

LESSON TEN
THE PEACE OF GOD
(Philippians 4:1-7 NKJV)

REFLECTION

We have financial, medical, educational, and spiritual advantages that previous generations never imagined—and yet we have more counselors and psychiatrists seeing more patients and writing more prescriptions than at any other time in history? Why do you think so many people—and so many Christians—lack real peace of mind?

DRAWING NEAR

When in your life have you been the strongest—spiritually speaking? What factors or practices do you feel gave your faith stability and strength at that time?

When in your spiritual journey have you felt the shakiest and most uncertain? Why?

SITUATION

As Paul draws his letter of Philippians to a close, he will once again call on the believers to “stand firm” and “be of the same mind in the Lord” (**Philippians 1:27; 4:1-2**). But this time, Paul will leave them with some practical instructions for how they can, in fact, live in such a way: by rejoicing in the Lord always, showing gentleness to all, refusing to give in to anxieties, and by presenting their needs—with thanksgiving—to the heavenly Father. As Paul notes, following this “prescription” for life leads to a wonderful result: the perfect peace of God.

OBSERVATION

Read **Philippians 4:1-7** (New King James Version)

EXPLORATION

1. Two women in the church at Philippi, Euodia and Syntyche, were obviously involved in some kind of conflict. Why are disagreements so stressful and draining to a church?

Answer: Disagreements are stressful and draining to a church because they can cause division and lead people to taking sides. Also, they can spread throughout the church fueled by misunderstanding and misinformation. They can also show disunity in the church.

2. Paul urges an unnamed person in Philippians 4:3 to help mediate the dispute between these two women. How skilled are you at helping resolve conflicts?

3. How can a spirit of rejoicing help combat stressful and anxious situations?

Answer: A spirit of rejoicing can help to refocus on God and lighten the stress. By easing the stress and anxiety, rejoicing can bring about harmony in the church.

4. What role does allowing “your gentleness be evident to all” (**verse 5**) play in creating unity and reducing stress in a community?

Answer: Gentleness refers to contentment with generosity toward others. It can also refer to mercy or leniency towards faults and failures of others. Gentleness can create an atmosphere of patience and understanding in the community.

5. How does a belief in the imminent return of the Lord help bring you peace?

Answer: Believing and knowing that the Lord is near can bring about an inner calmness because one knows that the Lord can handle whatever a person is going through. Even the thought of His presence can bring about peace.

6. How does prayer play a part in bringing God’s peace? Why is it important to come to God not just with request but with thankfulness?

Answer: Sometimes just being able to talk about a situation or having somebody to listen to you can bring about peace. Prayer is that vehicle where we can have honest two-way communication with God. Coming to God with a heart of thanksgiving will help us to develop an attitude of gratitude. We need to appreciate what God already has done for us: “And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (**1Timothy 6:8**).

INSPIRATION

When mariners describe a tempest that no sailor can escape, they call it a perfect storm. Not perfect in the sense of ideal, but perfect in the sense of combining factors. All the elements, such as hurricane-force winds plus a cold front plus a downpour of rain, work together to create the insurmountable disaster. The winds alone would be a challenge; but the winds plus the cold plus the rain? The perfect recipe for disaster.

You needn’t be a fisherman to experience a perfect storm. All you need is a layoff **plus** a recession. A disease *plus* a job transfer. A relationship breakup *plus* a college rejection. We can handle one challenge... but two or three at a time? One wave after another, gale forces followed by thunderstorms? It’s enough to make you wonder, *Will I survive?*

Paul’s answer to that question is profound and concise: “The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (**Philippians 4:7**).

As we do our part (rejoice in the Lord, pursue a gentle spirit, pray about everything, and cling to gratitude), God does his part. He bestows upon us the peace of God. Note, this is not a peace from God. Our Father gives us the very peace of God. He downloads the tranquility of the throne room into our world, resulting in an inexplicable calm. We should be worried, but we aren’t. We should be

upset, but we are comforted. The peace of God transcends all logic, scheming, and efforts to explain it.

This kind of peace is not a human achievement. It is a gift from above. “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” (**John 14:27**).

Jesus promises you his vintage of peace! The peace that calmed his heart when he was falsely accused. The peace that steadied his voice when he spoke to Pilate. The peace that kept his thoughts clear and heart pure as he hung on the cross. This was his peace. This can be your peace. (From *Anxious for Nothing* by Max Lucado.)

REACTION

7. What are some “perfect storms” that you have weathered? How did you get through these difficult times?
8. What part do Christians play in reducing anxiety? What part does God play?
9. What stresses you more—being in a conflict or having to referee a conflict between other people? Why?
10. How would you define what Paul means by “the peace of God” (**verse 7**)?
11. How is the peace of God different from other kinds of peace?
12. Of all the topics Paul mentions here (resolving conflicts with others, rejoicing, showing gentleness, remembering the return of the Lord, praying about situations), which would bring the most peace to your life?

LIFE LESSONS

Can you think of anything the world needs more than peace? Look around your neighborhood at all the squabbling spouses and fractured friendships. Listen to people at work talk about their restless and stressful lives. Watch the news and see the tragic victims of crimes and war. Hear the litany of scary reports of disease and doom. As Christians, we have the opportunity (and the responsibility) to show the world a different and better way. How? By living in peace with our fellow Christians. By trusting God to pour out his incomprehensible peace in life’s anxious times. And by never forgetting the words of Jesus, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God” (**Matthew 5:9**).

DEVOTION

Lord, fill us with a desire for unity. Fill us with joy. Fill us with gentleness and kindness and the firm conviction that your return is soon. Fill us with a thankful spirit and a consuming desire to seek you. Help us to realize that when we are filled with these things, there will be no room in our hearts for worry.

JOURNALING

What items can you list (relationships, situations, trials) that are currently causing you stress? What can you realistically do about each item you listed?

Next Lesson: Lesson Eleven: It's All In Your Mind—**Philippians 4:8-13.**