



STUDY CIRCLE
GUIDE

SEARCHING FOR AND
MAINTAINING PEACE

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OVERVIEW

SEARCHING FOR AND MAINTAINING PEACE

SUMMARY

This Study Circle Guide is designed to accompany the small book by Fr. Jacques Philippe, *Searching for and Maintaining Peace*. This book has become a kind of modern classic, translating age-old Catholic wisdom about spiritual growth into language and concepts applicable to our contemporary lives.

CATEGORIES OF INTEREST

Prayer and Spiritual Growth

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF SESSIONS

The book is divided into a preface and three short chapters. The Study Circle Guide follows that structure, presenting material for four sessions.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Each participant should have a copy of this Study Circle Guide.
- Ideally, each participant should also have a copy of the book, *Searching for and Maintaining Peace*.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

Anyone. The book is written in a very simple style and does not require advanced knowledge of the Catholic faith. Because its focus is on the day-to-day living of the faith, the discussions that happen in a Study Circle about this book will tend to be very personal. Participants will have to share personal comments in order for this Study Circle to work well in a small group.

HOW MUCH HOMEWORK?

The amount of homework will depend on the method chosen for conducting the Study Circle. There are a few different possibilities:

1. Individually, it can be used as a valuable resource toward personal growth and fulfillment in the spiritual life. The author offers practical insights toward achieving and maintaining the peace of soul that we often seek in the midst of life's struggles and day-to-day challenges. These insights, while providing a gospel perspective on life, have the potential to relieve us of our anxieties and worries as we embrace each new day and the tasks that God places before us.
2. It can also be used for a group Study Circle in the following format:

Read the summary for each session.

- Choose the study questions that you would like to use and propose one to the group. The section and page numbers provided at the end of each question indicate the area within the chapter where the answer can be found. Give the group time to read the section and look for the answer, then members can offer their answer and discuss it with the group.
- Move on to another question when you are ready. Members of the groups can choose questions that interest (or might benefit) them the most.
- Cover as many questions as you would like to use or that time will allow.

Little preparation is required with the second method, except on the part of the moderator. Although it is not always possible for people to prepare in advance for various reasons, it is more beneficial when the material can be read beforehand. (However, when necessary, key paragraphs in the lesson can be chosen by the moderator and read out loud by a volunteer in the group.)



SESSION I

GETTING STARTED

SUMMARY

[Read together the preface of the book and/or this summary introduction. Then answer the discussion questions at the end of the session.]

Searching for and Maintaining Peace is a treatise on peace of heart, which has become a classic work of modern Catholic spirituality. It was written by Fr. Jacques Philippe, a well-known spiritual writer and retreat master, and a member of the Community of the Beatitudes in France. In this book, Fr. Jacques offers readers clear, yet profound guidance with emphasis on peace of soul as the primary factor in achieving spiritual growth and holiness.

PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

1. To offer readers practical guidance in achieving and maintaining peace of soul in all circumstances of life.
2. To emphasize God's role and the power of prayer in obtaining and maintaining peace.
3. To identify and overcome the dangers that threaten spiritual progress and interior peace.
4. To recognize the fruitfulness of a peaceful heart.

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK

This spiritual treasure on peace of heart brings to light practical examples of the day-to-day struggles we experience in order to achieve peace of soul, as well as the means to attain and preserve it. The author invites us to open our hearts to the power of God's grace to instill in us a profound sense of peace, and the desire to put into practice all the good works that God will inspire in us. We will discover how peace of soul can overcome the obstacles in our lives that inhibit our spiritual progress, and allow us to continue on our journey without fear or anxiety, but with complete faith and trust in God.

PART ONE stresses our dependence on God to achieve inner peace, and describes the fruitfulness of a peaceful heart.

PART TWO describes the ways in which we can lose interior peace, and the means to confront them with confidence and hope in the power of God's grace and in the light of the Gospel.

PART THREE is rich in spiritual wisdom from many of the saints to encourage and guide us on our lifelong journey toward achieving and maintaining peace of soul in all circumstances of everyday life.

SUMMARY OF THE INTRODUCTION

We live in a day and age where peace of soul is becoming more difficult to achieve due to the influences around us and the hectic pace of everyday life. As a result, we find ourselves consumed with worries and anxieties, which complicate our lives even further and affect our ability to find true peace in God and the joy that comes from serving others. In this book, the author explains how we can achieve and maintain peace of heart by living each day and confronting each circumstance with confidence and trust in God and in accordance with the values of the gospel.

FOREWORD & INTRODUCTION

The advice offered by the saints listed in this book is a treasure of spiritual wisdom and encouragement for anyone who wishes to travel along the path to holiness.

Study and Discussion Questions (Preface)

1. Why is this day and age considered one of "agitation and disquietude"?
2. What dangers do they pose on our spiritual life?
3. The author briefly describes some of the fruits of a peaceful heart. What are they?



SESSION 2

PART ONE: INTERIOR PEACE, THE ROAD TO SAINTLINESS

SUMMARY

In order to make progress in the spiritual life, first we must be convinced that all the good that we do comes from God and from Him alone. *We are powerless without God's grace.* We often have to experience failures, humiliations and trials in order to realize this truth.

The goal we should aim for in the spiritual life is not primarily to impose a lot of things on ourselves, as good as they may seem to be by our own judgment. Rather, we must try to discover the disposition of our soul, the profound attitude of our heart and the spiritual conditions that permit God to act in us. It is only in this way that we can bear fruit—fruit that will last (Jn 15:16).

The author explains that by allowing the grace of God to act in us and to produce in us (with the cooperation of our will, our intelligence, and our capabilities) all the good works that He has prepared for us, our lives will produce fruits for the good of those around us. And the more our soul is peaceful and tranquil, the more God is reflected in it, and the more good works we are capable of producing for the glory of God and the good of our neighbor.

Oftentimes, we bring agitation and unrest to our souls by trying to resolve everything on our own, instead of allowing God's grace to act in us. We must always keep in mind that His wisdom and power are infinitely superior to ours, and He knows what is best for us.

Peace begins in our heart; and without our own inner peace, we are incapable of passing it on to others. True peace liberates us from ourselves, allowing us to be compassionate toward the needs of others.

To acquire inner peace, one must continuously foster a conversion of heart and attentiveness to prayer.

Acquiring and maintaining interior peace should be considered a priority for everybody, above all for those who claim to want to do good for their neighbor. Otherwise, they would simply be communicating their own restlessness and distress.

An important reality in the spiritual life is to affirm the truth that the Christian life is a combat, a war without

mercy. Every Christian must be convinced that his spiritual life is the scene of a constant and sometimes painful battle—a struggle against evil, temptation and the sin that is in him, which will continue throughout his earthly life. *However, it is the combat of one who struggles with the absolute certitude that the victory is already won, because the Lord is resurrected. It is exactly this interior peace which permits him to fight, not with his own strength, but with the strength of God. This total adhesion to Christ permits him even in the worst moments to abandon himself with a blind confidence to the One Who cannot abandon him. (The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?) Psalm 27:1*

The first goal of spiritual combat is not to always obtain a victory (over our temptations, weaknesses, etc.); rather, it is to learn to maintain peace of heart under all circumstances, even in the case of defeat. In this way we can pursue the greater goal, which is to eliminate our failures, our faults, our imperfections and our sins. This is the ultimate victory we desire, knowing quite well, however, that it is only by God's grace that we will achieve it.

All the reasons that cause us to lose our sense of peace are bad reasons that either come from the world, the devil, or our own imagination and misguided thoughts. The peace we seek is not as the world gives it; it comes from trust in the Word of Jesus.

In Jesus, we will always abide in peace, because He has conquered the world, because He is resurrected from the dead. By His death, He conquered death; He annihilated the sentence of condemnation that weighs on us. He manifested the benevolence of God toward us.

A necessary condition for interior peace is goodwill, or purity of heart. *It is a firm disposition to love God and to do His will in all circumstances, to always say "yes" to God, in the great things as in the small. Goodwill is not perfection, nor sainthood achieved. But it is the way, because it is just this habitual disposition of heart (whose foundation is found in the virtues of faith, hope and love), which permits the grace of God to carry us, little by little, toward perfection. However, it also requires of us that we become detached from all that is contrary to the will of God on a continual basis.*



SESSION 3

PART TWO: HOW TO REACT TO THAT WHICH CAUSES US TO LOSE PEACE

SUMMARY

The author mentions that the most common reason for losing our peace of soul is fear caused by situations which affect us personally, involving all aspects of our lives: our health, family, professional life, moral life and the spiritual life itself. Our worries and concerns about many things (past, present and future) bring anxiety and restlessness to our soul.

The surest way to losing one's peace is trying to rely on one's own resources or those of the world, which are limited and powerless in facing the many challenges and difficulties of life.

To preserve peace in the midst of the hazards of human existence, we have only one solution: We must rely on God alone, with total trust in Him: "Your heavenly Father knows what you need" (Mt 6:32).

Man has lost confidence in God, trying to find happiness on his own, but becoming unhappy in the process. We must regain our lost confidence by believing in Divine Providence.

The devil, who always attempts to deceive us, tries to instill in us the belief that total abandonment to God will deprive us of everything and destroy our happiness. This distrust in God is the product of original sin, and we must "reeducate" ourselves in the truth, and believe with certainty that God will not take away our happiness but will leave us in peaceful possession of many things *when they are not bad in themselves and can serve His designs*.

The author brings to light two principal obstacles that prevent us from regaining our confidence in God.

1. First, many do not believe in Divine Providence because they have never experienced it, and because they never give it the opportunity to intervene in their lives. They seek to resolve everything on their own, without God and without success. We cannot experience God's help unless we give Him the necessary space to express Himself. St. Francis de Sales tells us: "The measure of Divine Providence acting in us is the degree of confidence we have in it."

2. The second great obstacle to abandoning oneself to Divine Providence is the presence of suffering, in our own lives and in the world around us. We must be convinced that God in His power and goodness will use whatever evil there may be, as well as our own suffering, or the suffering of a loved one, for our benefit or the benefit of another, and that He has the ultimate victory over evil. It is an act of faith—an invitation to believe in the power of Jesus' Resurrection as the definitive victory of God over evil.

What really inspires confidence is to contemplate Jesus Who gives His life for us, and nourishes us with "too great a love" that He expresses on the cross. "*Greater love than this no man has than to lay down his life for his friends.*" (Jn 15:13)

Evil is a mystery, a scandal, and it will always be so. It is necessary to do what one can to eliminate it, to relieve suffering, but it always remains present in our personal lives, as well as in the world. Its place in the role of redemption reveals the wisdom of God, which is not the wisdom of man; it always retains something incomprehensible that intervenes.

The heart does not awaken to confidence until it awakens to love; we need to feel the gentleness and the tenderness of the Heart of Jesus. This cannot be obtained except by the habit of meditative prayer, by this tender repose in God which is contemplative.

In the midst of our trials, we can experience "delicacies of Love" (consolations from God). They are not reserved for the saints. They are for all the poor who believe that God is their Father. They can be for us powerful encouragement to abandon ourselves to His care, far more efficacious than any reasoning.

If we learn to abandon ourselves with total confidence in God, in the big things as in the small, with the simplicity of little children, God will manifest His tenderness, His providence and His fidelity in a manner sometimes overwhelming.

It is necessary to abandon ourselves "completely, or not at all" into the hands of God, with the simplicity of little children, not seeking any longer to manage or



“to save” ourselves by our own initiatives materially, emotionally, or spiritually. *We must be disposed to give everything to God, without panic, and to allow Him to do things His way, in total confidence.*

The measure of our interior peace will be that of our abandonment, consequently our detachment.

If we detach ourselves from everything and put all into the hands of God, God will return all to us a hundredfold. From personal experience, and to illustrate this point, St. John of the Cross shares with us that “All things were given to me from the moment when I no longer sought them.”

Abandonment is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but *the Lord does not refuse this Spirit to those who ask with faith.*

One of the most beautiful expressions in the Bible of confident abandonment into the hands of God is Psalm 23 (Section 8, Page 41).

We will be saints the day when our inabilities and our nothingness will no longer be for us a subject of sadness and anxiety, but a subject of peace and joy.

Strive for perfection, but never become discouraged! St. Therese of Lisieux teaches us that “small things done with love and to please God are extremely beneficial in making us grow (one of the secrets of her holiness). St. Teresa of Avila also reminds us that “Patience obtains everything.”

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. According to the author, what is the surest way to lose one’s peace, and the only sure way to preserve it? (Section 1, Page 24)
2. How has original sin contributed to man’s loss of confidence in God? (Section 1, Page 27)
3. Fr. Jacques mentions one important thing that is necessary to regain confidence in God. What is it? (Section 2, Page 28)
4. In order to overcome the fear of suffering in our lives, what must we be convinced of? (Section 3, Page 31)
5. Why does contemplating Jesus on the cross inspire total confidence in God? (Section 4, Pages 33 & 34)
6. According to the author, why is it necessary to abandon ourselves to God completely or not at all? (Section 5, Page 37)
7. Describe some of the devil’s strategies to prevent us from abandoning ourselves completely to God. (Section 6, Page 39)
8. If we find that we are unable to abandon ourselves totally to God, what should we do? (Section 7, Page 40)
9. Psalm 23 (Page 41) exemplifies total abandonment to God in confidence and trust. Share a personal reflection or light that you received from reading this passage.
10. Why is our peace of soul tested when we experience the suffering of a loved one? (Section 9, Page 47) What can we do to alleviate our unrest and bring peace and comfort to the sufferer? (Section 9, Page 48)
11. What is the primary motivation to aid us in peacefully confronting suffering? (Section 10, Page 49)
12. Sometimes our suffering is caused by the faults and shortcomings of others. Give an example of this and how it should be addressed in the light of the Gospel.
13. Why is patience important in our conversion and in the conversion of others? (Section 12, Page 55)
14. After reaching a certain level of progress in our spiritual life, we can sometimes experience sadness and discouragement when we continually experience a fault or imperfection. The author gives four reasons why it is important for us to maintain our peace under these circumstances. What are they? (Sections 13 & 14, Pages 57-64)
15. What advice does the author give us after committing sin? (Section 15, Page 65)
16. The author makes an important point to consider prior to making a decision. What is it? (Section 16, Page 70)
17. Explain in your own words *why the only true perfection is that of love.*



SESSION 4

PART THREE: WHAT THE SAINTS TELL US

SUMMARY

Through the lives of the saints we come to realize more fully and more perfectly that peace, which sows charity, the love of God and love of neighbor in our soul, is the road that leads straight to eternal life. *It is the greatest perfection of love that can be achieved in this life.*

They taught us by their example that true peace can only be found in God through complete abandonment to His holy will, and that genuine humility, which is a necessary condition for peace, brings contentment and peace to the soul, making it better able to serve God.

Following are the personal reflections of each saint in greater detail:

JUAN DE BONILLA

- Take care never to let your heart be troubled, saddened, agitated or involved in that which can cause it to lose its peace. Rather, work always to remain tranquil because the Lord says: “Happy are those who are at peace.”
- Just as a city is not built in a day, do not think that you can achieve, in a day, this peace, this interior calm, because it is within you that a home must be built for God, while you yourself, become His temple.
- True freedom consists in not being attached to anything. It is in this detachment that God seeks your soul in order to work His great marvels.

FRANCIS DE SALES

- Because love only resides in peace, always be careful to conserve the holy tranquility from God, Who is the Prince of Peace.
- One must everywhere and in everything live peacefully (through pain, joy, avoiding evil, doing good, and in matters of penance).
- Let us do three things and we will have peace: let us have the very pure intention of will to do all

things for the honor and glory of God; let us do the little that we can toward that end (with the advice of our spiritual director); and let us leave it to God to take care of the rest.

- Peace is born of humility.
- All things contribute to good for those who love God. He converts our miseries into grace and heals our souls of our iniquities.
- One should desire God alone, and the rest in moderation.
- The measure of Divine Providence in us depends on the degree of trust that we have in it.
- Don't rush to do your tasks, because haste upsets your reason and judgment and even prevents you from doing well the very thing that you are hurrying to do...
- We must have the patience to see our shortcomings and to profit from a saintly assessment of ourselves.
- Our zeal toward others should be gentle, kind, gracious, peaceful and enduring—never anxious or irritable.
- Accept, without being troubled, not always being able to maintain one's peace.

ST. TERESA OF AVILA

- **DISCERNING BETWEEN GENUINE AND FALSE HUMILITY:** Humility does not disquiet, trouble or agitate the soul; it is accompanied by peace, joy and repose. When humility is genuine, the pain of its misery fills the soul with sweetness and contentment; it does not trouble the soul. Rather, it enlarges it and makes it better able to serve God. The other type of pain which the devil proposes to the soul upsets all things, agitates everything and completely disturbs the soul and is full of anger. *(Excerpts were taken from the Way of Perfection, Chapter 41. It is highly recommended reading for spiritual growth and peace of soul.)*



MARIE OF THE INCARNATION

- If we could see all the goodness and mercy that exists in God's designs for each one of us, even in times of disgrace, pain and affliction, our happiness would consist in throwing ourselves into the arms of the Divine Will, like that of a young child who throws himself into the arms of his mother. We would behave, in all things, with the intention of pleasing God and maintain ourselves in a holy repose, fully convinced that God is our Father and that He desires our salvation more than we ourselves desire it.

FRANCOIS-MARIE-JACOB LIEBERMANN

- The best ways to establish in ourselves the admirable reign of Jesus are precisely those of continual prayer and peace of soul...
- "Keep your soul at peace." Enclose it in Jesus, in gentle repose, Who holds it in His arms. This gentle repose, a peaceful manner of behaving and a steady, measured and quiet interior action expand the soul.
- Don't measure your love of our Lord by the depth of your feelings; abandon yourself into His hands with confidence, and your love will increase more and more...
- Never allow yourself to become upset by your misfortunes. Respond to them, whatever they may be, with gentleness, peace, tenderness and interior moderation before God, abandoning yourself simply into His hands so that He may make of you and in you what He pleases. Wish calmly and peacefully to live only for Him, through Him and in Him.
- Don't allow yourself to become discouraged if it appears that you are making no progress. Simply strive to forget all these things and turn your mind toward God, standing before Him in the quiet and continuous desire that He make of you and in you His holy pleasure.
- Do everything with the greatest possible calm and serenity and out of the greatest, purest and holiest love of Jesus and Mary.
- One of the principal obstacles on the way to perfection is the impatient desire to progress and

possess the virtues that we don't have. However, the true means of solidly advancing (in the spiritual life), and with giant steps, is to be patient and to calm and pacify these anxieties, allowing yourself to be guided by the Holy Spirit rather than proceeding ahead of Him.

- It is necessary to forget oneself and continually direct one's soul toward God and leave it calmly and peacefully before Him.
- The main occupation of your soul should be to moderate its movements and to acquire a humble attitude of submission and abandonment into the hands of God. Our role is to be faithful in following God's lead, leaving Him to do in us what seems best to Him.
- Be docile and pliable in the hands of God. Keep yourself at peace and in complete repose, never become upset and never trouble yourself about anything, forget the past, live as though the future does not exist, live for Jesus in every moment that you are living, without fear or worry, abandon the care of your soul to Jesus alone.
- Do not be disturbed if you find yourself weak. On the contrary, rejoice, because God will be your strength. Only take care to keep your soul ever turned towards Him in the greatest possible peace and in the most perfect abandonment...

PADRE PIO

- Peace is the simplicity of spirit, the serenity of conscience, the tranquility of the soul and the bond of love. Peace is order, it is the harmony in each one of us, it is a continual joy that is born in witnessing a clear conscience, and it is the holy joy of a heart wherein God reigns. Peace is the way to perfection, or, even better, in peace dwells perfection.
- The soul should be saddened by only one thing: an offense against God. However, we must be prudent, to regret one's failures but with a peaceful sorrow and always trusting in Divine Mercy. One must beware of certain reproaches and remorse against oneself which most of the time come from our enemy who wants to disturb our peace in God. When in this situation, we must push them aside and find our refuge in confidence in God.



