

LAUGH AGAIN: Experience Outrageous Joy

STUDY TWELVE

Freeing Yourself Up to Laugh Again

Matthew 6:25–34; Philippians 4:1–3

I want to make a statement that will make many of you feel shocked: God intends for His children to be free. That's right, free. He gave you and me minds to think freely . . . hearts to love freely . . . and wills to act freely and to have genuine peace.

—Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT would life be like for you if you were totally free—mentally, emotionally, and spiritually? In other words, how might your experience each day be different if you could know a genuine peace of mind? Sadly, the number of individuals struggling with addictions or chronic levels of anxiety and stress is on the rise. Jesus offers us a wonderful alternative when we entrust all aspects of our lives to Him. Want peace and freedom? Open your Bible to search the Scriptures. Philippians chapter 4 shows us that there is hope!



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Are you tired of living life paralyzed by anxious thoughts or deep guilt because of your past? The Lord specializes in setting people free. Turn to Him in these next few moments and ask Him to relieve you of what has you feeling overwhelmed and helpless. Then you'll be ready to hear from Him anew in the pages of His Word.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Matthew 6:25–34; Philippians 4:4–9



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Take the time you need to read Philippians chapter 4 in its entirety. As you read, circle words or phrases that speak directly to you. Write a note or two in the margin using key words or questions that will help you summarize each section of the chapter; whatever thought comes to mind, write in the margin of your Bible or in the space provided below.

Key words:

Key people mentioned:

Repeated words:

Emotions you feel:

Emotions Paul described:

Now based on what you've read, write a summary sentence that would explain to a new believer the main idea of Philippians 4.



Observation: Getting Serious about Being Free

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are compared, contrasted, emphasized, repeated, or related. As Paul concluded his letter to the Philippians, he revealed the common experience of anxiety we all face. But before we examine what he offered as a solution to this menacing problem, let's look closely at what God promises to those who take Him at His Word.



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A brief survey of both Old and New Testament passages shows that God longs for us to be free from anxiety and debilitating struggles. Take a look at each passage listed and make some notes about what you see using basic observation.

Read Isaiah 61:1–2 slowly and reflectively. Which key words from this passage relate to the freedom granted to those who believe God's promise?

Read John 8:34. What did Jesus say about the debilitating nature of sin?

What metaphor did Jesus use to emphasize the seriousness of sin's power?

Now read Luke 4:16–21. How does this passage compare to what you read in Isaiah 61?



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Where was Jesus when He spoke these words?

The mission of Jesus was exactly what Isaiah had predicted it would be—proclaiming release to the captives and setting free those who are downtrodden. Not a literal freedom but freedom for those trapped within the walls of self-made prisons of sin and addiction.



Interpretation: Understanding the Antidote for Worry

Interpretation involves a process that helps answer the question, *What does the text mean?* Paul had serious intentions of making sure the Philippian believers understood the importance of praying against anxiety and addictive thoughts rather than allowing them to impede their freedom.

God's Cure for Anxiety—Philippians 4:4–6

In the next few verses, Paul revealed God's way of freeing us from the habit of worry:

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4–7)

Paul insisted the Philippian Christians learn to reject worry by embracing prayer. How did Paul explain the kind of praying he had in mind? What elements should be involved as we approach God in prayer about things that worry us?



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God's Response to Our Trust—Philippians 4:7

As always, God is faithful when we trust His provision for the issues in our lives. According to Philippians 4:7, what does God promise to us in response to our prayers?

How does God's peace guard our hearts and minds?

Replacing the Negative with the Positive: Correcting Our Perspective—Philippians 4:8–9

Paul became a bit of a cognitive therapist with a supernatural twist when he offered some final counsel to those struggling to overcome negative thoughts:

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you hear from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8–9)

Paul urged the Philippians to elevate their thinking by focusing on excellent things rather than those things that cause anxiety.

How can realigning the focus of our thoughts relieve us from worry?



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That's what we need guarded: our hearts and minds! We don't need our homes guarded as much as we need our hearts and minds protected. It's my heart that gets me into my day. It's my mind that gets me into my study. My passion flows from that. And His peace surrounds that and frees me from the agitation and the horror of worry. Rejoice! —Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: The Most Universal of All Addictions: Worry!

Correlation compares passages of Scripture to help us interpret the passage in view. Not surprisingly, you don't have to go further than Jesus Himself to find a correlating principle with Philippians 4. Who can imagine life without worry? Jesus could. And the addiction to worry and anxious thoughts is one addiction He took time to address. Read Matthew 6:25–34, and as you do, make notes about what strikes you as relevant to Paul's teaching in Philippians 4.

How does Jesus' teaching on this issue remind you of what Paul shared with the Philippians?

How is it different?

How does encountering Jesus' teaching on worry help you understand Paul's explanation?



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Application: Some Closing Exercises

Application moves us from maintaining a mere intellectual understanding of a passage to allowing truth to penetrate the heart. Chuck summarized his study of Philippians 4 with practical exercises for every believer to adopt in their battle against worry.

1. *Feed your mind positive thoughts.* Worry will starve on such food for thought as things that are pure, lovely, honorable, and true. So, refuse to ruminate on negative junk food like shame, fear, or guilt which strengthen worry and strangle peace.
2. *Focus your attention on encouraging models.* Paul urged his fellow believers to follow his example. We would do well to do that too—and to find other people whose lives can offer encouragement and inspiration when we've lost our will and wind.
3. *Find the God of peace in every circumstance.* Anxious times offer excellent opportunities for us to seek the Lord and grow closer to Him. Lean into those times and pursue Him in prayer. He will be faithful and meet you in your need.

Which of these biblical keys can you use to release your worries and anxieties and unlock the peace of Christ in your soul today?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I really needed this word from You today. Thank You. How grateful I am that You did not leave me to myself only to watch me sink deeper in the mire of worry and anxiety. Your Word lifts me from despair and places me on solid ground. Now I sing praises to You. In Jesus' name, amen.



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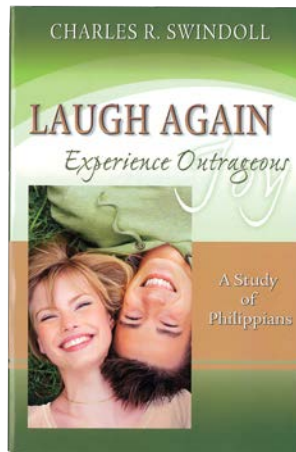
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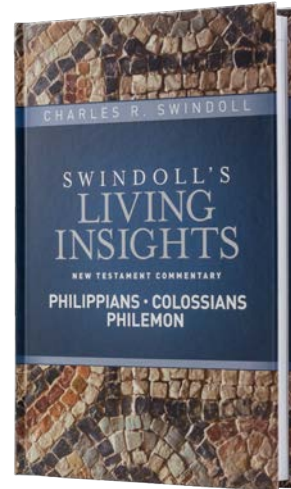
Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Mark Tobey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

