

Teach Us to Pray, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: Thanksgiving and Peace Instead of Anxiety

Philippians 4:4–7

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Philippians 4:4-7 gives the class a clear, practical theology of what to do with worry, and it places prayer at the very center of the Christian's emotional and spiritual life. The doctrine at stake is the nature and source of true peace. Paul does not offer a relaxation technique or positive thinking; he prescribes a God-ward action (prayer and supplication with thanksgiving) and promises a God-given result (the peace of God guarding heart and mind in Christ Jesus). Help the class see that peace here is not primarily a feeling we manufacture but a gift God gives and a guard he sets, flowing from a real transaction in which we entrust our anxieties to him.

Guard one boundary carefully. This passage must not be turned into a formula that guarantees God will remove our troubles or grant our specific requests if we just pray correctly and thank him enough. Paul, writing from prison, is the living proof that the peace he promises can coexist with unresolved hardship. The promise is not "pray and God will fix it"; the promise is "pray, and God's peace will guard you," whatever the outcome. This quietly but firmly resists the prosperity and word-of-faith error, which the next lesson will address head-on. Peace is given to those who trust God's wisdom and goodness with the outcome, not to those who have mastered a technique for controlling him. Note too the phrase "the Lord is at hand," which grounds our joy and peace in the Lord's nearness and his sure coming, not in improved circumstances.

The formational aim is deeply pastoral, because anxiety is one of the most common burdens your class carries. Many believers are quietly exhausted by worry and have never learned that there is a specific, God-given path through it. The goal this week is not to shame anyone for being anxious (Paul's command is an invitation, not a rebuke) but to teach them the exchange: the deliberate practice of turning each worry, as it comes, into thankful prayer, and then trusting God's peace to stand guard. If students leave actually doing this with one real anxiety, the lesson has succeeded.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul commands, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (v. 6). Why does Paul prescribe prayer as the God-given alternative to anxiety, and what does the structure of this verse teach us about what we are to do with our worries?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by letting the command land in its fullness: “do not be anxious about anything.” This is sweeping, and it can feel crushing if heard as a mere prohibition (“just stop worrying”). Help the class see it is not a bare command but a command with a provision attached. Paul does not say “stop worrying” and walk away; he immediately gives us something to do with the worry instead.

Walk through the structure of verse 6. “In everything” (no worry is excluded) “by prayer and supplication” (specific, earnest asking) “with thanksgiving” (gratitude woven in) “let your requests be made known to God.” The verse is essentially a recipe for transferring anxiety into God’s hands. Anxiety and prayer are presented as alternatives: the energy that would have gone into worrying is to be redirected into praying.

Make the theological point that this is possible because of who God is. We can be told not to be anxious only because there is Someone trustworthy to whom we can hand our cares. Anxiety assumes we are alone with our problems; prayer remembers we are not. The cure for worry is not a stronger will but a bigger God who invites our requests.

Close by relieving false guilt. Anxiety is not the unforgivable sin, and feeling it does not mean we have failed. Paul is showing the anxious heart a door, not delivering a verdict. Frame the whole lesson as good news for worriers: there is somewhere to put all this.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- “Do not be anxious” as a command with a provision, not a bare prohibition
- The structure of verse 6: everything, by prayer, with thanksgiving, made known to God
- Prayer as the God-given redirection of anxious energy
- Trust in a trustworthy God as the basis for being free from anxiety
- Anxiety addressed with an invitation, not condemnation

Discussion Prompts

- Why doesn’t “just stop worrying” ever work, and what does Paul offer instead?
- What does the structure of verse 6 tell us to actually do with our worries?
- How does prayer change the basic assumption that we are alone with our problems?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest about your habits. When anxiety rises, do you actually take it to God in prayer, or do you mostly stew on it, distract yourself, or try to manage it alone? What would it look like this week to turn a specific worry into a prayer the moment it appears?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question exposes the gap between what we know and what we do. Almost everyone agrees we should pray about our worries; far fewer actually do it in the moment anxiety strikes. Most of us stew, scroll, distract, or try to think our way out. Help the class notice their actual default without shame.

Offer a simple, repeatable practice: turn the worry into a prayer the instant it appears, even a single sentence. Anxiety tends to arrive in repeated waves; each wave can become a prompt to pray rather than an occasion to spiral. The goal is to build a reflex of praying our worries rather than rehearsing them.

Encourage specificity. Vague worry is hard to pray; naming the actual fear (“I’m afraid of this diagnosis,” “I’m afraid we won’t have enough”) turns it into a concrete request God can be trusted with. Invite each student to pick one recurring worry this week and practice handing it over, by name, every time it returns.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between knowing we should pray our worries and actually doing it
- Our default ways of avoiding prayer: stewing, distraction, self-management
- Turning each wave of anxiety into a prompt to pray
- Naming worries specifically so they can be entrusted to God

Discussion Prompts

- What is your honest default when anxiety rises?
- What would help you turn a worry into a prayer the moment it appears?
- Which recurring worry will you practice handing over to God this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says to bring our requests “with thanksgiving” (v. 6). Why does he include thanksgiving as part of the cure for anxiety, and how does gratitude reframe our worries by reminding us of who God is and what he has already done?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on the surprising phrase “with thanksgiving.” Paul could have said simply “make your requests known,” but he weaves gratitude into the very act of bringing our worries to God. This is not incidental; thanksgiving is part of the cure for anxiety. Help the class see why.

Explain how gratitude reframes worry. Anxiety fixes our gaze on what might go wrong and on what we lack. Thanksgiving deliberately turns the gaze toward what God has already done and who he has already shown himself to be. It does not deny the problem, but it sets the problem

inside a larger story of God's proven faithfulness. A God who has provided before, rescued before, and kept his promises before can be trusted now.

Show that thanksgiving is an act of faith, not merely a mood. We give thanks not because we feel grateful but because God is good and has been good, and remembering that steadies us. Often the feeling of gratitude follows the deliberate practice of giving thanks, the same way the feeling of trust follows the act of entrusting.

Apply it to the prayer life. Encourage a pattern of mingling thanks with requests: before or while we ask, we recall what God has done. This keeps prayer from becoming a mere anxiety dump and turns it into an exercise in remembering God's character, which is exactly what an anxious heart most needs.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Thanksgiving as an essential ingredient in the cure for anxiety, not an afterthought
- Gratitude reframing worry by recalling God's proven faithfulness
- Thanksgiving as an act of faith rather than a mood
- Mingling thanks with requests so prayer becomes remembering, not just venting
- Feelings of gratitude often following the deliberate practice of thanks

Discussion Prompts

- Why do you think Paul made thanksgiving part of how we bring God our worries?
- How does giving thanks change the way a worry feels?
- What is the difference between feeling grateful and choosing to give thanks?

Question 4

Student Question:

Anxiety tends to magnify what is wrong and shrink what is right, while gratitude does the opposite. What are you currently overlooking that you could give thanks for? How might deliberately practicing thanksgiving begin to loosen the grip of your particular worry?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question puts gratitude to work against the student's particular anxiety. Anxiety has a way of consuming the whole field of vision, magnifying the threat and erasing every good thing. Gratitude deliberately widens the lens again. Help students notice what their worry has been crowding out.

Make it concrete. Ask each person to name several specific things they can thank God for right now, including ordinary mercies they have stopped noticing. The very act of listing them begins

to shift the inner weather. This is not denial of real trouble; it is refusing to let trouble be the only thing in view.

Prescribe a simple discipline: pair every season of worry this week with a deliberate act of thanksgiving, perhaps keeping a short running list of gifts. Over time this practice retrains an anxious mind to see God's goodness alongside its fears rather than only the fears.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Anxiety's tendency to magnify threats and erase blessings
- Gratitude as a deliberate widening of our field of vision
- Naming specific, ordinary mercies we have stopped noticing
- A repeated practice of thanksgiving that retrains an anxious mind

Discussion Prompts

- What good things has your worry been crowding out of view?
- What specific mercies could you thank God for right now?
- How could you pair thanksgiving with worry as a habit this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul promises that "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (v. 7). What is this peace, how is it different from the peace the world offers, and what does it mean that this peace "guards" us rather than simply makes us feel better?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Open up the promise of verse 7. "The peace of God" is not merely a calm feeling; it is a peace that belongs to God, that comes from him, and that reflects his own settledness. Paul says it "surpasses all understanding," meaning it does not arise from having figured everything out or having our circumstances resolved. It can rest in a heart even while the mind cannot make sense of the situation.

Contrast it with the world's peace. The world's peace depends on conditions: enough money, good health, resolved conflict, a clear horizon. Remove the conditions and the peace evaporates. God's peace is given by God and does not depend on circumstances, which is why a prisoner like Paul can have it in abundance. Jesus made the same contrast: "my peace I give to you; not as the world gives" (John 14:27).

Draw out the word "guard." It is a military image: peace stationing itself like a sentry over our hearts and minds. The picture is not of a soft glow but of a strong protector keeping watch over

the very places, our emotions and our thoughts, where anxiety attacks. God's peace does not just soothe; it defends.

Note the location: "in Christ Jesus." This peace is found inside our union with Christ, not in techniques or temperament. It is one of the benefits of being his. Apply it pastorally: we do not have to generate this peace by trying harder to feel calm; we receive it as a gift as we entrust our cares to God, and we find it guarding us in Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The peace of God as a gift from God, reflecting his own settledness
- Peace that surpasses understanding, not dependent on resolved circumstances
- The contrast with the world's conditional peace (John 14:27)
- "Guard" as a military image: peace standing sentry over heart and mind
- Peace found in union with Christ, received rather than manufactured

Discussion Prompts

- How is the peace of God different from the calm the world offers?
- What does it mean that this peace "guards" your heart and mind?
- Why is it significant that this peace is found "in Christ Jesus"?

Question 6

Student Question:

Paul describes an exchange: we hand God our anxieties, and he guards us with his peace. Take the worry you named earlier. What would it look like, this week, to actually make that exchange, bringing it to God with thanksgiving and trusting him with the peace he gives, even before anything changes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites students to actually make the exchange Paul describes rather than merely admire it. The transaction is simple but real: we hand God a specific anxiety with thanks, and he guards us with his peace. Help the class move from concept to practice with the very worry they named earlier in the lesson.

Address the timing honestly. The peace is promised before the circumstance changes, and often the circumstance does not change at all. So the exchange is an act of trust: we give God the worry and receive his peace while the situation is still unresolved. This is the costly, faith-filled heart of the passage.

Prescribe the step plainly: this week, take the named worry, bring it to God with thanksgiving, deliberately release it into his hands, and ask for his guarding peace, then do it again each time

the worry returns. Encourage students to notice that the peace is tied to the entrusting, not to the resolving.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The exchange of anxiety for God's peace as a real, repeatable transaction
- Peace received before, and often without, a change in circumstances
- Entrusting as an act of faith rather than a guarantee of resolution
- Repeating the exchange each time the worry returns

Discussion Prompts

- What would it look like to actually hand God the worry you named?
- Why is it significant that peace comes before the circumstance changes?
- How will you make this exchange when the worry returns this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul frames the whole passage with "Rejoice in the Lord always" and "The Lord is at hand" (vv. 4-5). How is rejoicing "in the Lord" different from rejoicing in our circumstances, and how does the nearness of the Lord give us a ground for joy and peace that our situation cannot touch?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Take up the frame around the passage: "Rejoice in the Lord always" (v. 4) and "The Lord is at hand" (v. 5). The key phrase is "in the Lord." Paul does not command us to rejoice in our circumstances, which would be impossible and even dishonest in hard times. He commands joy in the Lord, whose goodness and nearness do not change when our circumstances do.

Explain how this makes "always" possible. If our joy depended on circumstances, "rejoice always" would be a cruel demand. But because the object of our joy is the Lord himself, who is constant, joy is available even when life is hard. We rejoice not in the trial but in the unchanging God who meets us in it.

Open up "the Lord is at hand." This carries both senses dear to believers: the Lord is near, present with us now, and the Lord is coming, his return is sure. Either way, the truth steadies us. We are not facing our worries alone or forever; the One who is with us now is also bringing all things to their appointed end. This nearness is the ground of both joy and peace.

Apply it to prayer and anxiety. When we rejoice in the Lord and remember he is at hand, our worries are resized. The problem does not disappear, but it is no longer the biggest reality in the room; the present, coming Lord is. Teach the class that cultivating joy in the Lord is not a distraction from dealing with anxiety but part of the cure.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Rejoicing “in the Lord” rather than in circumstances (v. 4)
- Joy made possible “always” because its object is the unchanging Lord
- “The Lord is at hand”: his present nearness and his sure coming (v. 5)
- The nearness of the Lord as the ground of joy and peace beyond circumstances
- Cultivating joy in the Lord as part of the cure for anxiety

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between rejoicing in your circumstances and rejoicing in the Lord?
- How does “the Lord is at hand” give you a steadiness your situation cannot?
- Why is joy in the Lord part of dealing with anxiety rather than a distraction from it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul wrote “rejoice always” from a prison cell, which means this joy is possible even in hardship. Where in your life is it hardest to rejoice right now? What would it look like to rejoice “in the Lord” there, not by pretending the difficulty away, but by turning to the One who is near?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses joy into the hard places, and it must be handled with tenderness. Paul wrote “rejoice always” from prison, so we cannot dismiss the command as naive, but neither should we wield it to shame those who are suffering. Help students locate the area where joy feels most out of reach right now.

Clarify what rejoicing in the Lord looks like in hardship. It is not pretending the pain is not real or plastering on a smile. It is the deliberate turning of the heart toward the Lord who is present in the pain: recalling his character, his promises, his nearness, and finding in him a gladness that the circumstance cannot supply or destroy.

Invite a gentle, concrete step: in the hard area they named, choose one true thing about the Lord to rejoice in this week, spoken honestly to him. The aim is not forced cheerfulness but a real turning to God in the middle of difficulty, where joy and sorrow can genuinely coexist.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Rejoicing in the Lord as possible even in suffering, as Paul models from prison
- The difference between rejoicing in the Lord and denying real pain
- Turning the heart toward the present Lord rather than away from the hurt
- Joy and sorrow coexisting in the honest believer

Discussion Prompts

- Where is it hardest for you to rejoice right now?
- What is the difference between rejoicing in the Lord and pretending you are fine?
- What true thing about the Lord could you rejoice in there this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

This passage promises peace, but it does not promise that God will always remove the trouble or grant the specific outcome we ask for. Why is it important to see that the peace of God is a gift that guards our hearts even when circumstances do not change, rather than a technique for getting what we want or a guarantee of a trouble-free life? How does this protect us from a “name it and claim it” view of prayer and anchor us instead in trusting God’s wisdom and goodness?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, and it protects the class from a serious and common misreading. Philippians 4:6-7 is sometimes taught as a formula: if you pray and give thanks correctly, God will remove your trouble or grant your request, and you will feel calm. That is not what the text promises, and treating it that way sets people up for disillusionment and even shipwrecked faith when the trouble remains.

Read the promise precisely. Paul does not say, “and God will give you what you ask” or “and your circumstances will improve.” He says, “and the peace of God... will guard your hearts and your minds.” The promised result is peace, not the removal of the problem. The proof is Paul himself: he prayed, he gave thanks, and he stayed in prison, yet the peace was real and overflowing. The gift is God’s guarding peace in the trouble, not necessarily deliverance from it.

Name the error directly. This understanding stands squarely against the “name it and claim it” and prosperity teaching that treats prayer as a technique for compelling God to deliver health, wealth, or a desired outcome. Prayer is not a lever that forces God’s hand, and faith is not a currency that purchases our preferred results. When we bring our requests with thanksgiving, we are entrusting them to a God whose wisdom and goodness we trust, and who may answer yes, no, or wait. The peace comes from resting in his character, not from securing our outcome. The next lesson will develop this further; here, plant the truth firmly.

Then offer the deep comfort of this rightly understood. A peace that depends on getting our way is fragile and rare; a peace that guards us regardless of outcome is sturdy and available to everyone in Christ. This is far better news than a formula. We do not have to engineer our circumstances to be at peace; we entrust them to a good and sovereign Father and let his peace stand watch over our hearts. That is a peace the world, with all its conditions, cannot give and cannot take away.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The promised result is God’s guarding peace, not the removal of the trouble or a guaranteed outcome
- Paul in prison as living proof that peace can coexist with unresolved hardship
- A clear rejection of “name it and claim it” and prosperity teaching: prayer is not a technique to compel God
- Faith as trust in God’s wisdom and goodness, not a currency that purchases results
- God’s freedom to answer yes, no, or wait (developed further in Lesson 9)
- A peace independent of circumstances as sturdier and better news than any formula

Discussion Prompts

- What exactly does Paul promise in verse 7, and what does he not promise?
- How does Paul’s situation in prison expose the error of treating this as a formula?
- Why is a peace that does not depend on getting our way actually better news?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Philippians 4:4-7, with its call to rejoice in the Lord, its command to trade anxiety for prayer with thanksgiving, and its promise of guarding peace. Name one specific anxiety you will start bringing to God this way, and one way this passage is reshaping what you do with worry when it comes.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the passage into one practical resolve. Trace the path once more: rejoice in the Lord, who is near (vv. 4-5); refuse anxiety by bringing everything to God in prayer with thanksgiving (v. 6); and receive the peace of God that guards heart and mind in Christ (v. 7). It is a complete, repeatable response to worry.

Press for one real application. Ask each student to name a specific anxiety they will begin bringing to God in this way, and to identify how the passage is reshaping what they do with worry when it comes. Keep it concrete: a particular fear, a particular practice of thankful prayer, a particular trust in God’s peace.

Close by leading the class in the exchange together. Have them silently bring a real worry to God with thanks, and pray over the room for the peace of God to guard their hearts and minds in Christ. Let them leave having actually practiced the very thing the passage teaches.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Synthesis: rejoice, refuse anxiety through thankful prayer, receive guarding peace
- A complete and repeatable Christian response to worry
- Spiritual formation expressed in a specific anxiety entrusted to God

- Experiencing the exchange of anxiety for peace within the body of believers

Discussion Prompts

- Which specific anxiety will you begin bringing to God with thanksgiving?
- How is this passage changing what you do with worry when it comes?
- How can the class pray for one another's peace this week?