



LORD I AM

grateful.

Small Group Discussion Guide
NOVEMBER 19, 2017



PREPARATION

STUDY

Spend the week studying Philippians 4:4–7. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools to enhance your preparation.

DETERMINE

Many questions have been included in this guide. Read through this lesson to determine which questions will work best to encourage, push, and grow your group.

PRAY

As you prepare, pray for the preaching of God's Word this coming weekend. Pray also for your time in this week's study and your group's openness to God's Word.

LANDING POINT

My Father knows me, loves me, and cares for all my needs so I have no reason to be anxious and every reason to be thankful.



GROUP DISCUSSION

CONFIDENTIALITY | What's said in the group stays in the group.

NO CROSS-TALK | Be considerate of others as they share. Refrain from side conversations and texting during group time.

NO FIXING | We are not in the group to fix each other. Jesus does that part.

SHARING | Be sensitive to the amount of time you share. Don't talk too much or too little. Every person brings something valuable to the group.



INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Walk into a crowded room and chances are most everyone there is anxious about something to some degree. One has a doctor's appointment about her test results. Another isn't sure he'll be able to pay for his tuition next semester. A couple loses sleep over their daughter who hasn't been home in months.

Read today's newspaper, and it's clear we live in an anxious age. But does it have to be this way? Does God have a life for us that's better than worry and anxiety? This week your group will discuss how you can experience God's peace in a worried and anxious world. You have no reason to be anxious and every reason to be thankful, because your Father knows you, loves you, and cares for all your needs.

Q: *What are people worried or anxious about most? Why?*

Q: *Why is it easy to default to worry or anxiety?*



LEARN

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

ANXIETY VS. TRUST

Paul addresses anxiety in Philippians 4:6–7. Like Jesus, Paul makes no room for anxiety in the lives of believers. No matter the circumstance, God's people always have a reason to rejoice and never a reason to worry. The opposite of anxiety is trust. An anxious heart is really an unbelieving heart. But a heart that trusts God puts everything—all its hopes, fears, and dreams—into the loving Father's hands with complete trust.

READ: *Read Philippians 4:4–7. What stands out to you in this passage?*

Q: *Explain why an anxious heart is an unbelieving heart.*

PRAYER + THANKSGIVING = PEACE

While anxiety calls into question God's character, Paul challenges the Philippians to see God as a loving Father who hears and responds to us. Prayer is how we communicate with God and express our total dependence on Him. For Paul, the combination of prayer with thanksgiving was potent. A thankful heart sees all that God has done, is doing, and will do for us and is willing to surrender everything for Jesus. Also, thankfulness relates directly to experiencing God's peace. "A thankful spirit crowds out selfish pride, checks fear, defuses anger, and directs one's thoughts outwardly toward others."¹ In Christ, we can have confidence that God's peace will stand guard over our hearts and protect us from the enemies of worry and anxiety.

🗨️: *Is it easy or challenging for you to go before God with your needs? Explain.*

🗨️: *What's one thing you could do this week to focus on being thankful in your prayers?*



LIVE

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

ANALYZING WORRY AND ANXIETY

Worry and anxiety are rooted in fear. Healthy fear gives us the ability to detect and deal with threats. It causes us to think and problem solve. But worry and anxiety do just the opposite. They drain our spiritual strength and lead us away from the abundant life Jesus offers us (see John 10:10).

Anxiety is rooted in a fear of future events. It's a feeling of looming danger or misfortune from a something you deem threatening. Anxiety tends to be vague. Worry, on the other hand, is specific. It's the mental outworking of your anxiety, dwelling on what could happen and expecting the worst.

🗨️: *How would you explain the difference between healthy and unhealthy fear?*

🗨️: *What does it feel like, mentally and/or physically, to experience worry and anxiety? Do you have specific examples?*

RESPONDING TO WORRY AND ANXIETY

Charles Swindoll says “we can allow fear to make us its victims or we can challenge fear to work for us by driving us to a deeper dependence on God.”² God is not far from you and your troubles. He is with you in the midst of them. Jesus knows your weaknesses. He knows what keeps you up at night. He knows every anxious thought or worried moment. But Jesus never excuses your worry. He says, “If you trust me to save you, will you trust me with lesser things? You have no reason to worry and every reason to find peace in Me.”

Q: *What would it look like for you to depend on God in the face of worry and anxiety?*

PRACTICE MAKES PEACEFUL

So, what does it look like to stop worrying and start trusting God? Paul tells us to practice trust through our prayers. As you make prayer a daily practice, you begin to see all you have to be thankful for. You daily go before the Father and trust He is good and rewards our prayers with His peace. Over time, worry and anxiety lose their grip on our hearts and minds. “The way to become anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything.”³

Q: *What’s one thing you can do this week to make prayer with thanksgiving a practice?*



LEAD

Select 2-3 questions from this section to answer.

JESUS ON WORRY AND ANXIETY

Each of us has a large capacity for worry and anxiety. We rationalize it when we deem certain things as “worthy of our worry.” But Jesus gives us no worry ration. In the Sermon on the Mount, He uses birds and flowers to teach an important lesson (Matt. 6:25–34). If God cares for birds and flowers, will He not much more care for you?

Unbelief is at the heart of worry and anxiety. When we’re worried and anxious, we don’t trust that God cares or has our best interest at heart. Jesus calls us to focus on Him and His kingdom instead of our worry and anxiety. “Do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (v. 34).

Q: *What things do you typically deem “worthy of worry”?*

Q: *How could your group encourage one another to experience less worry and anxiety and more peace and thankfulness?*



PRAY

Pray with your mind and heart focused on following Paul’s instruction. First, confess to God anything that makes you worried or anxious. Then, acknowledge all you have to be thankful for. Finally, submit to God and trust Him to answer you and provide for your needs.



FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following:

- Read 1 Peter 5:6–11 and reflect on how this passage relates to Philippians 5:6–7.
- Ask the group to share stories or lessons learned where they see God at work in their life.



COMMENTARY

PAUL’S PURPOSE Paul wrote to the church in Philippi to encourage them to live out their faith and grow in spiritual maturity, which was evidenced by the daily practice of serving God and one another. The best model for how to live is Jesus, but that model can also be seen in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.⁴

THE PAPA PRAYER Larry Crabb offers a simple prayer method, called the PAPA Prayer, which stands for:

- Present yourself to God without pretense. (Be real with God.)
- Attend to how you’re thinking of God. (How do you experience God currently?)
- Purge yourself of anything blocking your relationship with God. (What makes you want to hide from God? Where are you seeking what’s best for you?)
- Approach God as the “first thing” in your life. (Seek to make God your ultimate treasure.)⁵

SIDE EFFECTS OF ANXIETY “When anxiety persists in the absence of a need to fight or flee, it can not only interfere with our daily lives but also undermine our physical health. Evidence suggests that people with anxiety disorders are at greater risk for developing a number of chronic medical conditions. They may also have more severe symptoms and a greater risk of death when they become ill.”⁶

ENDNOTES:

1. David E. Garland, “Philippians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians–Philemon (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 253.
2. Charles Swindoll, “Fear and Anxiety: God’s Provision in Your Time of Need,” *Insights Newsletter*, May 1999. accessed November 8, 2017, <http://www.christianity.com/bible/fear-and-anxiety-gods-provision-in-your-time-of-need-11547430.html>.
3. Hywel R. Jones, *Philippians, Focus on the Bible Commentary* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 1993), 136.
4. Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2275–76.
5. Larry Crabb, *The Papa Prayer: The Prayer You’ve Never Prayed* (Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2006), 10.
6. “Anxiety and Physical Illness,” *Harvard Health Publishing*, June 6, 2017, https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/anxiety_and_physical_illness (accessed November 8, 2017).