

Small Group Discussion Guide

Teach Us to Pray: Prayer that Unlocks the Prison of Anxiety Philippians 4:4-7

Opening question

- To what degree do you find yourself weighed down with anxiety, on a scale of 1 to 10? (1 means you're never anxious, and you live a totally care-free life; 10 means that not a moment passes without you being weighed down by anxiety).
- What is the most common issue that causes you to be anxious?

Read Philippians 4:4-7

- Paul and his Philippian readers all had circumstantial reasons to be anxious. And yet, in the middle of harsh realities, Paul tells us the kind of prayer that unlocks the prison of anxiety. That kind of prayer involves the following three actions. Take some time to discuss them as a group.

1. Prayer that Rejoices

- How does it strike you when you hear the command in v. 4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"?
 - How is the command to "rejoice" shaped or colored by the phrase, "in the Lord?" What form or cause does that phrase give to our rejoicing?
 - Pastor Josh said on Sunday that if you are a follower of Jesus, you always have a reason to rejoice. How do you feel about that statement? Agree or disagree? What are some of these reasons?
 - How do you feel about viewing rejoicing as a discipline—in other words, doing it as an exercise, even when you don't feel like it?
 - How does this kind of rejoicing help us deal with our anxiety? Have you ever personally experienced your anxiety lifting as a result of the choice to rejoice?
- How does "your gentleness" (v. 5a) relate to rejoicing?
- Some scholars think that when Paul says, "Let your gentleness be evident to all," he's thinking of how Jesus responded when attacked—when he was arrested and questioned by the Sanhedrin, when he was tried by Pilate, when he was taunted by Roman soldiers, when he was mocked on the cross. What did Jesus say or do in response to these onslaughts? Why was he able to be gentle? How does his example enable you to do the same when attacked by anxiety?
- Why does Paul say in v. 5, "The Lord is near?" What kind(s) of nearness does he have in mind? (Pastor Josh mentioned two on Sunday).
 - Read Philippians 3:20-21 to be reminded of one of them.
 - Leaders: The Lord is near 1) by the presence of his Holy Spirit, living in each believer, and 2) in the sense of Jesus' certain return to make all things new.
 - How does this nearness enable us to rejoice and lay down our anxiety?

2. Prayer that Refuses (to remain anxious)

- V. 6: When Paul says, “Do not be anxious,” he does not mean that you should never have an anxious thought enter your mind. He is speaking in the “continuous” aspect, meaning, “Don’t go on being anxious. Don’t wallow in anxiety. Refuse to stay in a state of anxiety.”
 - How do you feel about this command? Does it feel shallow and trite, or meaningful to you?
- When Paul completes the sentence, “Do not be anxious *about anything*,” do you think he had exceptions in mind—times when it would be okay to remain anxious?
- With regard to the items that you mentioned at the outset—the things about which you tend to worry—would it make sense to fill in the sentence with them? “*Do not be anxious about _____?*”
- What obstacle(s) might prevent you from applying this statement to your concerns?

3. Prayer that Releases (requests to God)

- In the second half of v. 6, following the “but,” Paul gives the alternative to staying anxious. What is it?
 - Be sure to bring out and discuss the four parts of this alternative: 1) In every situation; 2) By prayer and petition; 3) With thanksgiving; 4) Present your requests to God.
 - If you have time, discuss the corresponding application questions to the four components above: 1) Are there situations where you feel you can’t release matters? 2) Are you confident petitioning God? 3) What does giving thanks have to do with releasing anxiety in prayer? 4) When you present something to someone, you take your hands off and leave it in their hands. How do you do this in prayer?
- How easy or difficult is it for you to *release* things that worry you when you pray about them? Do you tend to keep worrying about them, or are you able to rest, knowing God has heard you and is acting on your behalf?
- What result does Paul assure us will happen, in v. 7, when we rejoice, refuse, and release our anxiety in prayer?
 - The image behind the phrase, “guard your hearts and minds,” in the Greek language, is of a military garrison, a protective force or structure. Have you ever experienced God’s inexplicable peace guarding your heart and mind in this way? Share about that experience.

Sharing and prayer

- As you share your needs with one another, be sure to name those things that you’re having a hard time releasing in prayer. Pray for one another specifically in these matters, that the peace of God may be experienced among you.