



Overcoming Anxiety

A BIBLE STUDY WITH
BRANDON BLUE

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WEEK 1

THE GRIP OF ANXIETY

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, *let your requests be made known to God*; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Sarah, a client whose identity and information have been changed for confidentiality, once lived confidently and was considered the life of the party. As she was at the pinnacle of her career, she made a few changes to her life. These changes pushed her past her comfort zone and that is when she found herself under the suffocating grip of anxiety. Everything she was involved in was a success, yet her life was marked by indecision, isolation, and a fading faith in God. Anxiety had become a relentless companion, making even the simplest decisions feel like insurmountable mountains.

Picture Sarah, the architect extraordinaire, once the life of every project and the soul of innovation. But as her career took a thrilling turn, anxiety sneakily slipped into her life like an uninvited guest. Nights turned into battlegrounds, with sleep elusive and blueprints tainted by trembling hands. The weight of decisions, once an exciting challenge, now felt like a crushing force that smothered her creativity. It was as if anxiety had woven itself into every fiber of her passion, tightening its grip with each attempt to break free. The very success that defined her career seemed overshadowed by a suffocating cloud of indecision and isolation, casting doubt over the brilliance she once effortlessly brought to every design.

Why do we allow
anxiety to control
our lives?

Amid grand blueprints and towering structures, Sarah found herself standing at the crossroads of success and anxiety. Each design choice became a monumental struggle, each night a battlefield between ambition and the tightening grip of unease. The shadows of indecision and isolation eclipsed the very essence of her celebrated career, leaving her questioning the once-clear path she had confidently walked.

Why do we allow anxiety to control our lives? What is it about this emotion that can paralyze our ability to live fully and embrace God's plan for us? Perhaps you have found yourself in a similar place to Sarah. Everything is going great and then all of a sudden it is not. Maybe it is a trauma response, you have slipped into survival mode, or simply you have taken too much on. And now you find yourself feeling like you cannot keep your thoughts straight and you seem to have taken a back seat in your mind while it runs away without you.

Just as Sarah grappled with overwhelming anxiety, we, too, face moments where worry threatens to consume us. Whether it is about where you are going to go to college, getting fired from a job, or how much is in the bank account, we have had those moments that we obsess over. Philippians 4:6-7 encourages us to bring our anxieties to God through prayer, trusting in His ability to provide peace that transcends understanding.

Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

This is a difficult scripture for believers to reconcile when they are experiencing anxiety. That first line, "Don't be anxious for anything" causes most people to think, "That's easy for the guy who wrote two-thirds of the New Testament to say." However, Paul is instruct-

ing the congregants at Philippi on how to deal with their anxieties in a healthy, life-giving way.

Let's explore the first step in overcoming anxiety—surrendering it to God in prayer. Prayer is reflection and reflection means that you must accept the thing that is making you anxious. Reflecting is difficult because you then have to face the thing that is making you afraid. When you reflect on the anxieties that grip you, and in an attitude of thanksgiving, lay them before God. Trust that His peace will guard your heart and mind.

Behind every anxiety, there is a cause, and the cause looks very different from the waves that are rocking your boat.

Consider the story of Jesus calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41). Jesus and the disciples were crossing the sea to rest after an intense bout of successful ministry when a rough storm blew up unexpectedly, they became very anxious. They thought that they were losing their lives. They took their anxiety to Jesus, and He heard them. However, Jesus did something interesting here, He did not speak to the waves. Think of the waves as anxiety. The disciples had to accept that the waves existed and take them to the Lord. Jesus stood and instead of yelling at the waves to stop, He spoke calmly to the wind. Behind every anxiety, there is a cause, and the cause looks very different from the waves that are rocking your boat. Jesus understood that speaking to the waves would be ineffectual if the wind was not addressed first. Instead of wasting energy yelling at our anxiety to stop, take some time to mindfully be aware of what the wind is behind the waves and allow Jesus to bring calmness to the storms of anxiety in your life.

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Why do we allow anxiety to control our lives? _____

What is it about this emotion that can paralyze our ability to live fully and embrace God's plan for us? _____

What anxieties are you holding onto today? Take time to list them and offer them to God in prayer. _____

How does surrendering your anxieties to God align with the promise of His peace in Philippians 4:6-7? _____



WEEK 2

TRUST IN GOD'S WISDOM



Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;
In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

PROVERBS 3:5-6

Think of Sarah, the architectural wizard, as someone who used to bring life to blueprints and sketches like a master painter. But then, anxiety barged in like an uninvited guest, refusing to be ignored. Amidst the excitement of creating, doubt and fear started casting shadows over her confidence. The once-bold architect, who used to dance with ideas, found herself tip-toeing around her own creations. Every design choice turned into a battlefield of uncertainty, with second-guessing as a constant companion. As anxiety's weight pressed down, the joy she once found in creating faded, replaced by a paralyzing fear of failure.

Picture Sarah, the once-daring architect, trying to navigate through a maze of doubt and fear that clung to every decision. The blueprints that used to be her canvas now showed signs of hesitation and uncertainty. The very essence of her boldness was overshadowed by the looming fear of failure. In this challenging journey, she stumbled upon a stark realization—regaining trust in God's wisdom was the key to shaking off anxiety's suffocating grip. It became a journey of rediscovery, a path guiding her back to the bold and confident architect she once knew herself to be.

Sarah was experiencing life through the lens of survival mode. Despite knowing that she could not face it on her own, and it seemed like she had no other choice. Her anxiety seemed so real that it began to distort her reality. She fell into the trap of trying to control her anxiety on her own.

How often do we rely on our understanding rather than trusting in God's wisdom?

Anxiety can cause you to feel out of control and this can cause you to hang on to your anxiety even tighter because you get some sense of control even if that means you have to live in survival mode. How often do we rely on our understanding rather than trusting in God's wisdom? Why is it challenging to surrender control, especially in the face of anxiety?

Sarah realized that she had an advantage over unbelievers when it came to healing from her anxiety. Sarah's story can teach us this valuable lesson as well. She started to trust God's wisdom in her life and things began to turn around. Just as Sarah learned to trust God's wisdom, Proverbs 3:5-6 encourages you to trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths."

King Solomon invites you to join his son in trusting in the Lord and disregarding your own understanding. Trusting in God can be difficult because leaning on your own understanding and trusting God are inversely related. The more you trust in God the less you will be able to lean on your knowledge. And the reverse is also true. The more you try and figure things out on your own, the less faith in God you will have.

How does one overcome this and learn to place their trust in The Rock which is higher than them? The first step is to reflect on areas in your life where anxiety has caused you to rely on your understanding rather than trusting God's wisdom. Take inventory of your life and identify what is troubling you the most. The second step will seem counterintuitive; prayerfully take action without much pondering. Anxiety will lead to anxious behaviors.

These emotionally based behaviors are generated in a part of our brains that operates automatically. This means that we can be cognitively aware that some behaviors are not beneficial, or downright destructive, in our lives and feel helpless to change them. One of the best actions to take is simply to act. Take action despite feeling anxious about it and your nervous system will begin to learn that you are safe, even when the action feels unsafe. Solomon understood this bit of human physiology and applied it spiritually. When you do what is right despite feeling anxious God will make your path easier to travel.

Consider the story of Abraham and Sarah trusting God's promise of a child despite their old age (Genesis 18). In this story, we see that God's wisdom surpasses human limitations. Abraham was 100 years old, and Sarah was 90 when they became pregnant with their promised son Isaac. At first, they both doubted that God's promise would come true, after all, it had been 16 years since he had leaned on his and Sarah's understanding and had a son that would antagonize the son of promise for the rest of their lives. Thankfully, even though they messed up, their mistake was not big enough to stop God's promises from coming true.

Trust in the Lord,
not in yourself, and
He will help you.

You may feel that your anxiety is too much to handle, and subconsciously you may have concluded that God will not help because your anxiety has grown into an insurmountable mountain in your mind. Trust in the Lord, not in yourself, and He will help you.

**WHEN YOU DO WHAT IS RIGHT DESPITE
FEELING ANXIOUS GOD WILL MAKE
YOUR PATH EASIER TO TRAVEL.**

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Identify a current situation causing anxiety. _____

How can you actively trust in God's wisdom in this circumstance? _____

Share your reflections with someone and pray for each other's trust in God's guidance.



WEEK 3

THANKFULNESS OVER ANXIETY

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, *with thanksgiving*, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

Think of Sarah's architectural journey as a complicated dance floor, with anxiety barging in as an uninvited partner. Yet, right in the middle of drafting plans and battling stress, something unexpectedly powerful showed up—thankfulness. Imagine Sarah intentionally changing her focus, weaving through the twists and turns of anxiety with this game-changing tool. Instead of letting worry run wild, she started counting her blessings, both in her personal and professional life. Surrounded by anxiety, thankfulness became her secret weapon, turning looming mountains of stress into more manageable hills. With every expression of gratitude, Sarah not only found relief from anxiety's grip but also discovered a newfound sense of purpose, like a light breaking through the clouds.

See Sarah navigating the tricky path of anxiety, using gratitude like a trusty guide. The once-intimidating shadows of isolation slowly faded away as she embraced the power of being thankful. Each grateful thought became a stepping stone, leading her away from the loneliness that anxiety had imposed. Amid her journey, Sarah realized that recognizing the good things in her life wasn't just a feel-good exercise—it was a game-changer. It not only helped loosen anxiety's hold but also revealed a path toward a life filled with purpose and freedom.

Each grateful thought became a stepping stone, leading her away from the loneliness that anxiety had imposed.

The question that you may be asking yourself is how would thankfulness help me manage my anxiety? This is the hardest part for believers to reconcile because it is extremely difficult to be thankful during times when you are fearful and anxious. It is challenging to be thankful during difficult times because the way that we have predisposed ourselves to think is futuristically and not to be present in the moment. For example, when we are experiencing difficult things, we tend to think about how this experience will affect us in the future.

There was a time when I received a bad grade on a paper that I had turned in for one of my college classes. Up to this point I had earned great grades in this class, but this one paper was so heavily weighted that my GPA plummeted to near failing. I spent the next three days spiraling thinking about how I was going to fail this class, and that was going to affect my overall GPA, and that was going to keep me out of grad school. By the end of it I had convinced myself that I was a complete failure who had let my family and everyone around me down.

Anxiety is worrying about things that have not happened yet and thankfulness is being grateful for what is happening in the present.

It is this future-forward type of thinking when we are anxious, that makes it hard to practice thankfulness. The reason for this is that thankfulness is present-tense thinking. Anxiety is worrying about things that have not happened yet and thankfulness is being grateful for what is happening in the present. How does gratitude impact our ability to overcome anxiety? Why is it challenging to be thankful when facing difficult circumstances?

As you look back at Sarah's experience, you can see that her story aligns with the call in Philippians 4:6-7, to present your requests to God with thanksgiving. Gratitude shifts your focus from anxiety to God's goodness. Philippians 4:6-7, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be

made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

It is amazing when science proves the Word of God to be true. Paul invites us to take those things that make us anxious to the Lord in prayer with thanksgiving. Multiple studies have proven that keeping a gratitude journal will lower anxiety, relieve stress, help you sleep better, and have better friendships. It has also been shown that counting your blessings will help decrease materialism and improve generosity.

Consider the story of the ten lepers healed by Jesus (Luke 17:11-19). Ten men had a particularly terrible disease called leprosy. If anybody had a reason to be anxious and worry about the outcome of their futures, these men did. We have to commend these men because they mustered the courage to go and see Jesus. This may not seem like much, but these men were forced to live in a special colony for lepers because of the contagiousness of their condition. Furthermore, when in public spaces they would have to shout “unclean” as loud as they could.

Multiple studies have proven that keeping a gratitude journal will lower anxiety, relieve stress...

As you read this story imagine a group of ten men walking through the streets shouting “unclean” until they found Jesus. When they met Jesus, He performed a miracle and healed them of their flesh-eating disease. To be considered clean after being unclean for so long these men had to go to a priest and be declared clean. Once this was completed only one returned. You can see that the one who returned expressed gratitude. This is the most illustrative story to show the transformational power of gratitude and how it can change your perspective. Jesus told this man that because of his gratitude, he would be made whole, meaning that the other nine no longer had leprosy, but still bore the scars where the mala-

dy had eaten away at their flesh. This man's thankfulness healed all his scars.

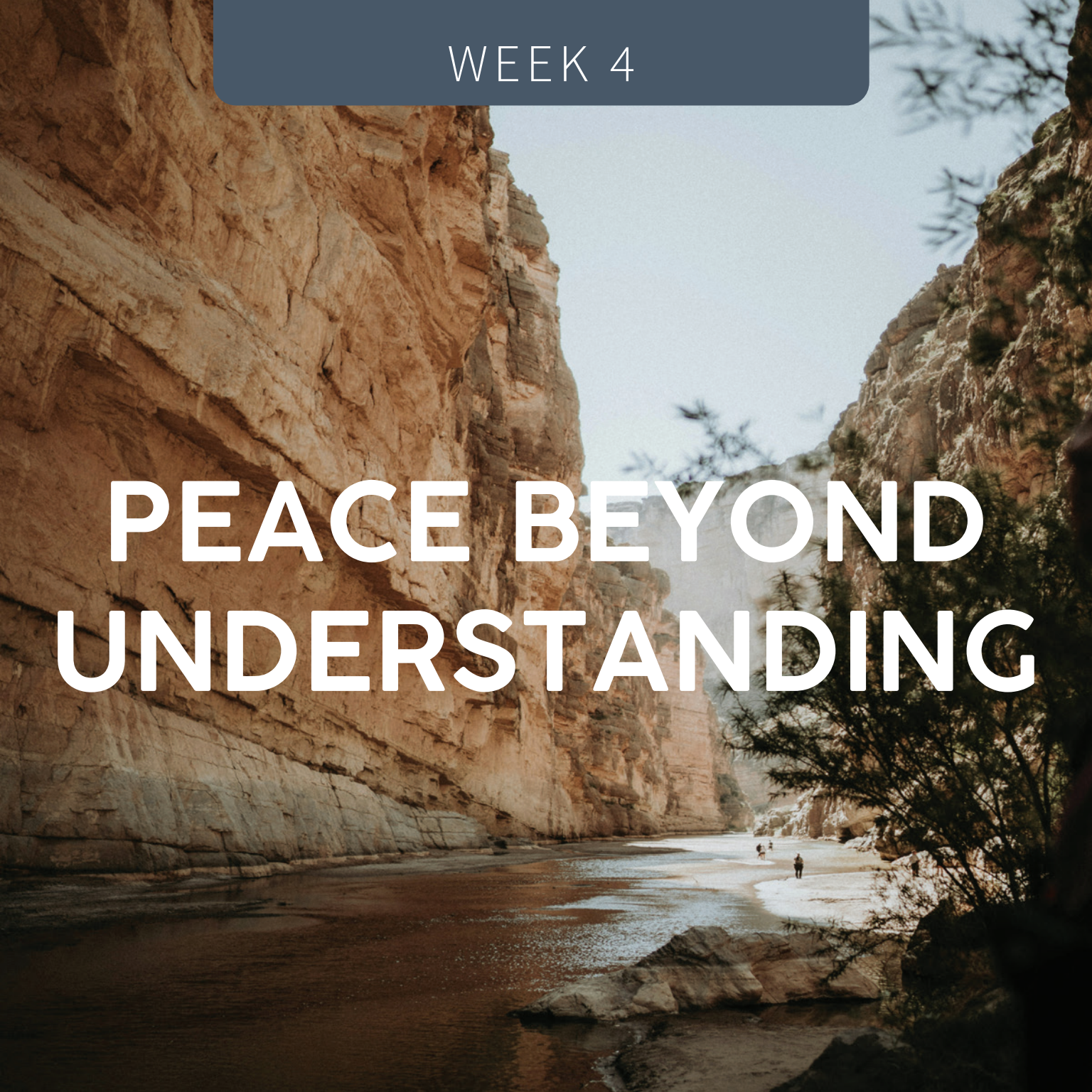
To see how gratitude can help you manage your anxiety and help you develop a better and more positive outlook on life, try creating a gratitude journal. In this journal note things you are thankful for even if you are in the midst of challenges. Take some time to make a list now, share your list with a friend and discuss how gratitude can be a tool for overcoming anxiety.

JESUS TOLD THIS MAN THAT BECAUSE OF HIS GRATITUDE, HE WOULD BE MADE WHOLE, MEANING THAT THE OTHER NINE NO LONGER HAD LEPROSY, BUT STILL BORE THE SCARS WHERE THE MALADY HAD EATEN AWAY AT THEIR FLESH. THIS MAN'S THANKFULNESS HEALED ALL HIS SCARS.



WEEK 4

PEACE BEYOND UNDERSTANDING



Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and *the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

It's the grand finale of Sarah's story, a moment that feels like the turning point in a blockbuster movie. Picture Sarah deciding to let go of her anxiety, handing it all over to God. It's like that moment in a gripping story where everything changes. Instead of wrestling with anxiety, she decides to surrender her fears, doubts, and all those heavy feelings to God. And in that very moment, something incredible unfolds—an unexplainable peace washes over her. It's not your usual kind of calm; it's a deep, profound peace that wraps around her, guarding her heart and mind. This radical acceptance becomes Sarah's solace, bringing an end to anxiety's tight grip and revealing a clear, vibrant landscape of creativity and purpose that was hidden behind the clouds.

Imagine Sarah standing tall after this powerful moment, surrounded by the aftermath of her choice. It's like the clouds parting after a storm, and suddenly everything becomes clear and bright. The once-hidden beauty of her creativity and purpose shines through, vivid and unmistakable. Sarah's decision to go with God's plan isn't just the end of the anxiety chapter—it's the beginning of a new one, filled with peace, purpose, and a freedom she never thought possible.

When you are in the throes of dealing with your anxiety it may feel impossible that you will be able to experience the peace of God. If you were asked to describe the peace of God, you might have trouble putting it into words. Perhaps it has been so long since you have felt true peace that you do not even know how to quantify it.

Secularism would describe peace as quietness or simplicity where all of your material needs are met. Eastern religions would describe peace as transcendence, where you have mastered yourself and have the ability to control your thoughts and emotions. So how does the Christian cultivate peace, especially the kind that is beyond all understanding? What does it mean to experience God's peace that surpasses understanding? How can we cultivate a mindset that embraces this transcendent peace?

The culmination of Sarah's journey mirrors the promise in Philippians 4:6-7—an assurance of God's peace that surpasses understanding. As you ponder over Sarah's story let's look at how she cultivated a mindset that embraced the transcendent peace of God.

First, she practiced radical acceptance. You saw in week one that Sarah had to accept that she was suffering from anxiety. If you want to cultivate a mindset of peace you have to identify what it is that is making you anxious so that you will be able to bring it to the Lord in prayer.

She had to let go of trying to overcome her anxiety by herself and trust in the wisdom of God.

Second, Sarah learned to lean into the fact that she may never understand why she was suffering from her anxiety. She had to let go of trying to overcome her anxiety by herself and trust in the wisdom of God. This is a vital step in peace cultivation. There is such a release in knowing that all you have to do is act on what we know to be true despite our anxiety and God's wisdom will make your path straight.

Lastly, Sarah implemented thankfulness into her life. She decided that she would focus on the good things in her life and start counting her blessings and keeping a list of the things that she was grateful for. Being thankful will cause you to slow down and take account of the good things you have in your life. It also retrains your neural pathways to look for the good things that you otherwise would have missed because of your misplaced focus on your anxieties.

Philippians 4:6-7, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Anxiety is a precursor to your fight/flight/freeze response, and it can feel like your mind is under attack. The Apostle Paul encouraged the Church at Philippi to understand that no matter what, God’s peace would protect them. Allow this scripture to encourage you to embrace the promise of God’s peace that surpasses understanding. Surrender your anxieties in prayer, trusting that His peace will guard your heart and mind.

Consider the story of Paul and Silas in prison, singing praises to God despite their circumstances (Acts 16:16-40). Paul and Silas found themselves locked in a Roman prison in the worst of conditions. However, in the dark of night sitting in their own filth, Paul and Silas began to sing praises to the Lord and God miraculously opened the prison doors and allowed them to share the gospel with their keeper. They had embraced the peace of God even though it did not make sense in their circumstance. This teaches us that God’s peace can prevail in the most challenging situations.

**THEY HAD EMBRACED THE PEACE OF GOD
EVEN THOUGH IT DID NOT MAKE SENSE
IN THEIR CIRCUMSTANCE.**

THIS WEEK'S QUESTIONS

Reflect on moments in your life when you've experienced God's peace beyond understanding. _____

How can you actively cultivate this peace in the midst of anxiety? _____

Share your insights with someone and pray for each other's continued peace.



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