

# THE STEPS TO PEACE (PART II): PRAYER AND POSITIVE THINKING PHILIPPIANS 04:06–09

## *Introduction*

Remember we are answering a question — once we possess the peace of God, how do we maintain the peace? (See Phil. 4:1-5.) Once we have made *peace with God*, then the *peace of God* floods our lives. How do we maintain that peace? How do we keep the *peace of God* ruling and reigning within our souls? How do we keep a consciousness of God's very own presence within us — an awareness that the “God of peace” lives within our very being? This passage discusses two of the most important steps to possessing peace. Above all other passages, it tells us how to have peace and how to maintain peace. If we will take these two steps, the peace of God will rule and reign in our hearts and lives. We will never lose our peace or be without peace.

- I. Peace comes through prayer (vv. 6-7).
- II. Peace comes through positive thinking (vv. 8-9).

## **I. *Philippians 04:06–07 Peace Through Prayer***

Peace comes through prayer. Note three significant points.

1. There is the charge: Do not be *anxious* (merimnate) about anything. The idea is that the believer is not to worry or fret about a single thing. The word *anything* (meden) means all things. Humanly speaking, the Philippians had every reason to worry and be anxious.
  - => They were suffering severe persecution (Ph. 1:18-19).
  - => They were facing a disturbance in the church, some disunity and quarrelling (Ph. 1:27, 42).
  - => They had some carnal members within their fellowship, some members who were prideful, super-spiritual and self-centred (Ph. 2:3-4; 3:12).
  - => They were facing some false teachers who had joined their fellowship, and the teachers were fierce in attacking the cross of Christ (Ph. 3: 2-3, 18-19).
  - => Some of the believers were having to struggle for the necessities of life: food, clothing and shelter (Ph. 4:19).

There was little else that could confront these dear believers. They were facing about every trial and temptation imaginable, the kind of trouble that arouses anxiety and worry. Humanly, a person is going to fret, worry and suffer anxiety...

- when he is either about to lose or lacks food, clothing or shelter
  - when he is persecuted, ridiculed, abused or threatened
  - when he is surrounded by quarrels, disturbance, carnality or false teaching
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In the midst of such circumstances, the only way a person can keep from worrying is to receive an injection of supernatural power.

This is the very point of Scripture. There is an answer to worry and anxiety, a supernatural answer: the peace of God. God will *enable* the believer to conquer worry and anxiety. God will overcome the trials of life for the believer, no matter how terrible and pressuring they may be. God will infuse the believer with peace — with the very peace of God Himself — a peace so great and so wonderful that it carries the believer right through the trial. Of course, this does not mean the believer is not to be concerned about the problems of life. He is, but there is a difference between concern, anxiety and worry. Concern drives us to arise and tackle the problems of life with an indomitable courage and diligence. Concern drives us to tackle and conquer all that we can handle. Anxiety and worry cause all kinds of problems...

- fear to act
- withdrawal
- hesitation
- cowardice
- depression
- discouragement
- a defeatist attitude
- quick, unplanned action
- unwise and harmful decisions
- physical sickness and infirmities
- emotional problems
- spiritual backsliding
- distrust and unbelief

Of course the list could go on and on, but the point to see is the seriousness of anxiety and worry. Just take a moment and think about a few of the above problems: how anxiety and worry cause a person to act and suffer. The seriousness is easily seen. We all know people who suffer greatly because of anxiety and worry; they simply lack the peace of God. Yet, the charge of Scripture is forceful: Do not be anxious about anything, not even for a single thing.

**Mat 6:31-33** *“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans [unbelievers] run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

**Luke 10:41** *“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things.”*

**Luke 12:29** *“And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.”*

**Luke 21:34** *“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.”*

**Phil 4:6-7** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

**Heb 13:5** *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”*

**1 Pet 5:7** *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

2. The remedy for anxiety and worry: prayer. The four words used for prayer show exactly how prayer is the answer to anxiety and worry.

=> The word *prayer* (proseuche) refers to the special times of prayer that we share in periods of devotion and worship. We are to have set times for prayer, times that we especially set aside for devotion and worship.

=> The word *petition* (deesis) refers to the prayers that focus upon special needs. We feel a deep, intense need, therefore, we go before God and *petition Him*, that is, pour out our soul to God. Need — great need — confronts us, and the only possible help and deliverance is God. Therefore, we come and lay our need before Him as a child: crying, pleading and begging for His help, comfort, deliverance and peace.

=> The word *thanksgiving* (eucharistia) means that we thank and praise God for all that He is and for all that He has done for us.

=> The word *requests* (aitemata) means specific and definite requests. Our praying is not to be general, but specific. We are to lay before God exactly what is needed and we are not to fear that we are being too detailed with God or bothering God. Neither are we to hold back from asking because we fear He will not answer something so specific. Too often believers fear not receiving the answer to a specific request, fear that it will show how weak they are spiritually if the request is not granted.

Note what Scripture says: “*In everything*” pray like this — use all four ways of praying and use them in praying for everything. This means two things.

a. We are to walk in God — live, move and have our being in Him — and we do this *by prayer*. We live and move in God through prayer. We pray “in everything” — all day long as we walk and move about our daily affairs.

=> We *pray* in times that are specifically set aside for devotion and worship.

=> We *petition* — struggle in prayer — when facing times of deep and intense need.

=> We offer *thanksgiving* (and praise) all day long as we walk and move about.

=> We offer our *requests* — specific requests — to God. We ask Him to do definite things as we walk throughout the day.

As stated, we walk in God — live, move and have our being in Him; and the way we do this is through prayer.

- b. We are to pray about every thing no matter how small and insignificant it may seem. God is interested in the details of our lives, in the most minute details. He wants us acknowledging Him in *all our ways* or steps because He wants to care and look after every single step.

Now picture the scene: we are walking throughout the day, sharing with God every step of the way, and God is taking care of every step of the way. What then can take the peace of God away from us? Absolutely nothing! For as we walk in prayer and fellowship with God, God is infusing us with His presence and peace. No matter the conflict or trial, we are continuing to share with God and God is continuing to infuse us with His peace. Through prayer He is giving us the peace to conquer and walk through the trial. Our relationship with God and His peace is unbroken.

**Mat 7:7** “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

**Mat 26:41** “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

**Luke 18:1** Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.

**Luke 21:36** “Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

**Eph 6:18** And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

**1 Th 5:17** Pray continually.

3. The promise: peace. Peace (eirene) means to be bound, joined and woven together. It means to be assured, confident and secure in the love and care of God. It means to have a sense, a consciousness, a knowledge that God will...
- provide
  - deliver
  - guide
  - encourage
  - strengthen
  - save
  - sustain
  - give real life both now and forever

A person can experience the peace of God only as he walks and moves about in prayer. Why? Because only God can *deliver man* through the most severe circumstances and tragedies of life; only God can *infuse assurance and security* within the human soul. The wonderful promise about the peace of God is twofold.

- a. First, the peace of God transcends all understanding. It is beyond anything we can ask or think. It transcends all our imaginations. Think of the most terrible situation you can imagine; then think of the peace you would want as you went through that trial. In actual experience, the peace of God is far greater than anything you could ever imagine or understand. The peace of God actually carries the faithful believer through the very midst of trial and tribulation.

- b. Second, the peace of God guards our hearts and minds. The term *will guard* (phrouresei) is a military term meaning to garrison, to keep guard and protect. The peace of God is like a most elite soldier who guards and protects the most precious possession of God; the believer's heart and mind.

However, note that God can keep us only as we are "in Christ Jesus." We can know the peace of God only if we have trusted Christ as our Lord and Saviour and only if we walk in fellowship with Him. To be in Christ means to walk in Christ — to live, move and have our being in Him.

**John 14:27** *"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 16:33** *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

**Rom 5:1** *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

**Rom 8:6** *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.*

**Rom 14:17** *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

**Gal 5:22** *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

**Gal 5:23** *Gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

**Isa 26:3** *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.*

**Psa 29:11** *The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.*

## II. ***Philippians 04:08–09 Peace and Positive Thinking***

Peace comes through positive thinking. The word *think* (logizesthe) means to consider, reflect, reason and ponder. The idea is that of focusing our thoughts until they shape our behaviour. The truth is:

=> what we think is what we become.

=> where we have kept our minds is where we are.

=> our thoughts shape our behaviour.

=> what we do is what we think.

William Barclay says, "...it is a law of life that, if a man thinks of something often enough and long enough, he will come to the stage when he cannot stop thinking about it. His thoughts will be quite literally in a groove out of which he cannot jerk them" (*The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, p. 97).

A person who centres his thoughts upon the world and its things will live for the world and its things: money, wealth, lands, property, houses, possessions, position, power, recognition, honour, social standing, fame and a host of other worldly pursuits. Very simply stated, a person who centres his thoughts...

- upon the flesh (sinful nature) and its lusts will live to satisfy the flesh (sinful nature) through such things as pride, self, greed, pleasure and sex.
- upon the eyes and its lusts will live to satisfy the eyes and its lusts through such things as the immoral, pornographic filth flaunted in magazines, films, books and television; the exposing of the human body; dressing to attract attention; looking a second time.
- upon the pride of life, all that he personally has and does will live to satisfy such things as the desire for recognition, honour, position and authority.

A mind set upon the world and the flesh (sinful nature) is what leads to anxiety and worry, emptiness and restlessness. This was the stress of the former point (v. 6-7). A worldly mind never knows peace — not true peace, not the peace of God. God will just never allow a worldly mind to have peace, for it is the restlessness of the human soul that He uses to reach men for salvation.

The point is this: when a person accepts Jesus Christ, his mind is made new by the Spirit of God.

**Rom 12:2** *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

**Eph 4:23-24** *To be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

**Col 3:10** *And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*

Once a person has been converted to Christ and becomes a new person, he is to focus his thoughts upon the good things of life and upon God. He is to give his mind to *positive thinking*. In fact, he is to think only positive thoughts. The believer is never to allow an immoral, fleshly, worldly, selfish, sinful or evil thought to enter his mind. There is never to be a negative thought whatsoever in the mind of the believer. Sinful and negative thoughts disrupt and destroy peace. For this reason, the believer is to struggle to conquer his mind and thoughts. He is to exert every cell of energy possible to captivate and control every thought. What we think is so important that God tells us what we are to think.

1. The charge is to think and practice positive thinking.
  - a. “Whatever is *true*” (alethe): real and genuine.

Many things in the world seem to be true, but they are not; they are false and deceptive, an illusion and a counterfeit. They seem to offer peace, but what they offer is a deceptive, a counterfeit peace — only escapism. We are to keep our minds upon things that are true, and we are to live lives that are true to both men and God. When our thoughts and lives are centred upon true things, peace comes to the human heart.

- b. “Whatever is *noble*” (semna): honourable, worthy, revered, highly respected and noble. Barclay says: “The word really describes that which has the dignity of holiness upon it. There are things in this world which are flippant and cheap, things which are attractive to the light-minded; but it is on the things which are grave and serious and dignified that the Christian will set his mind” (*The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. p. 98).
- c. “Whatever is *right*” (diakia): right and righteous behaviour. It has to do with right behaviour toward man and God.

The believer is to keep his thoughts upon his duty toward men and God — upon doing what is right toward both. Man is to be a responsible being while on earth. He is responsible for the earth and his fellow human beings, and he is to be held accountable by God for both. Therefore, he is not to focus his thoughts upon comfort and selfish pleasures and pursuits. He is to focus his thoughts upon the things that are *right and righteous*. He owes his thoughts and mind to the world and to his fellow men and especially to God. He owes whatever contribution he can make to the world and to God. A mind filled with *right (righteous)* thoughts will know peace.

- d. “Whatever is *pure*” (hagna): morally clean, spotless, stainless, chaste, undefiled, free from moral pollution, filth, dirt and impurities.
- The believer’s mind and thoughts are to be pure — every thought.
- e. “Whatever is *lovely*” (prospBILE): pleasing, winsome, kind, gracious; things that excite love and kindness.

The believer’s thoughts are not to be thoughts of unkindness and meanness, grumbling and murmuring, criticism and reaction. The believer’s thoughts are to be focused upon things that are lovely — that build people up, not tear them down.

- f. “Whatever is *admirable*” (euphema): reputable, high-toned, worthy things; things of the highest quality.

The believer is to think only upon worthy things. He is not to fill his mind with junk; he is not to listen to *bad reports*, no matter how *juicy* they may seem. Neither is he to fill his mind with junk, whether through rumour, radio, television, music, off-coloured jokes, or by whatever source. His thoughts are to be focused only upon worthy things — only upon that which is of *good report*.

- g. “If anything is excellent or praiseworthy [in any thought], think about such things.”  
Positive thinking is the answer to peace for the Christian believer.

2. The source or power for positive thinking is twofold.
  - a. There is the Word of God. Paul says that he had preached and taught the very virtues of positive thinking to the Philippians and that they had learned them. What Paul had preached and taught was the will of God; therefore, the source or power for positive thinking comes from the Word of God. It is in the Word of God that a person finds the things that are to fill his mind. His thoughts are to be upon the teachings of God's Word.

*Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

*2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.*

*Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.*

*Psa 19:8 The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.*

*Psa 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.*

*Psa 119:11 I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*

*Psa 119:105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.*

- b. There are noble examples. Paul says that he lived as a testimony before the Philippians. Therefore, they could follow his example because he kept his thoughts and life upon the very virtues of positive thinking.

*Phil 3:17 Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.*

*2 Th 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you.*

*2 Tim 1:13 What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.*

*2 Tim 3:10 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance.*

3. There is the energy and power of self-effort and discipline. Note the words, "Whatever you have learned...put it into practice." The believer is expected to control and discipline his mind. He is to struggle against all sinful and negative thoughts, and fight to think only positive thoughts. Note the result of positive thinking: the God of peace will be with the believer.



**Rom 8:5** *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.*

**Rom 12:2** *Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

**1 Cor 2:16** *“For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.*

**2 Cor 10:5** *We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.*

**Phil 4:8** *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things.*

**Eph 4:23-24** *To be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

**Isa 26:3** *You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. ■*