

# Obedience and Peace

*November 7, 2021*



## Lesson Summary

### ***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)

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### ***Theological Theme***

Followers of Jesus are called to take an active part in the sanctification process. A key component for believers of growing in Christlikeness is submitting their thoughts to the Lord to be transformed.



## Leader Guide

# Obedience and Peace

### Introduction

- ❓ What makes the mind a battlefield?
- ❓ Why is capturing our thoughts so important to finding peace?

What we think about has a tremendous impact on who we are—our thoughts matter. Paul told the Philippians that they were to hem in their thoughts based on a certain set of criteria. In fact, Paul gave them a command, not a suggestion, concerning this. Paul was onto something. People have long recognized that what goes on in our heads deeply affects what comes out of our mouths, how we behave. The ways people think about and interpret what is happening around them affects their feelings and behavior.<sup>1</sup>

- ❓ What passages of Scripture relate to this topic?

The Bible is replete with instruction about what we should focus on in our minds. Here are a few verses that deal with this issue:

- Luke 6:45
- Romans 12:2
- 2 Corinthians 10:5
- Philippians 4:7
- Colossians 3:2
- 1 Peter 1:13

In our passage today, we will see that Paul put great value and emphasis on the discipline of guarding our thoughts. Further, we will learn some general guidelines about discipleship.

## Session Summary

Every religion looks forward to a peaceful kingdom. The Greeks pictured the Elysian fields where heroes hung their weapons in trees and existed in harmony with one another. The Qur'an speaks of a sanctuary in the desert where all who enter will be at rest and live in blissful paradise. Buddhists hope to one day enter Nirvana where there is no more suffering. But all cravings for peace outside of Christ will never be realized. God offers all those who are in Christ both objective and subjective peace.

There is no doubt that an underlying longing for peace exists in mankind. Peace, of course, is multi-faceted. We may speak of geopolitical peace, interpersonal peace, inner-peace, and peace with God. Let's look more closely at the biblical concept of peace and how it relates to the incarnate Son of God.

Peace with God through Christ makes it possible for Christians to continually experience peace in their hearts. It is important to remember that the objective peace Christians have with God is because Christ's work and merits are a settled fact. However, the subjective peace Christians may enjoy is a matter of sanctification and daily dying to self. Christians can have peace for their hearts, but it won't be forced upon them.

It is critical for Christians to understand the importance and learn the discipline of actively guarding and directing their minds to what will make them more like Christ and enjoy God's peace. Paul told the Philippians that they could learn to do this by imitating him. Christians today should recognize the importance of being disciples and discipling others for the benefit of individual Christians, the strength of the church, and the glory of God. This kind of living leads to a life characterized by an indomitable joy and a peace that passes understanding.


### 1. Growing in Christlikeness (Philippians 4:8)

In verse 8 Paul introduced his admonition with the word "finally," which indicates that he was wrapping up his letter to the Philippians. The command in verse 8 isn't the first or only one given in this letter. In fact, Paul had already delivered a treasure trove of practical instruction concerning the progressive sanctification of the Philippian believers, and all of it is beneficial and valuable for believers. However, we ought to take special notice of this final direction. If Paul saved this teaching for the end of his letter, it means that he believed it to be one of the more fundamental and critical aspects of the Christian life.



What was the essence of Paul's command in verse 8?

Essentially, Paul commanded followers of Jesus to take careful responsibility for what they allow into their minds. “Dwell on these things,” indicates a habit of thought. Christians are accountable for their thoughts and have the ability to limit, manage, shape, and pattern them. Learning to do this is a part of the process of growing in Christlikeness. The list Paul gave in Philippians 8 describes the nature of Jesus’s thought life when He walked upon the earth.


 What are some clear and present dangers to the thought lives of followers of Jesus?


In his other letters, Paul emphasized this aspect of growing in Christlikeness. In Colossians 3:2 he said, “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things,” and in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”

Like the command in Philippians 4:8, Paul placed the responsibility of disciplining their thought lives squarely on the believers’ shoulders. Christians should be careful not to confuse responsibility with autonomy. Their responsibility wasn’t to change their own minds, but to continually take steps to place themselves in a position where God could change their minds.

 Application: What strategies do you use to guard your thoughts?

## 2. Dwell on These Things (Philippians 4:8)

 Who did Paul say guards believers’ minds?

 What is the means by which we receive this guarding?

Two things are very clear in Philippians 4:6-7: A Christian’s heart and mind is guarded by God’s peace through Jesus Christ. This is something that originates outside of them and is beyond them. Also, Christians’ prayer life is the key that opens the door for their hearts and minds to be guarded by God’s peace through Christ Jesus. They have responsibility, but not autonomy.

In verse 8, Paul gave us a grid by which a Christian can evaluate the benefit of something to their thought life. He listed 8 adjectives that serve as a sort of filter. Let’s look at each of those briefly.


### The Way to Peace

Minds focused on these seven qualities experience the peace of God. True is ethical “truthfulness.” Honorable is “noble,” to be respected. Just is giving people what they deserve. Pure is holy in relation to God. Lovely, mentioned only here in the NT, is attractive. Commendable, also used only here in the NT, is praiseworthy. The God of peace complements “the peace of God” (v. 7) in that life with these characteristics encourages God’s presence.

1. True – not false or deceptive
2. Honorable – revered, venerated
3. Just – that which is right, correct
4. Pure – clean, unstained, spotless, uncontaminated
5. Lovely – pleasing, winsome
6. Commendable – held in high esteem; has a good name
7. Excellent – of high quality
8. Praiseworthy – deserving of recognition


Verse 8 describes the kind of thoughts a believer in Christ should have. As Christians, we should be filling our minds with what is pleasing to the Lord. The world bombards us with ungodly messages. We must be willing and able to filter these messages and keep them from our thoughts. To dwell means to meditate or chew on something. It's important to keep the broken ideas of the world from becoming what we dwell on. The things we think most about easily translate into our words and actions.

Character and conduct find their origin in and are undergirded by the mind. Our actions are deeply affected by those things we allow our minds to dwell on. Paul commanded his readers to focus on things that reflect God's character and will produce a life that is Christlike.

 Application: Do your thoughts typically line up with the eight adjectives that Paul mentioned? What helps you think on good things?

### 3. God's Tool for Sanctification (Philippians 4:9)

Paul summed up his instructions to the Philippians by telling them to recall the teaching and example that he gave them personally. They were to lean on this example and teaching to continue forward in their growth.

 What gave Paul the authority and credibility to call others to imitate him?

Paul was a master disciple-maker. Discipleship or apprenticeship was a prevalent part of the culture of ancient Israel (as it probably was in all ancient cultures and is in many modern cultures today). We must remember that, during Paul's day, the primary mode of passing along information was direct, face-to-face instruction paired with modeling. In other words, if someone wanted to learn how to make bread, the primary way of learning would be to go spend time with a baker to listen to instructions and watch them make bread. Printed materials were rare. And of course, there were none of the networked digital resources that we rely on today.

Discipleship was not only a part of Paul's cultural mindset but also the clear commission of Jesus to His disciples, which eventually included Paul (and all Christians today). We know Paul took seriously the task of making disciples because we see him practicing it and instructing others to do it. For example in 2 Timothy 2:2 he explicitly told Timothy to teach faithful men who would teach others. In Philippians 4:9 Paul gave a brief overview of the discipleship process.



What are some of the elements of discipleship that we see in Philippians 4:9?

Paul broke discipleship into three basic elements as he described what happened with the Philippians.

1. Teaching – what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me.
2. Implementation – practice these things.
3. Testing – and the peace of God will be with you.

This simple process is what Jesus commanded and it is God's tool for the sanctification of His children. Christians learn to discipline their thought lives as they receive teaching from others, implement what they have learned, and then test their progress by evaluating the results and fruit. Paul wrote that he taught the Philippians both by direct instruction (learned and received) and example (heard and seen). Next, he told them that they must now put this into practice. Finally, he said that they would experience the fruit of the Spirit as they grew in Christlikeness.

The disciple-maker learns that they must teach in two ways: through direct instruction from the Bible and by example as they spend time with the disciple. The disciple learns that they must put into practice what they learn from the disciple maker. Finally, both learn that if there is not an increase in the production of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the disciple something has gone awry in the discipleship process.



Application Question: Who have you learned from as you have grown in sanctification throughout your Christian life?

## Conclusion

When Jesus appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, He said, “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). Jesus offered them both objective peace (reconciliation with God) and subjective peace (a feeling of well-being and wholeness). Peace in the hearts of Christians in daily life is rooted in the peace Jesus brought by reconciling them to God. Christians today are not only at peace with God through the shed blood of Christ, but they can experience the peace of God in all the circumstances of their daily lives. An important aspect of that is disciplining their minds to dwell on things that are helpful to their souls.

- ❓ What areas of your thought life are out of control? What are some practical steps you can take to discipline your mind in this area? What truth do you need to dwell on this week?
- ❓ Are you fulfilling the Great Commission by actively discipling other people? Who are you discipling now? What does the process look like?
- ❓ Are you being discipled by someone else? Who is pouring into your life? If you aren't being discipled, who might you ask for help in this area?

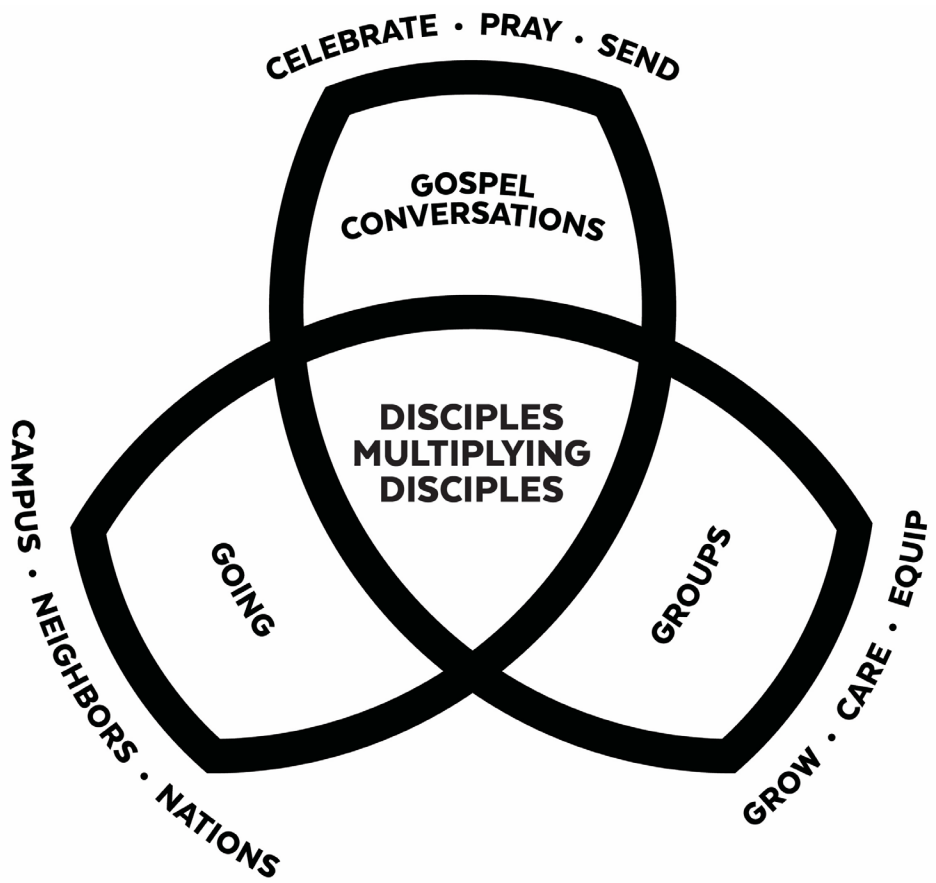
## Prayer of Response

*Pray for the sanctification of your fellow believers. Ask the Lord to teach them the importance of guarding their minds by thinking about things above, not on earthly things.*

## Additional Resources

- *The Pursuit of Holiness* by Jerry Bridges
- *Get Out of Your Head* by Jennie Allen
- *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* by Tony Merida

# Disciples Multiplying Disciples





## For Next Week

### Session Title

- Contentment

### Main Passages

- Philippians 4:10-14

### Session Outline

1. Contentment Killers (Philippians 4:10-11)
2. A Key to Contentment (Philippians 4:12-14)
3. Enough is Enough (Philippians 4:10-14)

### Memorize

*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.*

- Philippians 4:8

# 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 4:8-9

4:8. Continuing his strong imperative style, Paul suggested what should occupy our minds rather than anxiety and worry. Paul understood the influence of one's thoughts on one's life. Right thinking is the first step toward righteous living. What is right thinking? It is thinking devoted to life's higher goods and virtues. Thus Paul picked up a practice from secular writers of his day and listed a catalog of virtues that should occupy the mind. Such virtues are not limited to the Christian community but are recognized even by pagan cultures.

True is that which corresponds to reality. Anxiety comes when false ideas and unreal circumstances occupy the mind instead of truth. Ultimately, thinking on the truth is thinking on Jesus, who is the truth (John 14:6; Eph. 4:21). Noble refers to lofty, majestic, awesome things, things that lift the mind above the world's dirt and scandal. Right refers to that which is fair to all parties involved, that which fulfills all obligations and debts. Thinking right thoughts steers one away from quarrels and dissensions to think of the needs and rights of the other party. Pure casts its net of meaning over all of life from sexual acts to noble thoughts to moral and ritual readiness for worship. Thinking on the pure leads one away from sin and shame and toward God and worship. Lovely is a rare word referring to things that attract, please, and win other people's admiration and affection. Such thoughts bring people together in peace rather than separating them in fighting and feuding. Admirable is something worthy of praise or approval, that which deserves a good reputation. Pondering ways to protect one's moral and spiritual image in the community leads away from worries about circumstances and possessions that project a different image to the community and which thinking cannot change.

The catalog of virtues Paul sums up in two words: excellent and praiseworthy. The first encompasses what is best in every area of life, the philosophical good for which every person should strive. Here it is especially the ethical best a person can achieve. The second term refers to that which deserves human praise. The catalog of virtues thus reflects the best life a person can live and the best reputation a person can thereby achieve in the community.

Finally, in this verse, Paul gets to his point: think on these things. That, joined with prayer will relieve all anxieties and lead one to praise God and live life the way he desires.

4:9. Is such noble thinking possible. Paul says, "Yes, it is. Look at my example." This is not braggadocio or pride. It is the state every Christian should live in, a state of being an example for all who observe you. The example includes Paul's teaching, the tradition he received from the apostles and passed on, his reputation for Christian living, and the Christian lifestyle they saw him practice. If they obey Paul, God will bless them with his peace (see v. 7; John 14:27; 16:33).<sup>2</sup>

## References

1. Amy Morin, “This Is How Your Thoughts Become Your Reality,” *Forbes* (*Forbes Magazine*, June 15, 2016), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/amymorin/2016/06/15/this-is-how-your-thoughts-become-your-reality/?sh=42a23ec7528a>.
2. 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

### 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](http://www.maxanders.com) to help people grow spiritually.

### Jerry Bridges (The Pursuit of Holiness)

Jerry Bridges is a longtime staff member of the Navigators and currently serves with their collegiate ministry. In addition to his international speaking ministry, he has authored ten books and three devotionals; among them *The Pursuit of Holiness*, which has sold well over a million copies, and the award-winning *The Discipline of Grace* and *I Will Follow You, O God*.

### Jennie Allen (Get Out of Your Head)

Jennie Allen is the founder and visionary behind IF:Gathering, an organization that equips women to know God more deeply and to disciple others in their own lives. Through simulcasts and live events, IF has reached more than one million women in nearly two hundred countries and has seven thousand women leading in-person gatherings around the world. A popular podcaster and sought-after speaker, Jennie has taught at Women of Faith, Catalyst, Q Conference, and Send (North American Mission Board), as well as some of the largest churches in North America. She is the author of several books and study guides, including *Restless*, *Anything*, and *Nothing to Prove*. Jennie has a master’s degree in biblical studies from Dallas Theological Seminary. She and her husband, Zac, live in Dallas, Texas, with their children.

### Tony Merida (Exalting Jesus in Philippians)

Tony Merida is lead pastor of Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, NC, and associate professor of preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC.