



Discussion Guide

Date: 7/19/2026

Sermon Title: How does Jesus make me stronger?

Scripture: Philippians 4:4-13

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and loving God, we gather today grateful that our strength does not depend on our own abilities, accomplishments, or circumstances. Open our hearts and minds as we study your Word. Teach us what it truly means to find our strength in Christ. Help us move beyond familiar verses to discover the deep peace, contentment, and trust that Paul experienced even in hardship. May your Holy Spirit encourage us where we are weary, challenge us where we rely too much on ourselves, and remind us that Christ is always enough. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

OPENING QUESTIONS:

Describe a time when you felt completely overwhelmed. What helped you get through it? Did your faith play a role? Looking back, where do you see God at work during that season?

BACKGROUND TO PHILIPPIANS:

Paul wrote Philippians while imprisoned, most likely in Rome around AD 60–62. Unlike many of his letters, Philippians is filled with joy despite Paul's difficult circumstances. Paul is chained to Roman guards uncertain whether he will live or die, separated from many friends, and dependent upon others for daily necessities. Yet throughout the letter he repeatedly speaks about joy, peace, gratitude, and confidence in Christ. Philippians is often called "The Letter of Joy."

This makes Philippians 4:13 remarkable. Paul is not saying: "Jesus helps me accomplish anything I want." Rather he is saying: "Because Christ strengthens me, I can faithfully endure whatever life brings." This verse is about faithful endurance, not unlimited achievement.

DIGGING INTO Philippians 4:4-13: Read this text and use these questions to dig deeper.

1. How can someone like Paul in this passage rejoice while sitting in prison?
2. What is the difference between joy and happiness?
3. Have you ever experienced joy during a difficult season?
4. Why does Paul connect joy with the Lord rather than with circumstances? What is the significance of this?

5. What does Paul tell believers to do instead of worrying?
6. Why do you think gratitude is included with prayer?
7. What does God's peace guard? Have you experienced God's peace even when your situation didn't improve?

Paul gives believers something to focus on. Read each word slowly: whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, excellent, worthy of praise.

8. Which of these qualities is the hardest for you to focus on?
9. How does what we think about effect of how we live?
10. What habits help you fix your mind on Christ?

Paul speaks on contentment in verses 11-12.

11. Why do you think contentment must be learned?
12. What is the difference between contentment and complacency?
13. What steals our contentment today?

Read verse 13 again, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me."

14. How have you typically heard this verse used?
15. Does reading the surrounding verses change your understanding?
16. What kinds of strength does Christ provide?
17. When have you experienced Christ sustaining you rather than removing your hardship?

METHODIST CONNECTION:

One of the central affirmations of the Methodist tradition is that God's grace is sufficient for every season of life. The United Methodist Hymnal includes Charles Wesley's hymn "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," which celebrates Christ's power to transform lives not merely by changing our circumstances but by renewing our hearts.

Methodists have also long emphasized the importance of the means of grace, the ordinary practices through which God strengthens believers through prayer, scripture, Holy Communion, Worship, Christian fellowship, acts of mercy and compassion, fasting, and self-examination. Paul's encouragement in Philippians reflects this same pattern of spiritual formation. As we remain connected to Christ through these practices, God shapes us into people who can endure hardship with hope and faith.

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. Paul wrote about finding contentment in both plenty and need while imprisoned. What does this teach us about the source of true contentment in our own lives?
2. The sermon distinguishes between independence and dependence on God. In what areas of your life are you trying to be independent when God is calling you to be dependent?
3. Pastor Scott mentioned three practices Paul gives us: Prayer (surrendering to God), focusing on what's pure and true, and learning contentment. Which of these three is most challenging for you right now? Why?



4. Pastor Scott mentions that the practice of prayer aligns us with God's will rather than bending God's will toward ours, and what does this look like practically?
5. The sermon mentions that God's greatest promise is His presence, not escape from trials. How does this truth challenge or comfort you in your current circumstances?
6. The sermon states: "It's not about trying harder. It's about trusting deeper." What's the difference? How does this challenge our culture's emphasis on self-reliance?
7. The Footprints in the Sand poem that is illustrated in the sermon says it is God who is carrying us through difficult times. When have you looked back and recognized that God was carrying you when you felt most alone?

REFLECTIONS:

1. Paul knew what it meant to have little and to have plenty. What do you think he learned from both experiences? How might abundance be as challenging as scarcity?
2. The sermon mentioned that Paul uses two different Greek words for "learn." Why is it significant that contentment is something we learn through spiritual discipline rather than something that comes naturally?
3. Are you more likely to rely on God during difficult times or good times? Why do you think that is?
4. What burden are you trying to carry on your own that you need to surrender to God? How can this group support you in that?
5. Verse 8 tells us to think about things that are true, honorable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable. What's one practical way you can redirect your attention this week when worry or fear tries to consume you?
6. What would contentment look like in this season of my life?
7. How might Christ be strengthening me even if my circumstances don't change?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Faithful God, thank you for reminding us that our strength comes from Christ and not from ourselves. When we are anxious, teach us to pray. When we are discouraged, fill us with your peace. When we are distracted, help us fix our minds on all that is true, honorable, just, pure, and worthy of praise. Teach us the secret Paul learned to be content in every circumstance because Christ is always with us. Strengthen us not only for moments of success but also for seasons of waiting, struggle, grief, and uncertainty. Form us through your grace into disciples who trust you in every season and reflect your love to the world. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. Practice prayer this week by beginning each day by surrendering your plans to God, asking to be aligned with His will rather than asking God to align with yours.
2. Do an attention Inventory by tracking what consumes your thoughts. When you notice worry or "what-ifs," intentionally redirect your mind to something true, pure, or praiseworthy (Philippians 4:8).
3. Journal about your level of contentment each day this week. Write down one thing you're learning about contentment—whether in plenty or in need. Notice where Christ is strengthening you.
4. Practice a dependence confession by identifying one area where you've been trying to be independent. Confess it to God and one trusted person and practice asking for help.