

Group Study Outline

Philippians 4:4-7 Theme Sentence

Don't be anxious but pray instead.

Launching Questions

Why do we pray? Why *don't* we pray?!

READ Philippians 4:4-7

What does Paul tell them to do? (v4)

Why is Paul's command to rejoice hard?

How does Paul's situation (1:12-13) and the Philippians situation (1:28-29) add to the impact of what Paul is saying?

What does it mean to really rejoice?

To help them, what truth does Paul remind them of? (v5b)

How does that help?

What is the outworking of the fact that God is near / soon to return? (v6)

What is the opposite of being anxious? What is the opposite of praying?

How do the two connect?

What effect does anxiety have on you?

What do you do to cope with anxiety?

Why is prayer a better idea?

How should we pray? What are we to pray about? (v6)

Is this how we normally pray? Is this what we normally pray for?

What difference does it make that Philippians is addressed to a group of people, not just individuals? (*e.g. v7 "your hearts and minds" is plural*)

How do we feel about sharing the big things which make us anxious?

What does Paul say will happen when we pray? (v7) Is this what we are usually aiming for in our prayers?

People sometimes talk about whether their prayer has 'worked' or not. What would this passage say is the evidence that our praying has 'worked'?

Is this kind of peace after praying our experience? Why or why not?

What if we aren't anxious? Does this passage have anything to teach us?

Summing up & applying it

How would you summarise what we learn about prayer from this passage?

What have we learnt which will encourage us to actually pray?

So what should our prayer times as a Connect Group be like?

PRAY! (*of all weeks, don't skip on it this week!*)

- for our prayer times together
- for the things we're anxious about
- for God's peace to guard our hearts and minds

Talk To God Together



'Aim To Connect'

Our new small groups are called Connect Groups because we hope that they will be places where we connect with one another, connect the gospel to our everyday lives, connect with non-Christians and connect with God. Those are our four aims:

- listen to God together
- talk to God together
- care for one another
- reach the lost together



This series called *Aim To Connect* takes each of those aims and helps to start our new groups off with a clear purpose and for leaders to lay their cards on the table and share the vision for the group.

Chatting To The Creator

Praying is such a basic part of our relationship with God. It's a mind-blowing privilege that we get to talk to Him! And yet it's so often neglected and can become a source of nagging guilt rather than joy. In our group gatherings, prayer is the thing which gets squeezed out. Maybe because it's awkward to share prayer requests. Maybe because we think we can pray anywhere whereas reading the Bible and chatting are better uses of our time together. Maybe we just aren't convinced that prayer works or that we need God's help.

In our groups many people will struggle to pray in front of others for all kinds of reasons, whether for fear of being judged on the state of their relationship with God or just getting flustered over words. It's our prayer (!!) that these new Connect Groups would be places where people grow in their prayer life, praying with more and more confidence – not because they are confident in their own words, but because they are so confident in their loving Father who listens and answers.

[NB]

Philippians 4:4-7 Theme Sentence

Don't be anxious but pray instead.

Application

- When anxious, go to God in prayer and He will give you peace.
- Prayer looks like rejoicing and being thankful to God.
- Prayer looks like asking God for what we need.
- Pray *together*. (Leaders, give time to the last question about your prayer time in the group and keep applying it corporately, not just individually.)

Commentary

Philippians is a letter from prison (1:12-13). Paul is in Rome having been imprisoned for preaching the gospel. The Christians in Philippi too are suffering for the gospel (1:27-30). There are false teachers threatening to bring the law back into the church (3:2). And there are arguments and disagreements among them, such as between the two ladies Euodia and Syntyche (4:2-3). It's not an easy situation for anyone. But having said all that, Paul thinks they're doing great! He just encourages them to keep pressing on to even greater godliness and joy.

In part, Philippians is a thank you letter for a gift they sent Paul expressing their partnership with Him in the gospel (4:10, 14-16). It's a hugely encouraging letter, calling suffering people to keep going with joy and unity, humbling themselves to serve one another like Jesus did and not to be afraid of the suffering which God has called us to.

Prayer comes up a few times in Philippians, most notably perhaps in 1:3-11 where Paul tells them what he prays for them. This is a great place to go to get biblical priorities for prayer and the kinds of things we should be asking God for. Near the end of the letter, Paul comes back to the issue of prayer as part of his final goodbyes...

- 4 The call to rejoice is so important he says it twice, in case we didn't pick it up the first time. We tend to think that we can't help how we feel, but repeatedly in the Bible we're given commands to feel a certain way like this. In the Psalms, David speaks to his own soul and tells himself to not be so down in the dumps but to put his hope in God and rejoice. Rejoicing is a choice we make.

It's a choice impacted by the kinds of things we think about and focus on (v8). But whereas our rejoicing would naturally go up and down according to our circumstances, Paul is talking about something which goes beyond our situations (v11-13). What makes our joy different to the world's (and so tough) is that we are called to rejoice "always" and rejoice "in the Lord". The two go hand in hand. It's only when we rejoice because of Jesus that we can rejoice always. Even when we are sad and under pressure, we can have a deep joy in Him. Far from being connected to how well things are going, our joy and peace is much more connected to prayer.

- 5 We should be reasonable. This means being able to be reasoned with and to see another person's point of view so we can resolve problems easily and with patience. When faced with difficult circumstances, whether we are reasonable or not will come out! How we get on with each other is a marker of whether we really have that joy and peace. Are we easily annoyed with others when things go wrong or we are feeling stressed? Or are we easily calmed down and restored?

"The Lord is at hand" has two meanings. Firstly it means that God is near to us. This is a huge comfort in times of struggle. But most of all it means that Jesus is coming back very soon to judge and to rescue. This should influence how we deal with conflict but also our anxiety...

- 6 The knock-on implication of the nearness of Christ's return is prayer. We shouldn't be anxious, but instead we should pray. One is the antidote to the other. Notice that we shouldn't be anxious about "anything" and that we should pray in "everything". No area of our lives is to be exempt from prayer replacing worry.

Often we pray because we are anxious, but we are still anxious once we've finished praying. But Paul anticipates that prayer is the opposite of worrying. As the gospel song writer Charles A. Tindley put it, "My advice to you is put all your troubles in a sack, take 'em to the Lord and leave 'em there!" Let God deal with it. And rest assured that He is on the case so you don't need to worry anymore.

This section focuses on prayer as asking for things, in that "supplication" is mentioned, as is "let[ting] your requests be made known to God." But even as we make known to God our needs and our problems, this isn't done greedily but "with thanksgiving". We praise God in prayer even as we make requests. Even when we aren't especially anxious, we still need to express our dependence on God by asking Him for the things we need. And if we *really* don't think we have anything to pray for, then we must have lots of thanksgiving to give!

- 7 What is fascinating about this section is that the outcome of praying isn't a change in our circumstances! That may well happen but that isn't what Paul is interested in here. The expected outcome of our praying is God's peace guarding our hearts and minds; the removal of anxiety. Paul isn't just watched over by a prison guard but protected by the God of peace (v9).

God is far more interested in our hearts than our circumstances. When praying for ourselves or for others, more than asking for an improvement in the problem, we should ask for hearts and minds which are guarded by God's peace, content and trusting in Him no matter what. The logic goes PROBLEM → PANIC → PRAYER → PEACE.

Note that all this is written to a church not just to individuals. "your hearts and minds" is a plural thing. So it applies not just to our private prayer life but our times together as a Connect Group. Sometimes we make our requests known to God *by* making them known to one another. This is key to having partnership in the gospel, dealing with conflicts and growing in godliness together. Our prayer times together should aim for peace in our hearts more than ease in our lives; being content in Christ and trusting that God is sovereign and very near.