



**God. Self. Others. Trials. Purpose.**



**WEEK 2**  
**Peace with Self**  
By: Dr. John Freeland

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, 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.”

(Philippians 4:4-7)



## INTRODUCTION

Most people are in deep need of peace. It is not just the external pressures and anxieties they feel, but a myriad of self-doubts and guilt surge deep within. Finding true inner peace can feel like an elusive dream. Christians, however, are promised peace not merely fleeting moments of calm or the absence of strife, but a profound, consistent, and abiding sense of peace within the very core of their being.

The Apostle Paul, who suffered many times from beatings, incarceration, trials, and shipwreck, was no stranger to hardship (see 2Cor. 11:23-27). In Philippians he commands us to “rejoice in the Lord always.” This is not easy in the face of adversity. We need a deep-seated joy rooted in an unwavering trust in God’s unfailing love and presence that cries from within “I will rejoice in God!” This kind of consistent rejoicing becomes a shield of sorts, deflecting anxieties and worries before they take root. Next, Paul urges us to

cultivate “gentleness,” a quality born of a humbled heart and an awareness of God’s grace. This gentleness touches others with kindness and compassion while fostering self-acceptance and forgiveness.

Knowing the “Lord is near” reminds us we are not alone. Knowing God is constantly near sustains us in external storms. We may not suffer beatings, incarceration, trials, and shipwreck like Paul, but our need for inner peace is just as real and urgent as was Paul’s. But how do we navigate the anxieties that inevitably arise? Pray. Paul encourages us to present our “requests to God” with “thanksgiving,” for the blessings already present in our lives. This act of gratitude softens the grip of anxieties and shifts our focus toward God and His provision.

**SERMON NOTES:**

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**DAY 1 | WEEK 2**  
**Rejoice in the Lord Always**  
By: Dr. John Freeland

“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!”

(Philippians 4:4)

## REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS

Day 1 | Week 2

With 5 million copies in print, some of us will remember the 1950's Norman Vincent Peelle self-help book, The Power of Positive Thinking. It was promoted as a biblical approach with practical practices and instructions for "positive thinking." Some might say it was "all the rage." Its problem was it was less biblical than reported and more difficult to actually achieve. Paul is most definitely not suggesting positive thinking or "talking yourself into feeling good." When Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always" he says it from his own practical experience of weathering the storms of persecution and evangelistic hardships.

"Rejoice in the Lord always" is not Paul's way of saying ignore your difficulties. Paul wasn't relaxing at the beach working on his tan when he wrote these words. He wrote the letter to the Philippians while in prison either in Ephesus or Rome, either chained to a Roman prison guard or to the floor, with his

execution looming in the future. Paul's circumstances were not something he could ignore. Nor can we ignore our circumstances. So, Paul's command to "Rejoice in the Lord always" is about holding tight a deep trust and confidence in God's sovereignty, love, and ultimate plan.

Rejoicing always begins to make sense when we consider Romans 12:12 which says, "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer (ESV)." "Rejoice in the Lord always" doesn't mean rejoicing for the affliction, hardship, or persecution. "Rejoice in the Lord always" means rejoicing in the hope that God is involved and has a plan to put the present affliction, hardship, or persecution to work for the "good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). "Rejoice in the Lord always" means being patient in tribulation without having a knee-jerk reaction or overreaction. It means waiting on the Lord with confidence knowing



He is already acting on our behalf. “Rejoice in the Lord always” means being faithful in prayer even when we don’t know how to pray.

In both Philippians 4:4 and Romans 12:12, the Greek word translated “rejoice” is *chairo* and it means to “rejoice exceedingly,” “to let the hope of future blessedness give you joy.” In Romans 12:12, the NIV translates *chairo* “be joyful.” Inner peace comes when we realize the great hope and joy we have in Christ Jesus. *Shalom*, the Hebrew word we translate “peace,” reminds us that all of creation is to rejoice in God’s sovereignty and rule. Therefore we are to rejoice in every aspect of life recognizing that God provides abundant blessings to His people.

In Psalm 40:16 those who seek God are to rejoice and be glad in Him. In Isaiah 61:10, the prophet rejoices in the God of his salvation as he praises Him, not for physical clothing and provision, but for robes of righteousness. We do ourselves a disservice when we believe we must inventory what is physically set before us before we can rejoice. This is why a beaten and imprisoned apostle can say unequivocally, “Rejoice in the Lord Always!” (See also Rom. 8:28; 2Cor. 12:9).

Our world is ever darkening. There is always trouble to be had. In Matthew 24:6, Jesus said, “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars.” We might say this is nothing new under the sun (Eccl. 1:9). Trouble should be expected, but it shouldn’t drag us down. The 19th century Baptist minister, Alexander MacLaren, said, “True peace comes not from the absence of trouble, but from the presence of God.” Peace, *Shalom*, in its simplest terms is peace in the midsts of strife, because even in strife, maybe especially in strife, God is present. Rejoice in the Lord! Always!

**Questions for further reflection:**

1. Read Psalm 40:16 and Isaiah 61:10. What do these passages say to you? What comfort do they offer in times of trouble/strife?

2. How do these passages challenge you?

3. In what ways has rejoicing helped you find peace?

**DAY 2 | WEEK 2**  
**Gentleness**  
By: Dr. John Freeland

“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”

(Philippians 4:5)

## GENTLENESS

### DAY 2 | WEEK 2

In Philippians 4:5, Paul connects gentleness with the Lord being near. This gentleness is not merely being polite, but acting with grace, understanding, and a willingness to put others first. This quality of “gentleness” is so important Paul commands it be evident among the Philippian Christians. This gentleness is a generous treatment of others. It does not insist on what is justly due. It is courtesy and respectful of others.

Gentleness fosters genuine relationships built on mutual respect, empathy, and understanding and creates unity in the body of Christ. It breaks down the walls of pride and competition, creating a more loving and supportive community. True gentleness may be found by imitating Christ, who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness” (Phil 2:7). It allows us to receive the gifts and graces of God while extending them freely to others.

Think about the tax collector and the Pharisee who went up to pray in Luke 18. The tax collector made no claim on God. His plea was simple and humble. With agony he confessed his sin and pleaded for mercy. We see true public repentance from this man who considered himself so lowly he stood at a distance. On the other hand, the Pharisee’s lack of humility before God separated him from others and betrayed his arrogance and disdain for his fellow Jews. The elitist attitude of the Pharisee had blinded him to a plight of his own making. He was more separated from others than was the tax collector. In no way could the Pharisee be considered gentle. Gentleness is a far reach without humility. And it is a far reach without a heart for other people. The proud person offends God through self-exaltation, offends others by self-preoccupation, and offends self with self-deception.

Many of us are like the tax collector. We are harder on ourselves than we are on anyone else. We know we've been wrong and fallen short. We rarely give ourselves the benefit of the doubt, because we've disappointed ourselves so many times there is no doubt. Philippians 4:5 instructs us to let our gentleness be evident to all. As we are gentle with our brothers and sisters in Christ, so we must be gentle with ourselves. Jesus demonstrated the meaning of gentleness more than any other. He submitted to the will of God more than any other. In humility He died our death so that in victory we could live His life. In His victory, the life He gives us is where we find peace with self. Jesus died for you, to forgive your sin and to give you new life. It is time to be gentle with yourself.

## Questions for further reflection:

1. Think about two or three people you know personally whom you consider gentle. What qualities make them gentle?

2. Read the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee in Luke 18. Examine them both to discover their acts of humility and gentleness (or the opposite).

3. Without reflecting too deeply on your past, what sins still burden your soul with guilt? Forgive yourself. Lay that sin and guilt down and be at peace with yourself and with God. Whom else do you need to forgive? If you have trouble, speak with one of your pastors.

**DAY 3 | WEEK 2**  
**The Lord is Near**  
By: Dr. John Freeland

“Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”

(Philippians 4:5)

## THE LORD IS NEAR

DAY 3 | WEEK 2

The world did us a huge disservice when it promoted the idea that we could buy our happiness. Commercial after commercial promotes this ideology causing us to think “if I only looked like that actor, had that house, had that car, or had that body.” Think about Barbie. Every young woman wanted a body like hers. We have been led to believe our physical appearance and material possessions are far more important than they actually are.

St. Seraphim of Sarov was an 18th-century monk later sainted in the Eastern Orthodox Church. He said, “The closer a person is to God, the happier he is; the farther away he is from God, the more miserable.” We cannot find true happiness (joy) in external circumstances or fleeting pleasures, but only in connection with God. But...there is always a “but.” But, happiness is not all its reported to be. We must consider the source of that happiness. Many things bring happiness, but not all of them please God.

There is a wellspring of joy and peace in a close relationship with God. A relationship with God brings security, purpose, and gratitude that spills over into every aspect of our lives, making us truly content, and truly at peace. However, the absence of God’s nearness creates anxiety, fear, and a sense of isolation, leading to the “misery” of which St. Seraphim warns. The Lord is always as near as we allow Him to be. His drawing near to us is not the problem. It is our drawing near to Him that disrupts our peace. If you feel far from God, guess who moved? We must open our hearts and minds to receive His blessings and experience the true joy that comes from being close to Him.

Many interpret “The Lord is near” with an eschatological expectation (expectation of the second coming of Christ). Certainly, that is in view here, but let’s focus on the “here and now” nearness of God we experience through the presence of the Holy



Spirit. The “nearness of God” is not solely a New Testament concept. We find the nearness of God comforting the people of the Old Testament time and again (see Psa. 34:18; 119:15; 145:18).

Let’s not misunderstand the nearness of God as though the Holy Spirit is here like a cruel head master ready to punish every disobedience. “The Lord is near” is the promise of comfort and a constant companion. God’s Peace is not dispensed on a whim but enjoyed in loving relationship. Certainly, we experience difficulties. We have all had them and will have them again, but Paul and the other Apostles lived in a pagan world where the next persecution was just around the corner. Believers lost their families and their livelihoods when they converted. The financial strain alone was enough to make you wonder if peace would ever visit again. But trusting the Lord was near, there could be no anxiety. With the Lord near, peace is a sure thing.

### Questions for further reflection:

1. Reflect on times when you have experienced God's peace during trials or uncertainties. How does God's peace differ from worldly peace?

2. In the story of Jesus stilling the storm, Jesus confronted the disciples regarding their lack of faith (read the story in Mark 4:35-41). Describe the relationship between faith and peace in this passage.

3. Read James 4:8. What does it mean to draw near to God and how does that affect you in times of trouble?

**DAY 4 | WEEK 2**  
**Be Anxious for Nothing**  
By: Dr. John Freeland

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

(Philippians 4:6)

## BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING

DAY 4 | WEEK 2

Paul's command to "be anxious for nothing" seems so utterly impossible in such an anxious world as ours. Being commanded not to be anxious almost seems cruel. It's like asking a man to sprout wings and fly, so let's rephrase this command: "Trust God with your cares, and no take-backs." Isn't that what we so often do? We plead with God to take care of this problem or that crisis. We beg Him to enter our chaos and straighten it out. But before He has a chance we take back the very worries we "entrusted" to Him. Sometimes we are anxious because we are control freaks.

Philippians 4:6 acknowledges the reality of anxiety but challenges its dominance over the Christian life. The focus then shifts from the problem itself to our response. Confidence in God's goodness isn't blind optimism, but a well-grounded trust in God's character. God's love is unwavering and He cares deeply for His creation of which He is both Sovereign and

Sustainer. He desires good for us, even when things seem bleak. God is not a distant observer. He is already actively involved in our lives, even more than we think (Eph. 3:20).

You may have heard something like, "Let go of your anxieties and worries, and trust God is in control." Sayings like that feel shallow. The hearer may want to thump their chest and reply "Take on my problems and see how you feel!" Trusting God doesn't mean ignoring your feelings. God gave us those feelings, but they should not dictate how we live our lives. Our problems may still exist, but they won't have power over us anymore because we can trust the God who has power over them.

Remember the Polaroid Instant Camera? The instant camera got its start in 1948 and was all the rage in the 60s and 70s. Push the button and something that looked like a black card would pop out of the camera. We would

shake the photo and look to see if it had developed yet. Then we would shake it some more. Truth was, shaking it didn't help one bit. It just helped us manage our impatience. Wanda Brunstetter, a novelist, said, "Worry is the darkroom in which negatives can develop." What negatives exist in your life? What is causing those negatives to develop?

One way to avoid developing negatives is to not take pictures. This means not taking "pictures" of ourselves and comparing them with others. Self-evaluations can increase anxiety and create self-loathing. This means letting go of some things we would normally cling to. But why do we cling to them? We want to control them. When we first become anxious, rather than going to the darkroom, we should go to the prayer room. In prayer God can guide us. Prayer is a conversation not a shopping list, and conversation means talking and listening. When we listen, God speaks. It is in those moments, in the prayer room, God can direct us regarding our worries and anxieties.

### **Questions for further reflection:**

1. What thoughts and attitudes occupy your mind? How can focusing on positive, virtuous thoughts contribute to inner peace?

2. Thinking about your daily life, what are some practical ways you can cultivate patience and trust in God?

3. What does trusting God mean to you? What things are you attempting to control that you should release to God?

**DAY 5 | WEEK 2**  
**Prayer and Supplication**  
By: Dr. John Freeland

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

(Philippians 4:7)

## PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION

DAY 5 | WEEK 2

Children grow and mature and eventually become adults who are independent. Every parent hopes their children will become successful and independent. But God wants His children to be dependent upon Him. Out of our independence, which we have worked all our lives to achieve, we think we can handle things on our own. Our parents taught us to be independent and self-reliant. The problem is independence and self-reliance actually increase our anxiety because deep down we fear our own shortcomings.

Anxiety causes us to forget God. Fear compels us to constantly think about what is wrong. Remember the darkroom vs prayer room analogy from yesterday? The darkroom of anxiety develops negatives. When we shift our focus from the problem to the Problem-Solver, God, the problems feel smaller and smaller. When we make our requests known to God our minds are freed from distressing anxieties, and we find peace that passes all understanding.

You don't have a problem so big God can't handle it, nor do you have a problem so small it escapes His attention, but prayer is not Alka-seltzer for anxiety. Prayer is growing in faith and relationship with God. We find peace when we let go and trust God with our problem. Prayer is a process not an event. Prayer is not a letter to Santa or a box to check on your to-do list. Prayer is a lifestyle. The sense that we can go to God anytime keeps us from punching a prayer clock. The point is not how often or how long we pray, but that we pray. When we develop a rhythm of prayer, our anxieties wither, and our trust in God blooms.

Many Christians feel they shouldn't bother God with the small things. Some have the idea God isn't interested in all their problems. Both thoughts underestimate God. They each forget "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."



Philippians 4:6 says, “do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation...” “Anything” and “every” are absolutes. “Anything” doesn’t leave out a single thing. “Every” forgets nothing. God wants to hear about every problem you have. He wants to know about your “anythings.” What should you pray about when you feel anxious? Anything and everything! So, when we pray about our “anythings” and “everything” we come to understand that peace is not the absence of conflict. Peace is God joining us in the conflict.

According to Philippians 4:7 peace does two things. It transcends all understanding and guards our hearts and our minds. Peace is in the realm of God. This is why we can’t “find” it in the physical realm. Peace is of God, not of man. We can’t understand peace. We can only pray to live in peace. Peace is like a shield guarding our hearts and minds. Anxiety assaults our minds and emotions. It upsets us, damages our thinking, and exposes our feelings. Thank God His peace transcends all understanding and guards our hearts and minds.

Spend time in prayer, laying your anxieties before God and trusting in His provision and care. Practice thanksgiving by acknowledging God’s faithfulness and past provisions. Consider sharing some of those anxieties with someone you feel can partner with you.

### Questions for further reflection:

1. Practice gratitude by listing the blessings in your life and praising God for His faithfulness, even in challenging times.

2. Remember the Brunstetter quote from yesterday, "Worry is the darkroom in which negatives can develop"? What negatives have you developed in your darkroom of anxiety? Go to your "prayer room" and surrender those negatives. Ask God to transform them into positives.



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