

Joy and Anxiety

October 31, 2021



Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Philippians 4:1-7

Session Outline

1. Joy and Reasonableness (Philippians 4:1-5)
2. Anxiety and Prayer (Philippians 4:6)
3. Peace of God (Philippians 4:7)

Theological Theme

Christians can experience a peace that passes understanding and put off anxiety because they have been given new spiritual life in Christ.



Leader Guide

Joy and Anxiety

Introduction

- ❓ What obstacles do you face that keep you from rejoicing?
- ❓ Does rejoicing mean you are happy about every circumstance?
- ❓ How can prayer combat anxiety?

Jesus said, “Can any of you add one moment to his life span by worrying?” (Matthew 6:27). This is a guarantee. It is a kind of promise. The reality is that anxiety will not do any of us any good. It is very useful to remind ourselves of this truth. We have to tell ourselves that fretting is absolutely useless. It ruins our days. It damages others. We must learn to leave our worries with God and then focus on the task that is in front of us. Fretting helps us in no way!

The thing about worry is that it cannot survive in the presence of faith and prayer. Those two things are worry killers. Anxiety is something that most of us battle. The Bible explicitly directs Christians to not worry in the passage we will study today. Thankfully, the passage gives us clarity concerning how we ought to view worry and how to combat it.

Session Summary

The church at Philippi was the first Paul founded in Europe (Acts 16:6-40). It was the site of Lydia’s conversion as well as Paul and Silas’ miraculous deliverance from prison in which they had been placed for casting a demon out of a fortune-telling girl. It is likely that Paul visited the church several times and they were active supporters of his ministry (4:15-16).

This letter served as a thank you as well as a news report. Above all, Paul was concerned with the spiritual progress of the Philippians. The letter of Philippians is a sketch of what spiritual growth looks like. Paul offered himself as a model to be imitated in the continual process of growing in Christlikeness (1:12-18; 3:17; 4:9).

1. Joy and Reasonableness (Philippians 4:1-5)

After giving some personal instruction and encouraging the Philippian church to stand firm in the faith, Paul issued the command to “Rejoice in the Lord always” (v. 4). He immediately repeated the command to give emphasis. There could be no doubt about this charge. Those who are in Christ are to be a rejoicing people.



What does it mean to “rejoice”? What does Christian joy look like in everyday life?

Joy is the watermark of those who have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. The world’s view of joy is very different than the biblical conception of this pillar of Christian living. The Greek word for joy (*chara*) is used around sixty times in the New Testament. It refers to a feeling of gladness that is rooted in a spiritual reality. Biblical joy isn’t simply the result of favorable circumstances or an elevated human emotion. Joy is a gift from God to His children. Further, rejoicing is a command for followers of Jesus. The world’s conception of joy is very different than the Christian’s joy. One distinctive is the fact that Christian joy isn’t based on changing circumstances.

Only Christians can experience true joy, because they have been redeemed from slavery to sin and reconciled to the Father. When Christians think and believe upon these glorious realities, their joy is continual. This is true even when the circumstances around them are such that joy would seem impossible. Consider this account of the joy of early Christians in Rome: “One of the marks of the early Christians was their joy in God as they lived in a hard world. According to one archaeologist, the apartment buildings of ancient Rome were so shoddily built that ‘the city was constantly filled with the noise of buildings collapsing or being torn down to prevent it; and the tenants of an [apartment] lived in constant expectation of its coming down on their heads.’¹ “That was the setting in which the Roman Christian raised their families. The classical world was not all gleaming marble, flowing white togas, and sumptuous banquets. It was messy. The streets of Rome were deepest darkness after nightfall. There was no medical care as we know it, ... no retirement benefits, no air-conditioning, and no refrigeration. But the early Christians, living in that world, stood out because God gave them a gift from beyond that world. Overflowing acceptance through the cross, God’s presence in their hearts, practical wisdom for daily life, and endless enjoyment of him in heaven— isn’t that enough to make people happy? They thought so.”²

- ❓ In verse 5, Paul exhorted the Philippians to let their graciousness be known to everyone. What does this mean? How is this connected to joy and the battle against anxiety?

In some translations, this verse is rendered reasonableness instead of graciousness. The idea here is that Christians are to be patient in bearing affliction, sober in their enjoyment of worldly good, charitable in their judgment of one another, and self-controlled in their living. The reality is that we are unable to live this way if we live in a constant state of anxiety and worry. We live graciously with others as we trust God for our every need.

- ❓ Application: Which of these commands is harder for you to follow? Why?

2. Anxiety and Prayer (Philippians 4:6)

In this verse, Paul referred to an unbelieving anxiety that is unbecoming of a child of God. There is a difference between godly concern and faithless worry. Christians should flee from anxious fretting and distracting worries concerning the desires or difficulties of life. It is their duty to avoid living as those without hope who concern themselves with the cares of this world. There is a care of diligence, which is the duty of Christians and consists of a wise assessment of circumstances and due concern. But there is an ungodly and distrustful concern, which is sin and foolishness and has no place in a Christian's life.

- ❓ If you had to sum up Paul's prescription for worry, what would it be?

Paul told Christians to pray instead of worry. It may seem superficial or like a Sunday School answer, but it isn't. Paul believed prayer was more critical than any sort of self-help psychological strategy. Why is this? When Christians pray, they are bringing their petitions to the One who holds all things in His hands. The hymn "Encouragement to Pray" says it well:

*Thou art coming to a King,
large petitions with thee bring;
for His grace and pow'r are such
none can ever ask too much.*

—John Newton

The kind of worry Paul referred to is the worry that deals with the future—something we don't possess. Negative anxiety can immobilize us and squeeze out our joy. Worries are like false prophets who tell us God isn't good, sovereign, or wise. Instead of worry, we are called

The Antidote for Worry

Prayer is the antidote for worry. Three words express different aspects of prayer: prayer, a worshipful attitude; petition, a need; and requests, the specific concern.

to pray. Paul began his Letter to the Philippians with a joy-filled prayer (see Phil. 1:3-11); now, he instructed his readers to pray in the face of anxiety.

Dennis L. Okholm, in the Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology, explains: "Christian prayer, then, shared a simple belief that God could be petitioned to intervene and effect changes in nature and in the course of world events. The immediate source of this confidence came from the teachings and examples of Jesus himself, such as the model prayer he offered (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4) and his assurance that one had only to ask the Father in order to receive what was needed (Matthew 7:7; Luke 11:9)."³



What do you think Paul meant when he said "everything"? Paul also added, "with thanksgiving." Why do you think he qualified his exhortation to pray with this?

Paul wanted to communicate the idea that we are to allow God to have the run of the house. It means we bring everything to Him. There is nothing we hold back and assume that we are on our own in handling. When we assume responsibility that God didn't intend us to have, worry always ensues. This is why Jesus told us not to worry about the most basic things of life (food, clothing) in Matthew 6:25-34. Jesus taught His disciples that their heavenly Father was trustworthy and there was no need for worry.

In addition to prayer, we need to take steps to battle worry in our lives. We need to accept that we shouldn't have a heart filled with negative anxiety. Paul simply said, "Don't worry about anything." Worry should no more be part of a Christian's life than gossip, envy, covetousness, or sexual sin. The most basic remedy for anxiety is prayer—cast all of our cares upon God (see 1 Pet. 5:7). Paul said peace comes only through prayer. God never worries. He is in control, so we can give Him our burdens. When we pray, we pray with thanksgiving and intercession. Paul didn't deny that we'll have hard times, but he knew we can still give thanks. We should also offer up our petitions to God when in need. We can offer our prayers and petitions confidently and "with thanksgiving," knowing God is faithful and will provide.

An attitude of thanksgiving goes hand in hand with faith. After all, how could true faith in a good and powerful God produce anything but an abiding gratitude?

Paul expressed to the Philippian church the right tool for the job of rooting out the sin of faithless anxiousness. The positive command is "present your requests to God." The medium is prayer and supplication. The characteristic of the prayer is thanksgiving.

Prayer is the right tool because the root of anxiety is disbelief, and the root of prayer is belief. Christians attack anxiety head-on when they pray in response to it.

 Application: What are some unbiblical ways that you are prone to deal with anxiety?

3. Peace of God (Philippians 4:7)

Paul said that if Christians battle against anxiety with thankful prayer, then they would gain God's peace. But peace isn't the absence of difficulties, questions, or trials.

 What verb did Paul use to describe what peace will do? What does this indicate about the presence or absence of those things that cause worry in our lives?

Often we use the phrase "have peace" as if it is something we own. For example, you might say "I have a peace about this situation." Yet, the way Paul wrote about peace was more like the peace owns us. He said it will guard us. It could also be translated "will garrison." Paul pictured God's peace as a sentinel mounting guard over emotions, logic, and perspective. It's interesting to think that Paul was imprisoned and guarded when he wrote this. He may have glanced over at the Roman guard as he thought about what God's peace does. He may have felt the weight of the shackles around his ankles as he thought about the strength of God's peace for those who will trust in him.

 Did Paul mean that God promises exclusion from any storm or trial of life? What did he mean?

Jesus said, "You will have suffering in this world" (John 16:33). The sort of peace Paul talked about is a peace that endures through difficult circumstances. It's the kind of peace that garrisons a heart and mind when the daily pressures become almost unbearable or the unthinkable happens. It's the sort of peace alluded to in Psalm 91:1: "The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty."

 Application: How have you experienced the peace of God? Can you recall a specific time where God's peace was beyond understanding in your own life?

Conclusion

The particular passage we are studying today has to do with faith or fear; worry or worship. Paul told the Philippians to be joyful in the Lord. But their joy could not be complete if their hearts were fretful. Besides, a fretful heart was one that coddles sin because it is faithless, and without faith it is impossible to please God. So, Paul gave the Philippians clarity about the weapons of warfare in the battle against this joy-killing sin.

- ❓ How can you be intentional in your daily life about repenting of worry and spending time in prayer?
- ❓ What are some ways we can make the discipline of replacing worry with prayer more of a priority in our corporate gatherings?
- ❓ Is there a way to reflect God's goodness and power to unbelievers by expressing the peace that you have during difficult circumstances? What are some practical ways to do this?

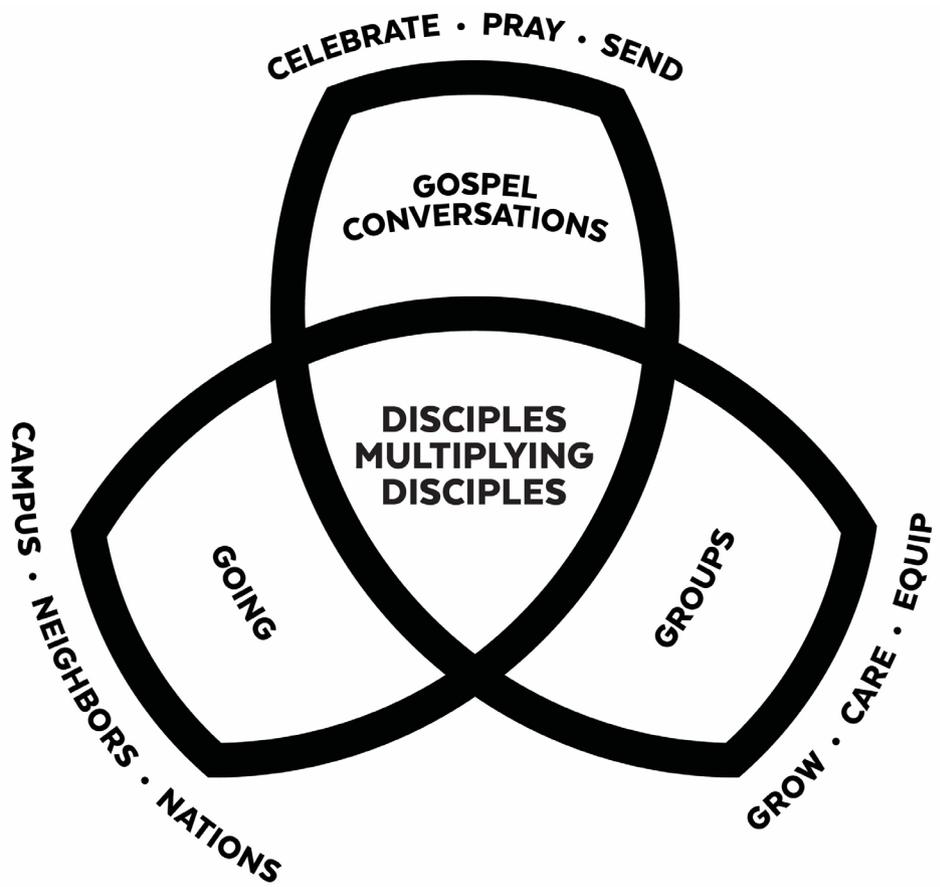
Prayer of Response

Pray for your spiritual growth as well as that of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Pray that they would rejoice in the Lord always. Ask the Lord to help each of you to diligently practice the spiritual discipline of prayer. Ask the Lord to make you a people of prayer. Finally, ask the Lord to help you to pray—especially when the cares of this world begin to intrude upon the joy and peace of your hearts—because of what Christ has done in your life.

Additional Resources

- *Putting an X Through Anxiety* by Louie Giglio
- *Anxious for Nothing* by Max Lucado
- *Peace with God* by Billy Graham

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



For Next Week

Session Title

- Obedience and Peace

Main Passages

- Philippians 4:8-9

Session Outline

1. Growing in Christlikeness (Philippians 4:8)
2. Dwell on These Things (Philippians 4:8)
3. God's Tool for Sanctification (Philippians 4:9)

Memorize

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.

-Philippians 4:6-7

Historical Context of Philippians

Purpose

One purpose of this letter was for Paul to explain his situation at Rome (1:12–26). Although he was concerned about the divided Christian community at Rome, his outlook was strengthened by the knowledge that Christ was being magnified. Paul's theology of life formed the basis of his optimism. Whether he lived or died, whether he continued his service to others or went to be in Christ's presence, or whether he was appreciated or not, he wanted Christ to be glorified.

Author

Paul the apostle wrote this short letter, a fact that no scholar seriously questions.

Setting

The traditional date for the writing of Philippians is during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (AD 60–62); few have challenged this conclusion.

Paul planted the church at Philippi during his second missionary journey (AD 50) in response to his "Macedonian vision" (Ac 16:9–10). This was the first church in Europe (Ac 16).

The text of this letter from Paul suggests several characteristics of the church at Philippi. First, Gentiles predominated. Few Jews lived in Philippi, and, apparently, the church had few. Second, women had a significant role (Ac 16:11–15; Php 4:1–2). Third, the church was generous. Fourth, they remained deeply loyal to Paul.

Philippi, the ancient city of Krenides, had a military significance. It was the capital of Alexander the Great, who renamed it for his father Philip of Macedon, and it became the capital of the Greek Empire (332 BC). The Romans conquered Greece, and in the civil war after Julius Caesar's death (44 BC), Antony and Octavius repopulated Philippi by allowing the defeated armies (Brutus and Cassius) to settle there (eight hundred miles from Rome). They declared the city a Roman colony. It flourished, proud of its history and entrenched in Roman political and social life. In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul alludes to military and political structures as metaphors for the church.

Special Features

Philippians is Paul's most warmly personal letter. After initial difficulties in the city of Philippi (Acts 16), a strong bond developed between Paul and the converts there. Paul wrote to thank the church for a gift it had recently sent him in prison and to inform them of his circumstances.

Extended Commentary

Philippians 4:1-7

4:1. Again Paul demonstrates his love and friendship for the church at Philippi. He addresses them as my brothers and dear friends, that is, as equals under God not as a superior church authority to subordinate members. In this most personal of his writings, Paul expressed his fond affection and the pain of separation by telling them that he both loves and longs for them. They are his joy and crown because their growth in the Christian life makes him proud. He points back to everything he has written in the previous three chapters as the reason to maintain a firm foundation in the Lord. He points forward to the following verses to show how to stand firm. He remains ever concerned with believers' spiritual lives. Deeper spirituality can come but only by heeding the rapid-fire list of imperatives Paul is about to throw at us.

4:2. Paul addressed a specific situation in the Philippian church, a quarrel between two Christian sisters—Euodia and Syntyche. This discord may be why he wrote what he did in Philippians 2:1–4. Although he believed their conflict would negatively affect the entire church, Paul did not reveal the nature of their problem or take sides. He did appeal tactfully for unity by asking them to agree with each other in the Lord. To agree is a strong Pauline word which niv translates with several different English equivalents (phronein, 1:7; 2:2, 5; 3:15, [16 kjv], 19; 4:2, 10; compare Rom. 8:5; 11:20; 12:3, 16; 14:6; 15:5; 1 Cor. 13:11; 2 Cor. 13:11; Gal. 5:10; Col. 3:2; 1 Tim. 6:17). The word basically means “to think, form an opinion,” or “to set one’s mind on something.” It came to mean to be in agreement, to live in harmony. This is the picture of the Christian church standing firm in Christ.

4:3. Paul asked a specific member of the congregation to help these women. Despite numerous guesses, no one knows who the loyal yokefellow was. Some even think Paul referred to the entire church. At least he set a precedent for church disputes to be settled by mediation within the church. Paul uses strong, urgent language to insist that the church get the problem solved and get back to the Christian position of standing firm “in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel” (1:27; compare 2:2–4). Disagreements even among mature Christians are not new. Mature Christians do not allow these disagreements to interfere with love and unity in the body of Christ.

Quarreling is not the nature of the church nor was it of the women involved. They had fought alongside Paul like gladiators in the arena to spread the gospel message. God had written their names in heaven’s registry of citizens alongside all the others to whom he promised eternal life. Paul sets the women on an equal level with others whom the Philippian church knew as faithful soldiers of the cross. Paul names one specifically—Clement. We know nothing else about him. The third bishop of Rome was named Clement, but we have no evidence to connect the two persons.

4:4. Again Paul returns to the key theme of this letter: joy. He calls believers to rejoice at all times and repeats the call for emphasis. This includes the bad times as well as the good (compare

Jas. 1:2–5). Christians should be known as joyful people. Such joy resides not in circumstances or positive attitudes toward life. Joy reigns in the heart only when Christ is Lord of life. Joy is always in the Lord.

4:5. A practical way to have joy is by exhibiting gentleness to all. This lets the church and world see that you belong to the Lord. The Greek word *epieikēs* means “yielding, gentle, kind.” It includes the ability to go beyond the letter of the law in treating others, to provide something beside strict justice. It does not insist on personal rights or privileges. Christ embodied such gentleness in his dealing with all people (2 Cor. 10:1; compare 1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 3:2; Jas. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:18). Why should we surrender personal rights for others? The Lord is near. In both time and space, God is available to us. He is not far removed in heaven but present in our hearts to hear and relate to us. His nearness also means he knows us and what we are. In time, God is near, for he is coming again. Then we will receive our rewards for living like Christ rather than like the world.

4:6. Joy replaces anxiety in life, so Paul advises the Philippians not to be anxious about anything. The cure for anxiety? Prayer! Worry and anxiety come from focusing on your circumstances such as imprisonment or persecution which Paul and the Philippians faced. Anxiety or worry doesn’t accomplish anything, but prayer does (Jas. 5:16). Jesus warned against worry which demonstrates a lack of trust in God (Matt. 6:25–34).

4:7. The peace of God comes from prayer involving both asking God for earthly needs and thanking God for his presence and provision. The expression appears only here in the New Testament. God’s peace reflects the divine character, which lives in serenity, totally separate from all anxiety and worry. Such peace is like a squad of Roman soldiers standing guard and protecting you from worry and fret. Such peace is not a dream of the human mind. The human mind cannot even comprehend this kind of peace, wholeness, and quiet confidence. Such peace protects the two organs of worry—heart and mind that produce feelings and thoughts. Such protection is real, available in Christ Jesus. Those who do not trust and commit their life to Christ have no hope for peace.⁴

References

1. Jerome Carcopino, *Daily Life in Ancient Rome* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), 31-32.
2. Raymond C. Ortlund, *Isaiah: God Saves Sinners*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2012), 408.
3. Dennis L. Okholm, “Prayer,” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), retrieved from <https://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/eng/bed/p/prayer.html>.
4. Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 08 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1999), retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.lifeway.com>

Author Bio

Jerome Carcopino (Daily Life in Ancient Rome)

Jérôme Carcopino (1881–1970) was the author of many books on ancient Rome including *César* and *Ovid and the Cult of Isis*. Mary Beard is the author or coauthor of numerous books including *The Parthenon*, *Classics: A Very Short Introduction*, *Classical Art: From Greece to Rome*, and *Religions of Rome*.

Raymond C. Ortlund (Isaiah)

Raymond C. Ortlund Jr. is the pastor to pastors at Immanuel Church in Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author of several books, including the *Preaching the Word* commentary on Isaiah and *Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel*, as well as a contributor to the *ESV Study Bible*. He and his wife, Jani, have four children.

Dennis L. Okholm (Baker's Dictionary of Theology)

Dennis Okholm (PhD, Princeton Theological Seminary) is professor of theology at Azusa Pacific University and adjunct professor at Fuller Theological Seminary. He speaks frequently in church and youth group settings and is a canon theologian for the Diocese of Churches for the Sake of Others. Okholm is the author or editor of many books, including *Dangerous Passions*, *Deadly Sins* and *Monk Habits for Everyday People*.

Max Anders (Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume *Holman Bible Commentary* series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Louie Giglio (Putting an X Through Anxiety)

Louie Giglio is Pastor of Passion City Church and the Founder of the Passion movement, which exists to call a generation to leverage their lives for the fame of Jesus. Since 1997, Passion has gathered collegiate-aged young people at events across the U.S. and around the world, uniting millions of students in worship, prayer and justice. In addition to the collegiate gatherings of Passion Conferences, Louie and his wife, Shelley, lead the teams at Passion City Church, *sixstepsrecords* and the Passion Global Institute. Louie is the author of *The Comeback*, *The Air I Breathe*, *I Am Not But I Know I Am*, and *Goliath Must Fall*. Louie and Shelley make their home in Atlanta, Georgia.

Max Lucado (Anxious for Nothing)

Since entering the ministry in 1978, Max Lucado has served churches in Miami, Florida; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and San Antonio, Texas. He currently serves as Teaching Minister of Oak Hills Church in San Antonio. He is America's bestselling inspirational author with more than 140 million books in print.

Billy Graham (Peace with God)

Billy Graham, world-renowned preacher, evangelist, and author, delivered the gospel message to more people face-to-face than anyone in history and ministered on every continent of the world in more than 185 countries. Millions have read his inspirational classics, including *Angels*, *Peace with God*, *The Holy Spirit*, *Hope for the Troubled Heart*, *How to Be Born Again*, *The Journey*, *Nearing Home*, and *The Reason for My Hope*.