



Intentional Choices:

discovering contentment
in stressful times

Bible Study That Builds Christian Community

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WRITE Serendipity House
117 10th Avenue, North
Nashville, TN 37234
FAX (615) 277-8181
PHONE (800) 525-9563

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117 10th Avenue, North
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Core Values

Community: The purpose of this curriculum is to build community within the body of believers around Jesus Christ.

Group Process: To build community, the curriculum must be designed to take a group through a step-by-step process of sharing your story with one another.

Interactive Bible Study: To share your “story,” the approach to Scripture in the curriculum needs to be open-ended and right-brained—to “level the playing field” and encourage everyone to share.

Developmental Stages: To provide a healthy program in the life cycle of a group, the curriculum needs to offer courses on three levels of commitment:

- (1) **Beginner Level**—low-level entry, high structure, to level the playing field;
- (2) **Growth Level**—deeper Bible study, flexible structure, to encourage group accountability;
- (3) **Discipleship Level**—in-depth Bible study, open structure, to move the group into high gear.

Target Audiences: To build community throughout the culture of the church, the curriculum needs to be flexible, adaptable, and transferable into the structure of the average church.

Mission: To expand the kingdom of God one person at a time by filling the “empty chair.” (We add an extra chair to each group session to remind us of our mission.)

Group Covenant

It is important that your group covenant together, agreeing to live out important group values. Once these values are agreed upon, your group will be on its way to experiencing Christian community. It's very important that your group discuss these values—preferably as you begin this study. The first session would be most appropriate. (Check the rules to which each member of your group agrees.)

- Priority:** While you are in this course of study, you give the group meetings priority.
- Participation:** Everyone is encouraged to participate and no one dominates.
- Respect:** Everyone is given the right to his or her own opinion, and all questions are encouraged and respected.
- Confidentiality:** Anything that is said in the meeting is never repeated outside the meeting.
- Life Change:** We will regularly assess our own life-change goals and encourage one another in our pursuit of Christlikeness.
- Empty Chair:** The group stays open to reaching new people at every meeting.
- Care and Support:** Permission is given to call upon each other at any time, especially in times of crisis. The group will provide care for every member.
- Accountability:** We agree to let the members of the group hold us accountable to the commitments we make in whatever loving ways we decide upon.
- Mission:** We will do everything in our power to start a new group.
- Ministry:** The group will encourage one another to volunteer and serve in a ministry and to support missions by giving financially and/or personally serving.

A black and white photograph of a cloudy sky over a body of water. The sky is filled with large, soft, white clouds. The water is visible at the top and bottom of the frame, with some ripples and reflections. In the upper left corner, the dark silhouette of a boat is partially visible. The word "notes" is written in a simple, lowercase font in the upper center of the image.

notes

The Stress of Anxious Anticipation

Prepare for the Session

	READINGS	REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS
Monday	Philippians 4:4	What can keep you from rejoicing in the Lord at all times?
Tuesday	Psalm 118:24	What are some good things about today? Thank God for them. What are some worries? Pray about them.
Wednesday	Philippians 4:5	Who could you surprise with gentleness today?
Thursday	Matthew 6:25–34	Underline one verse from this passage that speaks to you today. Why did you select it?
Friday	Mark 14:32–34	When have you, like Jesus, dreaded the events of the coming day? How did Jesus cope with this situation?
Saturday	1 Peter 5:7	What worry or anxiety have you “cast” to Jesus, only to reel it back in? Pray about that worry and reflect on how much Jesus loves you.
Sunday	Philippians 4:6–7	Where in your life do you need “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding”? How would it change your current thoughts and actions?

**OUR GOALS
FOR THIS
SESSION
ARE:**

BIBLE STUDY

- to understand that prayer is God's prescription for diffusing anxiety
- to recognize the importance of hearing God speak in the midst of our anxiety
- to realize where the prayer burden must be placed to cast off worry and anxiety

LIFE CHANGE

- to identify our surface and root worries and acknowledge them to God
- to read the Bible and select two of the promises of God to memorize
- to prepare a plan of action and prayer, then leave the rest to God



Icebreaker

10-15 minutes

**GATHERING
THE PEOPLE
Form
horseshoe
groups of 6-8.**

Worry Barometer. Which of the following statements would cause you the greatest worry and stress?

- Your dentist saying, "I think we're looking at a root canal."
- Your daughter saying, "Before you see the car, let me explain."
- Your in-laws saying, "We'll just be staying for a week or so."
- Your wife saying, "Let's re-do the bathroom ourselves."
- Your husband saying, "I'm thinking of getting a motorcycle."
- Your boss saying, "Come in and close the door."
- Your best friend saying, "What would you think about me going out with your ex-fiance?"
- Your mother saying, "He seemed so nice I gave him your phone number."
- Your father saying, "We're looking at that house for sale on your street."
- Your hairdresser saying, "I'm moving to Baltimore."
- Your son saying, "I think I'd like to be a hairdresser."
- Your wife saying, "The construction crew cut the cable lines. We won't have TV for a week."



Bible Study

30-45 minutes

The Scripture for this week:

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**LEARNING
FROM THE
BIBLE**

**PHILIPPIANS
4:4-7**

**A WORD
FROM THE
LEADER**

**Write your
answers
here.**

...about today's session

1. What is developing in our society along with rapid technological advancement?
2. What gives Paul exceptional credibility as he advises us on confronting worry?

Identifying with the Story

1. Life is often a three-ring circus of major concerns. From the following areas, rank your top three concerns according to what is provoking the most worry in your life at this time.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> finances | <input type="checkbox"/> children |
| <input type="checkbox"/> career | <input type="checkbox"/> ex-spouse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> spouse | <input type="checkbox"/> family member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> parent(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> a difficult decision |
| <input type="checkbox"/> health | <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____ |

**U In
horseshoe
groups
of 6-8,
explore
questions as
time allows.**

**IDENTIFYING
WITH THE
STORY
(cont'd)**

2. Finish this sentence with one of the choices that follow: "My approach to worry is to ..."
- lie awake at night and imagine the worst
 - attack it with busyness
 - smother the worry with chocolate
 - force myself to think rationally about the issue
 - pray, pray, pray
 - distract myself with entertainment
 - upgrade to a panic attack
 - talk it out and get feedback
 - other: _____
3. Which of the following is the best metaphor for your experience of prayer?
- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> fast food | <input type="checkbox"/> Lean Cuisine |
| <input type="checkbox"/> junk food | <input type="checkbox"/> gourmet meal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> leftover lasagna | <input type="checkbox"/> Slim-Fast |
| <input type="checkbox"/> all-you-can-eat buffet | |

**What is God
teaching you
from this
story?**

 **today's session**

1. Paul's words in Philippians 4:6 are not so much a condemnation of worry as a _____ for dealing with worry.
2. The English translation of the Greek word *merimnao* is: _____ . The English word taken from *phroneo* is: _____ .
3. The phrase translated into English from Philippians 2:20, "takes a genuine interest" and the word translated "concern" in 2 Corinthians 11:28 are both found to contain the Greek word for _____ .
4. What is the best thing we can do when we're anxious?

5. What role does hearing God play in reducing worry?
6. According to this passage, if my worry is to be restrained, who must do the praying?

U In horseshoe groups of 6–8, choose an answer and explain why you chose what you did.

Learning from the Story

1. What is the difference between anxiety and concern? How do the Greek words *merimnao* and *phroneo* illustrate this in Scripture?
2. What was the most beneficial insight about prayer that you gained today?
 - Worry is a signal to start praying.
 - Genuine prayer isn't just about talking; it's also about listening.
 - In the Garden of Gethsemane, what Jesus heard was perhaps more important than what He said.
 - I must pray for myself in order to diffuse my worry.
 - Peace is the result of genuine prayer.
 - Other: _____

life change lessons

How can you apply this session to your life?

Write your answers here.

1. What are the two types of worry you should identify and acknowledge to God?

2. In order to attack worry, what must you hear and rehearse?
3. What does worry empty today of?



Caring Time

15-20 minutes

CARING TIME

 Remain
in horseshoe
groups of 6-8.

This is the time for developing and expressing your caring for group members. Take turns praying for the concerns listed on the Prayer/Praise Report, as well as other requests that have been shared. In addition, pray that each group member will find peace through prayer.

If you would like to pray silently, say “Amen” when you have finished so the next person will know when to start.

Pray specifically for God to guide you to someone to invite next week.

BIBLE STUDY NOTES

PHILIPPIANS 4:4

Reference Notes

Use these notes to gain further understanding of the text as you study on your own.

Rejoice in the Lord always. Following an exhortation to the Philippians to be unified, and citing a specific case of division that concerns him, Paul proceeds to encourage the development of positive Christian behaviors. First, believers are to rejoice—to be filled with and express joy. Note that the exhortation is to rejoice *in the Lord*. It is faith in Christ and a focus on His love, grace, and goodness that makes joyfulness realistic and possible. It is this perspective that allows Paul to rejoice in the Lord, though imprisoned.

PHILIPPIANS

4:4
(cont'd)

I will say it again: Rejoice! Paul repeats the admonition for emphasis. An additional purpose of the repetition is likely a response to the skeptical reaction to his first exclamation. Facing great difficulty themselves and with their leader in prison, the Philippians would likely greet his joyful advice with disbelief or reluctance. The repetition is Paul's way of saying, "Yes, you heard me right; rejoice, I tell you!"

PHILIPPIANS

4:5

gentleness. The Greek word, *epiekes*, describes a willingness to yield one's personal rights when the normal or expected response would be retaliation (see Matt. 5:38–42).

The Lord is near. This is not referring to Christ's continual presence but to His second coming, at which time the righteous Judge will confront all injustices.

PHILIPPIANS

4:6

Do not be anxious. The Greek word, *merimnao*, implies excessive concern or anxiety. The verb tense suggests continual anxiety. In other words, "Do not be constantly anxious about anything." In context with the preceding verses, Paul is specifically admonishing the Philippians not to worry about the problems of present or future persecution. However, since Paul said that believers should not be anxious about *anything*, certainly the application may be extended beyond the experiences of persecution.

prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Prayer, *proseuche*, implies the attitude of worship. Petition, *deesei*, is the expression of needs. Thanksgiving, *eucharistias*, should accompany all prayer.

PHILIPPIANS

4:7

the peace of God. This is the only time this phrase is used in the New Testament. Note that the prayerful and obedient believer is promised the peace of God (v. 7) and the God of peace (Phil. 4:9).

transcends all understanding. It is a supernatural peace that cannot be explained by logic or attained by good psychology. It is a peace that operates not in a denial of reality, but transcends circumstances.

guard your hearts and your minds. Drawing from a military analogy, to guard, *phroureo*, recalls a military garrison stationed inside the city, employed to protect its citizens. Thus, the peace of God residing within the heart and mind of the praying believer acts as a guard against intruding anxious thoughts.