July 19, 2020

Become More Like Him: Part 1

RE**NEW**ED Series

Philippians 4:1-13

Pastor Jeff Petersen

We are living in unprecedented times. How many times have you heard that over the past several months? You know, it is repeated over and over and over because it's still our reality. We are living in circumstances unlike anything all of us have faced any other time in our lives. And I think it raises for us, as Christians, a really important question: How has your Christianity impacted your life over the past four months? How has your Christianity impacted you internally and externally? Well, how could—and should—it affect us? What would you say if I were to say to you this morning that I believe that the last four months, even these crazy times, could have been, and still could be, some of your very best days? That's what I'd like us to talk about together this morning.

If you have a Bible with you, would you turn with me to Philippians, Chapter 4? We're in the middle of a series in which we're speaking of having a renewed vision for our faith and for our church. And the vision statement is becoming a people who are: *"Coming together to know Jesus, to become more like Him, and to help others do the same."* We spent two weeks talking about the importance of coming together. Then, the past two weeks we talked about what does it really mean to personally know Jesus? And now, this week, we turn the page to trying to discover what it means to actually become like Him.

This leads back to the question I asked before: How has your Christianity been impacting your life in these crazy days—internally—in regard to the quality of your life and—externally—in regard to the impact from your life? Well, if the adverbs that you would use are anything less than profoundly and powerfully impacting, I would argue we might be missing something. After all, what is Christianity all about? What does it mean to be a Christian? Many would contend that the essence of Christianity is propositional and/or volitional, when in reality, it's ultimate outcome ought to be transformational. What I mean is that many would distill Christianity to adherence to a certain set of precepts—the belief system in our minds—or alignment to a certain set of behaviors—the actions undertaken by our will—the propositional and volitional aspects of Christianity. But, ultimately, at its essence, what Christianity ought to be is *transformational*, becoming more like Jesus.

What does that really mean though, to become like Jesus? I think a good way to put it is to say that we are increasingly becoming the kind of person who would live our lives as Jesus would live them if He were in our context, walking in our shoes, today. But how do we do that? You know, throughout the New Testament, a common theme that Paul reflects on is that there are certain practices that we can undertake in partnership with the Holy Spirit in order to aid us in the process of becoming more like Jesus. Paul suggests a number of things throughout the New Testament that we are to *put off*, things that we are to *put on*, referring primarily to those beliefs and behaviors, those propositional and volitional aspects of our faith. But what we sometimes lose sight of is that

those are primarily means. They are not the ultimate end, which is transformational. So I think, as we look at Philippians 4, we can dig into some of the things that Paul suggests we *put off*; some things that we ought to *put on*; and as we do, we will see the outcomes that God desires to produce, which are absolutely amazing! So, Paul gives us, in this text, both the hunger for and the hope of just such a life.

So let's dig into both his instruction and his example from Philippians 4. Verse 1:

> **Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long *to see*, my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved. I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord. Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in *the cause of* the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.** (*NASB, Philippians 4:1-3)

Paul starts out in this chapter addressing the Philippians about something that's going wrong in their midst. Apparently, some sort of dispute has arisen, and it has led to division. And while he doesn't explicitly use the words, I think Paul's first admonition in this chapter is that, if we want to become people who are actually growing to be more like Jesus, then *we need to put off division*.

Wow, what a word that is for us today! I don't personally ever remember a time of more division, hostility, and strife. People from every single corner and perspective seem to be throwing stones, sometimes even lobbing grenades. And it is so easy for us, when others act, to choose to react and to continue a cycle of action/reaction, leading to greater and greater division. Here's what we may not realize is happening within us. You see, when we choose to grab onto those things, to hold them, to own them, even perhaps to participate in them, whether it's just stewing on them in our own mind or whether it's actually choosing to vent on social media or to a friend, every time we do that, it's not an incident in isolation. It is actually a practice that we are cultivating, which is shaping the kind of person we are becoming. And when we grab on, participate in, and practice division, we are actually becoming more like the one described as the thief who came to kill, steal, and destroy rather than as the one who came to bring peace, hope, and shalom.

You see, our decisions, our beliefs, and our behavior have repercussions. And those repercussions are that they are shaping the very nature of our soul. And what it means to become more like Jesus is to increasingly become the kind of person who has a heart governed by the Spirit of God, that we might live in the way that Jesus would live if He was living our lives today. And so, we are called to put off division. And then, in Verse 4 we are told to:

> **Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!**

You know, I wrestled with Philippians 4:4 for a lot of years. It didn't make sense to me, because I thought perhaps what the Scripture was saying is that I was somehow, in Christianity, supposed to live some sort of an inauthentic life. Because I've got to be honest with you, there are a lot of moments and a lot of days, particularly in these days, when I'm not feeling a whole lot of joy. And here comes Philippians 4:4 saying, **Rejoice in the Lord always; I'll say it again, rejoice**! So, am I supposed to just put on an act? Am I supposed to live an inauthentic life, or am I supposed to be like one of the first Christian gals I met when I was a new believer in college, and every time I saw

her on campus, she walked up and said, “Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!”? And I was, like, “Can I peel that back and see if there's anyone in there?” Does it mean, to be a Christian, that we must be inauthentic? Does it mean that we're to put on a veneer of a plastic behavior?

Well, after wrestling with this for many years, I don't think that's what Philippians 4:4 is saying at all. In fact, Philippians 4:4 looks like something we're supposed to *put on*. But I would actually contend it's something we're supposed to *put off*. You could word it a lot of different ways, but I would say that the heart of Paul's admonition in this verse is to *put off discouragement!* We live in a world that is filled with things that are discouraging and disturbing to our souls. And once again, every single day we have an opportunity to either take that in, to soak in it, to own it, to possess it—to be governed and dominated by it—or to choose something else as a discipline, in order to become more like Jesus.

So, what does it mean to **rejoice in the Lord** if it's not inauthenticity? I believe it is a process of renewing our hearts and minds, where we look at our discouraging situation, but we look beyond it to our Savior. Because the reality is, friends, no matter how difficult things have been, no matter how much chaos there is in this world right now, no matter how much pain, division, and insanity, as a Christian, we have reason to rejoice. Because our God is good, our God is all-knowing. He is not caught by surprise; He has not fallen asleep. Our God is all-powerful. He is not threatened by what's happening to and around us. And our God is the God who loves us with such great love that He would come as our Savior to give His very life to ensure, as I said two weeks ago in Philippians 3, that our future is certain and it is glorious. No matter what you are facing today, if you are in Christ, you have reason for hope. And if you will choose as a practice—as a discipline—in the midst of the discouraging things of life, not to grab on and to own and to soak in those, but rather to legitimately feel them and their impact, and then to take them to the presence of God and, literally, by faith, choose to rejoice, then we will begin to experience change in our hearts, making us more like Christ. *Put off division. Put off discouragement.* Verse 5:

> **Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. The Lord is near.**

Or, perhaps, your verse says *forbearance*. That's a really good word. I like in Ephesians where Paul encourages us to *bear with one another in love*. I’m not seeing a whole lot of forbearance in our world right now. It seems like our ability to bear with one another in love, to give each other grace, to show up in conversation and interaction with gentleness and kindness is almost entirely absent. People are angry, frustrated, divided, and interacting in such a way that we must remember that God commands us right here in Verse 5 to put on a spirit of forbearance, of gentleness.

Well, once again, is God just asking us to do the impossible? How do we do that when life is difficult, and life is frustrating? Well, I believe the answer is found right there in the verse, in the often-overlooked last sentence of Verse 5: **The Lord is near.** Paul ultimately means, in this context, that what we can have confidence in, is that our God will make all things new. Our God has not abandoned us. He has not forsaken us. Our God has not fallen off His throne. Our God is in control and our God will make all things right. Is this how God intended for things to be? Absolutely not! But God is coming. He will make all things new. His return is imminent, and

that gives us the ability, the perspective, to be able to forbear in this world. I believe in Verse 5 Paul is calling us to *put on perspective.*

You know, there's another thing about the statement **The Lord is near** that is so encouraging to me, especially as we walk through difficult and troubling times, especially as our hearts deal with so many emotions. When we think of the Lord being near, remember that He is the one who is near to the brokenhearted. He is the one who said, "I will never leave you; I will never forsake you." He is the one who said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the very end of the age." There is not a moment in your life when the Lord is not near. There's not a moment when there's not opportunity to turn to Him, to experience His presence and His goodness. And as we, as a discipline, choose to do that—to put on perspective and to forbear and show up with forbearance and gentleness and kindness—our hearts are being shaped just a bit more to become like Jesus. And then, Verse 6:

> **Be anxious for nothing, but in ev…**

I probably should just stop there. **Be anxious for nothing.** Yours might say, "Do not be anxious about anything." Do you realize Philippians 4:6 is an imperative, which means it is a command from God? It's not an idea or a suggestion or a tip for living. It's literally a command from God, and it is a radical command. *Do not be anxious about anything*! So how have you been doing with the anxiety thing the past few months? I've got to be honest and tell you, "It's been a struggle. I'd say my failure rate on Philippians 4:6 is pretty high in terms of obeying the command to not be anxious about anything." We live in a world that is full of legitimate reasons to cause us fear and anxiety. You know, often fear is an emotion that we don't have control over; it just comes upon us. Often it is irrational. but it's based on something. And in our world right now, we are facing circumstances and times that are a cause for anxiety in very different and difficult ways.

So, how do we obey Philippians 4:6 and 7? You just…just muster it up…and you say, "Okay, I guess I'll just not be anxious." "Don't be anxious…don't be anxious…don't be anxious…don't be anxious." Meanwhile, the whole time you're anxious about not being anxious, right? Where's the answer? It's right there in the verse. Do not be anxious about anything…

> **…but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.**

Once again God gives us a discipline, a practice, a means of becoming more like Jesus. And it is a discipline to choose to not be anxious but, instead, to go to God in prayer. Whatever it is that is causing that fear, whatever it is that's causing that anxiety, what God calls us to in these moments is take all of that—don't deny it, don't stuff it—take it all to Him and cast your cares on Him, because He cares for you. Prayers and petition—tell Him what's troubling you. Tell Him what you want Him to do. Ask Him whatever it is you want to ask Him.

But I've got a question for you: "Have you ever done that and still felt anxious?" I honestly have pages and pages and pages in my journal where I have cried out to God about something I was fearful of, anxious of, frustrated by, and I have presented by requests to God. "Oh, God, do this; do that; change this; change that," and by the time I was done journaling and praying, I was more

upset and anxious than when I started. So, I guess it just doesn't work. Maybe we're missing something; I think probably the two most important words in Verse 6 we just glossed over. *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication* ***with thanksgiving*** *let your requests be made known to God.*

Why **with thanksgiving**? It seems kind of out of place, doesn't it? "Remember, Lord, I'm fearful. I'm anxious. I'm not really feeling a whole lot of thanksgiving right now." But do you understand that thanksgiving is the discipline wherein, by faith, we renew our minds of the goodness of God. It's a little bit like what we just talked about in Verse 4. When we come before God in the midst of our trouble, our fear, our anxiety, our frustration—whatever it is—and we bring our request to Him, when we begin to thank Him, when we begin to express our appreciation for who He is, for what He's done, for how He's met us in similar circumstances in the past, for how He is in control of all things, what begins to happen? The Spirit of God begins to change our hearts and our minds, and our soul is literally being transformed as we, by faith, give Him thanks for who He is. We are told to, *"Give thanks in all things, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus."* You want to know God's will for you today? "Give thanks in all things." I don't believe that means *for* all things; I believe that means *in* all things, because God is God, and God is good. And, as we renew our mind on that, He supplants the trouble in our hearts, and the result is the first outcome of a life that's becoming more like Christ, and it is beautiful. Verse 7:

> **And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

As we choose to *not be anxious* as a discipline, but instead to pray with our prayers and petitions *with thanksgiving*, **the peace of God**—a peace that literally transcends our ability to understand—begins to come and **guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus**. Do you want that kind of peace? Oh, "I do!" But do you notice that it doesn't command us to just have peace? We don't have peace just by trying, to say, "I'm going to have peace…I'm going to have peace…I'm going to have peace." We have peace as we walk through the disciplines of following what God has called us to *put off,* which is *doubt*, and *put on*, which is *trust*. And so we're called to *put off division,* to *put off discouragement, to put off doubts*. We're called to *put on perspective*, and we're called to *put on trust,* to appropriate faith, which unleashes the power of the spirit of God. And then, Verses 8 and 9:

> **Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.**

What have you been dwelling on over the past several months? You see, if we choose to be the kind of people who will dwell on the negative, who will dwell on division, who will dwell on discouragement, who will take in every next bit of bad news, it will affect our hearts and our souls and the kind of people that we are becoming. And that's why, again, as a discipline, as a practice, we are called to *put on truth*. Whatever is lovely, whatever is true, whatever is excellent, anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. And I told you when we were talking two weeks ago in

Philippians 3, how Paul said to the Philippians to follow his example. He does it here again. He says, "**Whatever you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things."**

Who do you know that you would honestly say, "That person is becoming more like Jesus? When I look at their life, they seem to somehow be able to live their life in such a way that it somewhat resembles how Jesus would live it if He were actually walking in their shoes today." If you are fortunate and privileged to know someone like that, follow their example. We put on truth by renewing our minds on the truth of God's words and the things that were pure and right and excellent and praiseworthy and by following the example of those who are ahead of us in the journey of becoming more like Christ.

In Verses 10 through 20, the immediate context that Paul is talking about is financial provision, and he's thanking the Philippians for their partnership financially with him in the gospel. But there are some things here that I think really transcend context and are extremely applicable to us. Verse 10:

> **But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned *before*, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.** (Vs. 10-12)

Wow! I've always been so intrigued by those verses. Here's Paul, and he's saying, "You know what? I've got a secret. I've learned a secret. Don't you want to know the secret yourself?" The secret is that Paul has somehow come to a place in his journey that he's become like Christ in such a way that he is **content**.

I believe that one of the most overlooked, not talked about, and not thought about, commands in Scripture comes from the Ten Commandments. And it is, "Do not covet." Now, I remember I used to read through the Ten Commandments, and you'd get all the big ones. Then when you kind of get to those coveting things, it's like, "I don't really know what that means." But coveting is to desire that which God has not given—and we do it all the time. We look at our friends; we look at our family; we look at our neighbors, and we say, "Oh, man, if I just had a nicer car…a nicer house…a nicer spouse. If I had a better job. If I had different circumstances, then I would be content." But in our covetousness, what we do is, we sow a heart of discontent. And every time we do, we are cultivating a character that is a little bit less like Jesus.

Paul's secret was to be able to walk through whatever this life threw at him, and to be content. That is an outcome of a heart that is increasingly becoming more like Jesus. It is a heart at rest. It is a heart of contentment. And Paul speaks of this, coming to the crescendo, which is Philippians 4:13, when he says:

> **I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.**

I talked a couple of weeks ago about Ephesians 3:10 being an almost perfect verse. You know, those ones that you can just rip out of context and use and misuse and put them up to kind of pump yourself up when you need a good word. Well, Philippians 4:13, man, that *is* the perfect verse. Is there any other verse in all of Scripture which is so perfect to tear out of the context and put it up and to claim it, to say, "**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**"?

So what does Philippians 4:13 mean? Well, I did a little bit of research online just to kind of get an idea of what it means and, man, it means a lot! It usually, I think, in our culture, in our context, applies in the context of athletics. I think those of us in Nebraska, we've probably seen it applied to football.

(A series of video images follow on screen, showing this Scripture verse in different venues, most of which are followed by audience laughter.)

> "I can be the greatest football player," "I can win the championship through Christ who strengthens me."
>
> But maybe baseball is your sport.
>
> You can also apply it to baseball.
>
> You know, if you're in basketball, if you've got those shoes with those verses, you're going to jump higher and you're going to make more points.
>
> You know, it could also apply to other sports as well. Maybe to soccer. That's another possibility.
>
> This next one, I've got to be honest with you, I…I…really…I really don't even understand. I'm not quite sure what those are, (wraps on the arms) but if you're going to have those verses and you're running, shouldn't they be on your legs? I don't know how that, how that really helps you.
>
> This one I get, because I don't know how in the world do you do that apart from Christ strengthening you?
>
> And then, apparently, you can even clobber somebody better than others through Christ who strengthens you. That's always good to know.
>
> And the quintessential hanging off the edge of the cliff, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."
>
> You know, you could even bowl more strikes through Christ who strengthens you. So, it's all over the place.

And the reality is, apparently, that if you start learning this as a very little boy, well, if you keep applying it, eventually, you can become a very big boy.

So, you know, it's all across the board of what you can do through Christ who strengthens you. And it's not just in athletics.

In fact, you can "write" through Christ who strengthens you. That's old school though. If you're new school, then you "text" through Christ who strengthens you.

Of course, you can also cook through Christ who strengthens you.

You can drive through Christ who strengthens you. I don't even know what that means.

You also, you know, you can charge all things through Christ who strengthens you. That's a helpful one, isn't it? "Here we go, Lord, off to the mall."

All right. You know, when my boys were really little, I found out for the first time just how bad some of that baby food tastes, so I understand why you need Christ to strengthen you at that age.

I don't even know what this means. Living in Michigan is difficult, I guess, or being born in February? I don't even understand.

And this, I always thought Bruce Banner had an anger problem. Didn't realize it was Christ who was strengthening him.

Oh you know, and then there's this. I can win every hand through Christ who strengthens me. That's going to come in really handy if you happen to be on your way to Vegas.

And if you are really, really all in on this and if you have a really bad tattoo artist, then your forearm can say, "I can do all things through Christ who *strengtheses* me. Philippians 4:13."

That's what the world says it means. But if we want to understand what Paul was talking about, we can't just rip it out of context. We must understand it right here in this context. And it is about becoming the kind of person who possesses the ability, the power—which means having adequate resources—to be able to live in the chaos of this life in the manner in which Jesus would live if He were physically present today living in your circumstances. That's what it means to **do all things through Christ who strengthens you.**

Earlier this summer, we were having some storms that were happening on a number of different nights, and they were kind of rolling in. And one of them, in particular, happened just a few days before we were about to try and reopen the church for the first time—and it was a tense and difficult time. There was a lot of stress going on. And at about 1:00 a.m., this storm came out of nowhere and it had winds of such ferocity I thought it was going to take my house down. And I remember laying there that night—and I'm sure part of this was because of all of the other stress of life—but

in an instant, I was afraid, and I began to pray. And I began to ask God, "Oh, God, don't let the power go out. Don't let our house be damaged." I wasn't afraid for my physical safety. Do you know what I was afraid of? I was afraid of God allowing yet another problem or issue that I would not be able to handle. So, at 2:00 a.m. that night, I opened my Bible and I spent time in Philippians 4. And then, I spent some time writing in my journal, and I want to share with you part of what I wrote to the Lord that night.

"Lord, so often my prayers are for you to arrange the circumstances of my life, and even the entire world, to enable me to be okay. But the secret Paul learned was to be okay no matter the storm. He could, in essence, stand in the middle of the fiercest tempest and say, 'Let it come.' He didn't need God to make his world perfect in order for him to have peace and even joy. His contentment was transcendent. It was not based on his circumstances or, in essence, even affected by his circumstances. His contentment, his peace and joy, came from his relationship with Christ, the provision of Christ, and the work of Christ within. That is transformation. Lord, how I long to be that kind of person. So often I am fearful, and I desperately call out to you to keep me from all harm, pain, or even trial or difficulty. Even worse, Lord, I have learned that some of the most deadly errors in my life are the countless times I've allowed my understanding of my circumstances to actually shape my view of God, rather than determining that my view of God will shape my understanding of my circumstances. So, Lord, if you make everything go well, you are a powerful and good God. But if You allow things in my life to be even difficult, then I question either Your ability to care for me, Your desire to take care of me, or both, and I end up putting you on trial again and again and again. Instead of standing on the truth of your power and love, demonstrated on the cross and in the resurrection, I choose to arrogantly and insecurely judge Your character based on my ability to understand present circumstances. Forgive me, Father.

"Paul was not saying, if I'm a Christian, I can conquer any mountain, win any trophy, or beat any team that's bigger and stronger than I am. He was saying that, by living a life of trust and dependence upon Christ and Christ alone, I can experience transcendent joy and peace and I can bear the fruit of the spirit in absolutely any circumstance God chooses to allow, no matter how horrific. Lord, I'm reminded of the context. Paul was in jail. This is not about athletic or external achievements; it is about an inner character and quality within the soul that allows hope, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and love even when we are losing everything from a human standpoint. To be able to do all things through Christ is not to be able to achieve everything. It is to be able to endure anything and to do so well, with genuine love and joy. That is what a transformed Christian life is truly all about.

*"**I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me**. But how? It requires me to put on confidence in the absolute sufficiency of Christ. Paul talks in the rest of the chapter about how the Philippians provided for him and took care of him. But in Verse 18 he says, **I am fully supplied, even more.** And then, in Verse 19 he says**, And my God will supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus**. All your needs. Not your greeds…not your wants…not necessarily even your desires. But my God promises if you are in Christ, to supply all your needs and to be able to do all things through Christ who strengthens me is to confidently believe in the sufficiency of Christ. For every moment of every day, I have all that I need. And as I begin to become more like Jesus, putting off and putting on, I experience*

another manifestation of His character in my life, and that's praise. In Verse 20, Paul, being like Jesus, spontaneously erupts in praise. ***Now, to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen****."*

How has your Christianity impacted your life over the last several months? Oh, how I wish I could stand up here and say, "Boy, I trusted in the sufficiency of Christ; I followed these practices to put *off* division; put *off* discouragement*;* put *off* doubt; to put *on* perspective*;* to put *on* trust*;* to put *on* truth, and as a result, I confidently rested in the sufficiency of Christ, experiencing a character and a life of peace, of contentment, of power, and of praise. But many, many days these past months I have failed to practice those disciplines. I have failed to see those beliefs and behaviors—those propositional and volitional aspects of our faith—as the means to lead to the ultimate outcome I desire, which is *transformational—to become more like Jesus*, to have a soul not governed by chaos and frustration and anger and anxiety, but to literally have a soul governed by peace, contentment, power, and praise. That is the kind of Christianity I want. How about you?

Jesus, thank You so much that You have provided all sufficiency for us. Thank You that You haven't fallen off Your throne. Thank You that You haven't forsaken us. But, O God, how we need to do our part to practice the disciplines that enable us to cultivate a heart that is truly becoming more like You. God, we want those outcomes, but they don't just happen. Help us, Lord, to partner with You through Your Holy Spirit that we might experience the wonder of transformation. In Your name we pray, Amen.

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RENEWED // WEEK 5

Online Connect Groups Questions
Become More Like Him: Part 1 // Philippians 4:1-13 // July 19th, 2020

Introduction

We've moved into the third section of our RENEWED Vision: Coming together, to know Jesus, **become more like Him** and help others do the same. Jeff led us through Philippians 4, seeking to help us understand the sufficiency of Christ in a such a way that we can walk into anything He allows in our lives.

Getting to Know Each Other *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Begin your time together by learning more about each other. Open up and have some fun!

→ If you could play any instrument, what would it be? How come?

→ What is one of your fondest memories as a child?

Getting Started

Begin transitioning into group discussion.

1) Invite someone to open the group in prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
    a. For God to reveal His truth and love for the group
    b. For openness to each other and God's voice
    c. For friendships to deepen and grow
2) This week read the passages as you cover the corresponding question.

Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Please complete these questions before your group meets.

1) Jeff stated that being a Christian is not primarily about completing a list of activities but is intended to be a journey of genuine transformation. **How do you generally define what it means to be a Christian (completing a list of activities, following Jesus, doing the right things, obeying God, genuine transformation, something else)? What influences have helped form your perspective?**

2) **Read Philippians 4:6-9.** Paul instructs us not to be anxious, but to present our requests to God.

    a. What's been your experience with anxious thoughts and prayer? Have you experienced the peace Paul discusses in these verses?

    b. Jeff mentioned that "presenting our requests to God *with thanksgiving"* is one of the keys to experiencing the peace Paul is talking about here. **How does thanksgiving change our mindset about our worries?**

    c. How does the idea of setting on minds on what is true, honorable, right… (vs. 8) help us experience the peace of God?

3) **Read Philippians 4:10-12.** Paul talks about contentment and rest in these verses.

   a. What's been your experience with contentment? Do you find it easy to be content? Is contentment a struggle for you?

   b. It's been said that one of the keys to contentment is awareness. When I become aware of the new iPhone, I'm now discontent with my current iPhone. In a similar fashion, my awareness of others' suffering/needs can help me be content with what I have, so I can give to others. **What do you think of this idea? What would it mean to put this idea of contentment into practice?**

4) **Read Philippians 4:13.** As Jeff demonstrated in his message, this verse has been misused in many ways over the years from winning the championship as a football team to accomplishing all your dreams.

   a. What does the context show Paul actually means by this verse? Have you experienced this in your life?

   b. The verses in Philippians 4 flow together to culminate in verse 13. **How would consistently experiencing peace (instead of anxiousness) and contentment (instead of always needing something more) change your experience of this verse?**

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10 min)*

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus?

A significant part of "coming together" is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.