

This new series (Courageous) focuses on a hot topic: fear and anxiety. The issue of faith in God is throughout the Scriptures. God wants us to live in a relationship of trust in Him. Jesus often pointed out examples of real faith or lack thereof. Fear and anxiety permeate our culture. God wants us to love and trust Him and learn to live in His peace. Let's pray, model, and encourage people as we learn together.

As the shepherds, we need to be good listeners, vulnerable, and prepared in the Word.

- To listen well, we need to be ready with good questions and then listen with empathy, curiosity, and love.
- To inspire love, trust, and genuine community, we need to lead in vulnerability. This is risky and challenging. The leader needs to model being real and open. This will inspire others to do the same.
- To help others go deep in God's Word, we, the shepherds need to study and prepare. This requires two steps: Knowing the passage and deciding how you will facilitate. You will need to put time in the Word, asking the Spirit of God to instruct and inspire. You will also need to consider what questions you will ask. My questions are suggestions. They are general and often incomplete. You know your friends and what they need. Ask God to help you select and perhaps write questions and discussion points.

May God encourage and inspire you as you love His family. Steve.

### LOOKING BACK AT COVID 19

What did you feel during Covid 19? What was behind the feelings?

We all have some experience on this topic. Please encourage and allow time for people to share their own experiences and then try to guide this to get to the feelings level.

### ANOTHER PANDEMIC (This is a long intro into our new series. You might want to write your own or read this together.)

Covid 19 was a fuel for another pandemic already infecting America: fear and anxiety. These emotions have never been more problematic in our culture. A war is being waged against our minds to shut out peace, contentment, joy, confidence, and rest. The arrows of overexposure, comparison, 'what ifs' of medical websites, and a steady stream of bad news have so affected us, that even if nothing 'bad' ever happens, our minds and emotions are infected with fear and anxiety.

One of the great blessings of following Jesus as a disciple is the promise and power to live in His peace and joy. This week, we begin a new series entitled, "Courageous: facing our fears in a world full of them."

God has answers and solutions and can bring about real transformation. We will turn to His words to discover His ways, promises, and power. As we state in our Core Values: "The Bible is God's story, given to transform us and be the authority in our lives." God has also sent His Spirit to live in us to illuminate the Scriptures and work powerfully to grow us to be like Jesus. Lastly, God gave us each other to do life together. Praise God!

Our first week will focus on “Philippians” 4:1-9. In this letter, the author focuses on the importance of our **thought life**. Our thoughts affect every aspect of life. In Philippians, the grand command regarding our mindset (attitude) is in chapter two:

“**Have this mind [mindset, attitude] among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus**, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped [unwilling to release] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (2:5-8)

### **LET’S LEARN FROM GOD’S WORD**

Pray and read through Philippians 4:1-9 while searching for what God says about fear and anxiety.

What words or topics are repeated or emphasized?

Stand firm “in the Lord” (1,2,4)

United in our thoughts

Our attitude toward life, one another,

Living as one who is “in the Lord,” before God, in a relationship with God

Specific command that have to do with

- living before God
- rejoicing in the Lord,
- letting God’s gentleness and peace guide you,
- avoiding anxiety and
- instead praying and giving thanks
- thinking about the right things

In summary, this passage informs us how to live in the Lord with a mindset focused on Jesus and trusting God with the challenges of life

**4** Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. **2** I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. **3** Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

**4** Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. **5** Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; **6** do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **7** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**8** Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. **9** What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

What kinds of issues or challenges are addressed? What wisdom is offered?

Specifically, our thought life (mindset, attitude) is the focus.

This passage begins with a call to “stand firm in the Lord” because life and specifically opposition, can cause us to drift in our thinking, our joy, and our peace in Christ.

When we aren’t focused on the Lord, we can lose our peace, struggle in relationships, and live in anxiety and fear.

What is the general attitude or mindset that these two women needed?

They were living in a spirit of disagreement rather than spirit of being in the Lord (belonging to and living by faith in Him).

They were so stuck that Paul asked a brother in the Lord to intercede. The word translated as “help” means to “assist” or “take hold of together.” They needed a third party to help them refocus on who they are in Christ and how they can serve together.

How do the commands of vs. 4-5 address the situation?

<sup>4</sup> Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. <sup>5</sup> Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

Paul repeated his words from 3:1 (rejoice in the Lord.) When we are watching for and seeking what God has done and is doing, it lifts our eyes away from the here and now and the petty differences that we have. “Reasonableness” is translated as “gentleness” or “yielding attitude” in other places (and is in my opinion a translation of the Greek word, *epieikes*)

Why do you think that “in the Lord” is referenced multiple times (1, 2, 4)? What does this mean?

Paul reminded them (and us) that our focus needs to be on God, who He is and who we are in Christ. The alternatives are numerous and can all lead to drift in our faith, purpose, love, etc.

What commands are given in verse 4-8? How might these practices (steps of obedience) bless our lives?

- Rejoice in the Lord always(4). Learning to be present and thankful before God.
- Be known for your gentleness (yielding spirit) (5) Trusting God for your well-being, influence, and situations in life
- Do not be anxious about anything (6) Release from anxiety and fear – God has got this
- In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (6) Living in a love and faith relationship with God, entrusting Him with your deepest needs, thoughts, desires, and feelings, knowing that He cares for you and has all power.
- Think on the right things (8) Helps us focus on the goodness, righteousness, and grace of God instead of what is wrong in the world.

Verse eight directly addresses our thought lives. What do you notice?

Opinion question

What promises are made to those who obey and practice these commands?

God’s peace in our lives (especially our thoughts and emotions)

God will guard your hearts and minds

### Commentary notes:

v. 2 – The author begins with a word that means to “entreat, implore, urge”

2 – The word translated as “agree” in ESV literally means to “be of the same mind” as in under the Lordship of Christ. See also 1:27-28; 2:2-4, 14-16; 3:1.

3 – “true companion” (ESV) is literally “yoke fellow,” a play on words as two people in a yoke are also “side by side” as Paul labored with these women.

This companion of Paul’s was asked to “help” these women, a word that could be translated as “assist” or “take hold of together.”

5 – “gentleness” means not self-seeking or contentious

7 – “The peace of God” means “God’s peace”

8 – “think about” could be translated as “give careful thought” or “consider”

## **DISCUSS TOGETHER**

This passage of Scripture is written to a church situated in a secular culture. What do we learn about God's desires for His family and the world?

As Paul said earlier in Philippians, we are strangers and aliens in this world. We belong to Jesus – He is our life, our source, our focus, and our joy. When we live in conflict with each other, we are no longer living as a disciple and servant of Jesus.

What does God teach us here about Himself and His ways that can change how we see and respond in life? Why is "in the Lord" and "The Lord is near" transforming?

This is a life of faith, sacrifice, death to self and sin, and living for His purpose and will. We all need regular reminders of what Jesus did for us and our need to keep our eyes on Him.

What do we learn about dealing with fear and anxiety?

As said above, this passage gives us specific attitudes and practices that would lead us to how to live in God's peace in our thinking, our relationships, and our general attitude in life. If we were to practice the specific commands, fear and anxiety would no longer be a problem for us.

How does this passage help you as a disciple of Jesus? Is this something that we can share with those not yet in Christ?

Opinion question

## **APPLY IT THIS WEEK**

OK, this all sounds good, but we all have life situations, habits, and attitudes that allow fear and anxiety to stress our minds and emotions. What can you believe and practice this week to live as a disciple under the Lordship of Jesus? What would it look like to walk through your days knowing that God knows, God controls, God cares, and I can talk with God about everything? What should I change to listen to God instead of the world and my worries? How can I live in the peace of God?

God is so gracious and kind to us. He is calling us to a life of His peace and love. May you be filled with His joy as you shepherd God's family.

Steve for the Home Group Core Team