be praised.

[**VERSE 9**] Along with helping us think in ways that renew our minds each day, Paul set out to help us in another way. He turned our attention to how we should discipline ourselves in terms of our actions. How we behave matters as much as what we think. Without hesitation, Paul counseled the Philippians to follow the example he had set for them as they translated godly thoughts into worthwhile actions. He added that his companions who walked with the Lord also provided a worthy pattern for them to follow (Phil. 3:17).

Paul set an example for believers in his day. His ministry continues to serve as a pattern of devotion to the Lord for us. When we consider what we have learned from others about walking with the Lord, we affirm that they taught us by example as well as by precept. From the pattern they supply, we receive inspiration and determination from the way they model a Christ-centered lifestyle. Christians who set solid examples help us grow. Likewise, we do well to keep in mind that younger believers need us to set worthwhile patterns for them.

The purpose of disciplining our thoughts and actions becomes clear as we consider Paul’s prayer for believers. His instruction nourishes a climate in which we can experience God’s presence. As the Lord abides in us, He gives us His peace. At the outset of Paul’s letter, he wrote about God’s peace by way of His grace (1:2). Now, at the end of his letter, he returned to the certainty of God’s peace. Peace is the outcome of disciplining our thoughts and actions so we can focus on the Lord.
GUIDE: Direct group members to page 28 of the PSG. Encourage them to choose one of the following applications to carry out this week.

- Praise daily. Begin your day—every day—with praise. Praise puts the day ahead of you into perspective.

- Pray daily. Set aside time every day for uninterrupted prayer where you give God your full attention. Consider using a prayer journal to help you stay focused. Prayer is a daily decision. Pray about your day, and pray for the challenges others are facing. Let the peace of God rule your heart as you leave these needs in His hands.

- Read daily. Get into God’s Word daily. Choose a Bible reading plan, and/or use this book as a guide for your daily focus in God’s Word. Partner with others in your group to support and encourage each other in your daily prayer and reading.

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the final paragraph from page 28 of the PSG.

Make a daily choice to do these things, and intimacy with Christ will follow. Spiritual dehydration will be a thing of the past!

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use the water bottle option on page 35 of this Leader Guide to illustrate the importance of spending time with God daily.

PRAY: Conclude by thanking the Lord for His desire to spend time with us. Ask Him to fan the flames of our passion so that we will long to spend time with Him.

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**ENGAGE**

**Spending Time with Jesus.** Take a look at your planner or calendar. Write down some of your more important appointments this week. Then answer the questions.

List some of the appointments you have kept this past week:

Number each according to the order of importance.

Where was your appointment with Jesus?

Too often we think of a daily quiet time as something rather than Someone.

Take a moment now to pray and enjoy some time with Jesus. Look ahead at your calendar and make sure you have some appointments set aside for Him.

**BONUS CONTENT**

**ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL):** To illustrate the importance of being with God daily, bring some bottles of water into the session. Use the bottles of water as an object lesson—pointing to our body’s daily need for hydration. Ask group members to open the water bottles and take a drink. Make the point that we cannot skip a day of drinking water and expect to feel healthy and good. Jesus promised to be the well that would never run dry. Just as we need physical hydration, we also must drink daily from Jesus, our never-ending fountain, in order to live in the peace of Christ.