

## LESSON 1 Three Keys for Stress-free Living (Philippians 1:1–2)

The book of Philippians is all about “stress-free living.” The word “stress” means “mental strain” or “mental tension.” Have you ever experienced stress? Are you stressed-out right now? In either case, you need the book of Philippians because on a regular basis you will experience stress. If you have trouble finding the book of Philippians in your Bible, remember: “General Electric Power Company.” G is for *Galatians*, Eis for *Ephesians*, P is for *Philippians*, and C is for *Colossians*. Let’s look at **three** keys for stress-free living.

### Know who you are (1:1a)

Paul begins this letter by writing, *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus* (1:1a). Timothy is not a co-author of this book; he is an associate of Paul’s and is like Paul’s own son. Paul won Timothy to Christ on his first missionary journey, and Timothy became Paul’s lifelong co-worker in the ministry. As Paul writes this letter he is a prisoner in Rome, so Timothy will deliver this letter to the church at Philippi.

I think being in prison would be very stressful, don’t you? Yet, while in prison Paul writes a book about stress-free living. One reason Paul handles stress so well is he knows who he is. Paul writes that he and Timothy are *servants of Christ Jesus*. Paul is a model for stress-free living because he knows who he is. Let me ask you, “Who are you?” Unless you can answer that question, you are going to have a lot of stress in your life. The greatest example of knowing who you are is Jesus Christ. In the gospel of John, Jesus reveals who He is with fifteen great *I AM* statements. For example, who does Jesus say He is in John 8:12b?

Paul can handle stress because he knows who he is: a servant of *Jesus Christ* (Philip. 1:1a). The word translated *servants* (DOULOS, doo'-los) means “slave.” The English word “slave” has negative connotations, suggesting forced obedience and abusive treatment. This is not what Paul means when he calls himself a “slave” of *Jesus Christ*. The word “servant,” or “slave,” expresses Paul’s absolute devotion to Jesus Christ. Everyone is a slave to someone or something. To whom or what are you a slave? The answer will determine whether or not you will experience stress-free living. To have a “journey into stress-free living,” **know who you are** and ...

### **Know what you want to accomplish (1:1b–c)**

On his second missionary journey, about ten years prior to writing this letter, Paul, along with Silas, Timothy, and Luke, established a church at Philippi (Acts 16:9–40) in Greece. It was the first church founded in Europe. At the time of Paul’s writing it is a thriving church with whom Paul continues to have close ties.

Paul writes this letter to *all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi* (1:1b). Paul calls the believers in Philippi *saints*. The word translated *saints* (HAGIOS, hag'-ee-os) means “set apart ones.” Few words are as misunderstood today as the word “saint.” Every Christian is a “saint,” which means “set apart” from the world to be used by God. “Saint” basically means “different.” It means we are non-conformists; we don’t give in to peer pressure; and we don’t go along with the crowd when we know the crowd is wrong. How does Romans 12:2a describe what it means to be a “saint”?

This means you should not let people squeeze you into their molds. If you don’t **know who you are** and **what you want to accomplish**, other people will squeeze you and make you fit into a mold of their liking. Then, you can’t be yourself, and that leads to all kinds of stress. If you want to take a lot of stress out of your life, just be the person God created you to be. God doesn’t want you to be like anyone else. He just wants you to be the

unique person He created you to be, and He will help you be that person. How does Ephesians 2:10 express this truth?

The word translated *workmanship* (POIEMA, poy-ay'-mah) is the word from which we get our word “poem” and refers to a work of art in the making. What an awesome description of who we are in Christ! You and I are God’s unique works of art; we are His masterpieces. Therefore, we are not to be copies of anyone else. Just being the masterpiece God created you to be will take all kinds of stress out of your life.

Paul also writes to the *overseers*, or “bishops,” and *deacons* in the church at Philippi (Philip 1:1c). These are the church leaders. The *overseers* were in charge of overseeing the spiritual needs of the church. They were to watch over, nourish, and protect the church through teaching and preaching. How are the duties of *overseers* described in Acts 20:28?

*Deacons* were selected by the church to serve the members. The word translated *deacons* (DIAKONOS, dee-ahk'-on-os) means “attendants or servants.” *Deacons* are not a board of directors but men who minister to the needs of people within the church. The office arose in response to a need in the church in Jerusalem. There was a complaint the Greek-speaking widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. Therefore, what do the apostles say to the church in Acts 6:3?

Therefore, *deacons* are to be servants in the church. *Overseers* and *deacons* should know what they are supposed to accomplish, and so should you if you want to have a “journey into stress-free living.”

In life, you will be guided either by priorities or pressures. Priorities are what God wants you to do, and pressures are what everyone else wants you to do. At the end of the day do you ever say, “I really did not accomplish anything today?” There is a big difference between being busy and accomplishing something. Being busy and not really

accomplishing anything causes stress. “Stress-free living” requires knowing what God wants us to accomplish in our daily lives. What did Jesus say in John 15:16a?

The Lord calls each of us to be branches in the true Vine—branches that produce the *fruit* of new believers. The *fruit* also refers to the qualities that make us like Jesus Christ, which the Bible calls the *fruit of the Spirit*. What are the nine components of the *fruit of the Spirit* (Gal. 5:22–23a)?

1. 2. 3.
4. 5. 6.
7. 8. 9.

To have a “journey into stress-free living,” **know who you are, what you want to accomplish**, and ...

### **Know God can empower you (1:2)**

We all get stressed because we try to do too much in our own power. We cannot be who God wants us to be and accomplish what He wants us to accomplish by ourselves. That’s why Paul writes: *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* (1:2). There are several kinds of *grace* in the New Testament, three of which we will mention here: **saving grace**, **equipping grace**, and **empowering grace**. As Christians, we usually think only in terms of **saving grace** because we are saved by *grace* through faith (Eph. 2:8). But there is also **equipping grace**. How does Romans 12:6a describe this kind of *grace*?

However, in Philippians 1:2, Paul is not referring to either of these kinds of *grace* because the Philippians have already been saved and received their spiritual gifts. He is referring to a third kind of *grace* called **empowering grace**, also known as “sustaining *grace*.” We see this kind of *grace* in the apostles, who flee in fear at the arrest and crucifixion of

Jesus, but then in *Acts* powerfully preach about the resurrection. Why, according to the last phrase in Acts 4:33?

As Christians, we experience all three kinds of *grace*: **saving grace**, **equipping grace**, and **empowering grace**. Only after we have experienced God's *grace* can we have His *peace* (Philip. 1:2). The word translated *peace* (ΕΙΡΗΝΗ, e-ray'-nay) means inner peace or tranquility in the midst of life's pressures and problems. What is the opposite of *peace*? It is stress. How do you get the *peace* to which Paul is referring? How does Jesus answer this question in John 14:27a?

“Stress-free living” begins when we receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. When we receive Jesus, we also receive the *peace* about which Paul is writing. To enjoy stress-free living, you must **know who you are**, **know what you want to accomplish**, and **know God can empower you**.

## LESSON 2     De-stressing Your Relationships (Philippians 1:3–11)

On a very regular basis, we deal with all kinds of stress. Because we are all different, one area that creates lots of stress is our relationships. There are **three** things you can do to de-stress your relationships, beginning with ...

### Look for the good in the other person (1:3 & 5)

Paul writes: *I thank my God every time I remember you* (1:3). Paul is thankful for the Philippian believers because he remembers the good things about them. He focuses on the good times they had. What do you think about when you think about people who bring stress into your life—good things or bad things? Most of us just focus on the bad things.

Do you have stressful times in your marriage? We all do. When that stress comes, how do you begin to think about your mate and what do you tend to remember about him or her? Just the bad stuff, right? Then, when you talk to your mate, you communicate the bad things you have been thinking, and that only adds more stress to the relationship. God gives us a great command to help with this problem. First, He tells us not to use any *unwholesome* or abusive talk (Eph. 4:29a). Then, what does the rest of the command tell us?

Building people up rather than tearing them down will take a lot of stress out of your relationships. You must be honest and sincere, but when you look for the good in people, you will begin to find it; and when you say things to build them up, you will start to de-stress your relationships.

Paul tells the Philippians he is especially grateful for their *partnership in the gospel from the first day until now* (1:5). The best way to de-stress a relationship is, “Remember the best and forget the rest.” If you want to take the stress out of a relationship, focus on people’s strengths, not their weaknesses; focus on the best things about them and forget the rest. With some people it may take a lot of creativity, but you can find something good in everybody. Focusing on the good and praising them for it will bring out more of their good qualities. Praise will help take the stress out of any relationship. To de-stress a relationship, **look for the good in the other person**, and ...

### **Pray for the other person (1:4 & 9–11)**

Paul writes: *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy* (1:4). Every time the Philippian believers come to Paul’s mind, he thanks God for them and prays for them. Every time you think about a person with whom you have a stressful relationship, whether a spouse, a child, or someone at school or work, say a prayer for that person. This is a good way to obey what command in 1 Thessalonians 5:17?

The quickest way to de-stress a relationship is to start praying for the other person. In Philippians 1:9–11 we find **three** things for which we should pray:

**1. Pray the person will grow in love.** Paul writes: *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight* (1:9). The word translated *abound* (PERISSEUO, pear-is-shoe'-oh) means “super abound.” It pictures a river overflowing its banks. Love is the river, and the two banks that form its path are *knowledge* and *insight*, or discernment, that reveal the direction love should flow. But where do we get love that overflows in our lives? How does Romans 5:5b answer this question?

To de-stress a relationship, pray the Holy Spirit would cause God’s love to overflow, not just in the other person but also in you.

**2. Pray the person will make the right choices.** Paul continues: *So that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ* (1:10). This means we should pray they will make the right choices so they will be *blameless until the day of Christ*. The word translated *blameless* (APROSKOPOS, ap-ros'-kop-os), or “without offense,” means “not causing to stumble.” It is the idea of not falling into sin or causing others to do so. When there is stress in a relationship, we need to obey and pray others will obey what command in Ephesians 4:31?

**3. Pray the person will be *filled with the fruit of righteousness*.** This comes *through Jesus Christ* (1:11). The *fruit of righteousness* is an Old Testament concept. The prophet Amos accused his people of turning *the fruit of righteousness into bitterness* (Amos 6:12b). The Hebrew word translated *bitterness* (LA'ANÂ, lah'-an-aw) means “poison” and is also translated “hemlock” [KJV] and “wormwood” [NASB]. Nothing poisons a relationship like bitterness. What does Isaiah 32:17a tell us?

When used in reference to people, the word *righteousness* means right action or treating people right. The *fruit of righteousness* is *peace* in our relationships. To de-stress your relationships, **look for the good in the other person, pray for the other person, and ...**

**Remember God isn't finished with the other person or with you (1:6)**

Every believer is a project under divine construction, so de-stressing relationships often takes time. Therefore, we must remember *he who began a good work in you* (and them) *will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus* (1:6). In our marriages, our homes, at work, and everywhere we must remember people are always growing and developing, so we must learn to love them the way they are. If you wait for people to become perfect before you have a good relationship with them, it will never happen. This is because there is no such thing as a perfect marriage partner, a perfect kid, a perfect boss, a perfect employee,

a perfect church member, a perfect pastor, or any other kind of a perfect person.

If you want to de-stress a relationship, start thanking God that He is not through with them or you yet. Also, as innocent as you might feel about causing the stress, you need to remember what words of Jesus in Matthew 7:4?

Paul was *confident* of God's power to change people (1:6). Are you? If you are, then be patient as God completes His *good work*. This is what faith is all about: praying for God to bring out the best in us and other people and then trusting Him to do it.

To de-stress a relationship, look for improvement, not perfection. Then, praise any improvement you see. As you praise the good, it will automatically bring out more good in the other person. Criticizing people brings out their worst; praising them brings out their best.

To de-stress relationships, **look for the good in the other person, pray for the other person, remember God isn't finished with the other person or with you**, and ...

### **Keep the other person in your heart (1:7–8)**

Paul writes: *I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me* (1:7). The reason Paul has such a great relationship with the Philippians is he keeps them in his *heart*. There is an old saying, "If you don't keep people in your heart, they will get on your nerves." That's true of husbands, wives, kids, grandkids, friends, associates, people at work, everybody. That's why we have what command in the last phrase of 1 Peter 1:22?

A man once came to his pastor and said, “I don’t understand my son; he won’t listen to a thing I say.” The pastor said, “Let me repeat and see if I understood what you just said. You said, ‘I don’t understand my son; he won’t listen to a thing I say.’ Is that right?” The man replied, “That’s exactly what I said.”

The pastor responded, “I thought you understood people by listening to them, not talking to them. Why don’t you trying listening to him rather than talking to him?” The man said, “I hadn’t thought of that. You’re right!” Listening to people is one way to reveal we love them from the heart. This begins by obeying what command in James 1:19b?

Because Paul knew how to take stress out of his relationships, he writes: *God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus* (1:8). Paul didn’t love them with human longing but with *the affection of Christ Jesus*. This is the result of AGAPE love, the first component of the fruit of the Spirit, being produced in Paul’s life (Gal. 5:22). When we allow the Holy Spirit to produce His fruit in our lives, we can obey what command of Jesus in John 13:34?

To de-stress your relationships, **look for the good in the other person, pray for the other person, remember God isn’t finished with the other person or with you, and keep the other person in your heart.** Which of these do you most need to put into practice today?

## LESSON 3    Enjoying Life in the Midst of Adversity (Philippians 1:12–19)

Paul wrote the book of Philippians, which describes “stress-free living” in the midst of all kinds of adversity. After Paul is arrested in Jerusalem for preaching the Gospel, false testimony about him is given in court, and he is then imprisoned in Caesarea for two years. Since he is a Roman citizen, Paul uses his right to appeal to Caesar and is transported to Rome. A storm adds to his problems by causing his ship to run aground. Then, according to Acts 27:41b what happens?

After swimming to shore, Paul is bitten by a poisonous snake. When he finally arrives in Rome, Paul is put under house arrest, where he spends about two years chained to a Roman guard as he awaits his hearing before Caesar. Paul not only can’t continue his missionary journey or visit churches he has established, but he also has no personal privacy. During this time Paul writes a letter about stress-free living because he knows how to enjoy life, not just endure it. To enjoy life in the midst of adversity, we must do **three** things. First, we must ...

### Keep problems in perspective (1:12–14)

After years of severe adversity and while chained to a prison guard in Rome, what does Paul write in Philippians 1:12b?

This part of Paul’s life seems to be a series of setbacks, but Paul says his circumstances have *served to advance the gospel* (emphasis mine). Paul can keep his problems in perspective because he knows God has a purpose for allowing them. One purpose for his imprisonment has become clear because he writes, *it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ* (1:13). The word translated *palace guard* (PRAITōRION, prahee-toh'-ree-on) refers to the elite Praetorian Guard who provided security for the Caesar’s palace and

served as his bodyguards. They were also the future generals and leaders of the Roman Empire. These guards changed about every four hours, which means he was chained to six different guards every day. Six times 365 days equals 2,190, and 2,190 times two years equals 4,380. As a result, many of these guards became believers, and history tells us even some of Nero's family, including his wife, became believers.

The phrase *everyone else* could refer to palace servants, government officials, and even members of Nero's family. Paul was successful in winning some of them to Christ because he writes: *All the saints send you greetings* (4:22a). Then, what does he write in the rest of that verse?

Paul sees himself as a preacher with a “captive audience.” Therefore, instead of having a “pity party” about his problems, Paul writes a letter about joy and stress-free living.

The devil tries to use our problems to discourage us and destroy our witness, but God often uses them for the good of other people. That's why Paul writes: *Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly* (1:14). Our attitudes toward our problems will either encourage or discourage other believers because we either let God or the devil use our problems to affect others. Faith is more “caught” than taught because faith is contagious. No one will ever be encouraged by your faith until they see how you respond to severe adversity. Like Joseph, what could Paul say to those who conspired to have him put in prison (Genesis 50:20a)?

Do you believe that verse? Do you live like you believe it when you have severe adversity? It's easy to talk the talk, but adversity reveals whether or not we walk the walk. To enjoy life in the midst of adversity, **keep problems in perspective** and ...

## Keep critics in context (1:15–18)

If you want some stress in your life, just let other people start criticizing you. Paul has this problem too because he writes: *It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry* (1:15a). Some other preachers apparently envy Paul and are using his problems as an opportunity to discredit him. The word *envy* refers to feelings of displeasure produced by seeing or hearing about the success of others.

Some *envy* Paul's success in proclaiming the Gospel and the fact he is recognized as an authoritative apostle. In over 35 years of pastoring I have observed that people who are always criticizing church leaders are usually envious of them. Sometimes they are envious because they think people less spiritual than they hold positions of leadership in the church. Some are envious because they see someone else getting recognition and they feel ignored. Whatever the reason, *envy* is a terrible sin. That's why Proverbs 27:4 asks what rhetorical question?

This means jealousy (or *envy*) is more serious than *anger*. I would rather have someone angry with me than jealous of me. Why? People get over being angry, but jealous people get more and more vicious. That's why James 3:16 gives us what warning about envy?

Envious people gossip, criticize, and try to cause all kinds of problems for people. *Envoy* is always followed by *rivalry*, or “strife,” (Philip. 1:15a). *Envoy* is the emotion, and *rivalry* is what envious people try to stir up. Envious people are mean. They don't care if they cause *strife*, and they don't care who gets hurt or what damage is done to the church or whatever organization of which they are a part. They only care about their own agendas and getting their own way.

However, Paul also writes *that some preach Christ ... out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel* (1:15b–16). (Note: the KJV reverses verses 16 and 17). When we have people problems, we sometimes focus only on the bad guys and forget about the others who do love us and are good people.

Referring to the first group, Paul continues: *The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains* (1:17). They are preaching the Gospel but with the wrong motives. Some of them are apparently trying to take Paul's place while he is in prison and are only interested in notoriety or influence, not in getting out the message.

Though some are preaching Christ out of jealousy and causing *rivalry*, Paul writes that regardless of the motive, at least the Gospel is being preached (1:18a–b). What is Paul's response to this (see 1:18c–d)?

Paul knows even when someone preaches the Gospel with the wrong motives, people will be saved. Therefore, Paul could keep his critics in context. I can honestly say I have learned more over the years from some of my critics than from any other group. Sometimes my critics have been totally off-base, but many times God has used them to teach me something. When dealing with critics, especially those who are destructive rather than constructive, I have found Proverbs 15:1 invaluable. Write it below:

Remember, God can use your critics to teach you many things, as He has me. **Enjoying life in the midst of adversity** means you **keep problems in perspective, keep critics in context**, and ...

### **Keep prayer and the Paraclete in the plan (1:19)**

Paul continues: *For I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance* (1:19). No matter what the problems or who the critics are, there are two things that will strangle the stress they cause. The first one is prayer. One thing that reveals our faith is our willingness to ask others, especially prayer warriors, to pray for us. Our pride often prevents

us from asking others to pray for us. Failing to ask for the prayers of others shows our lack of faith in what promise in James 5:16b?

If you really believe that, when problems or critics cause stress in your life you will ask others to pray for you. When you do, you will immediately be on your way to “stress-free living.”

Paul also says his deliverance will be the result of the *help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ*, who is the Holy Spirit (1:19). When Jesus taught about the Holy Spirit in John 14, He called Him “the Paraclete” in Greek, but that word is translated Counselor [NIV®], “Comforter” [KJV] and “Helper” [NASB]. What wonderful truth does 2 Corinthians 3:17b tell us about the Holy Spirit?

When we allow the Holy Spirit to fill and guide us, we experience freedom from all kinds of stress. Prayer and the Paraclete work together to strangle stress in our lives. To enjoy life in the midst of adversity, you must **keep problems in perspective, keep critics in context, and keep prayer and the Paraclete in the plan.**

## LESSON 4     Strangling the Stress of Waiting (Philippians 1:20–26)

When Paul wrote *Philippians*, a letter on “stress-free living,” he had been in a Roman prison for about four years, waiting on God, and not knowing whether he would be released or executed. One thing I really don’t like to do is wait. I don’t mind going to the doctor; it’s the “waiting” room I hate. It’s the only time I read three-year-old news magazines. Like Paul, we often must wait on God. In this passage we find **three** principles for **strangling the stress of waiting**.

### Wait with expectation (1:20)

After waiting on God for about four years, Paul writes: *I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death* (1:20). The word translated *eagerly expect* means to look ahead with concentration, as a watchman in the bow of a ship stretches his neck as he looks for land. Expectation is the outward manifestation of *hope*, and *hope* is the inward conviction God will do what He has promised. How does Romans 8:25 describe this kind of *hope*?

In the Bible, *hope* isn’t just crossing your fingers or wishful thinking. It is a firm trust in God’s promises. Paul’s *expectation* and *hope* were that Christ would *be exalted* in his body whether he lived or died (Philip. 1:20). The word *exalted* (MEGALUNŌ, meg-al-oo'-noh) is translated “magnified” in the KJV. As Christians our lives should “magnify” Christ so our lost friends and neighbors can see Jesus in us.

Paul wanted Christ to be *exalted* or “magnified” in his life, *whether by life or by death*. Paul was prepared for the “if nots” of life. He wanted to live, but “if not,” he wanted to die not being ashamed of Christ. He was more concerned about his testimony than the verdict of his trial.

Are you prepared for the “if nots” of life? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were. Just before they are thrown into the fiery furnace for not bowing down to King Nebuchadnezzar’s graven image, they tell the king their God is able to save them from the furnace (Dan. 3:17). That’s hopeful *expectation*! But hopeful *expectation* is also being prepared for the “if nots” of life. Therefore, what else do they say to King Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3:18?

To “journey into stress-free living,” we must wait on God with hopeful *expectation*, but we also must be prepared for the “if nots” of life. What if God never blesses your finances like you expect? What if you never have the wonderful marriage for which you’re praying? What if your wayward child never turns around? To deal with the **stress of waiting**, we must have hopeful expectation, but we must also be prepared for the “if nots” of life.

To strangle the **stress of waiting**, we must **wait with expectation** and ...

### **Wait with motivation (1:21–23)**

Paul has been in prison for four years. He has lost his freedom, many of his friends, his traveling ministry, and his privacy as he is chained to a Roman guard 24/7. Though everything has been taken from him, he is still a highly motivated man. Why? One thing couldn’t be taken from him—his purpose for living. Therefore, what does Paul write in Philippians 1:21a?

Everyone lives for something. For some, *to live* is possessions, pleasure, position, prestige, or power. Solomon tried it all. He amassed a personal fortune greater than that of most countries and was the wealthiest man in the world (Ecc. 2:7–9). That didn’t satisfy him, so he tried pleasure and writes: *I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure* (Ecc. 2:10a). He had 700 wives and 300 live-ins called *concubines* (1 Kgs. 11:3). Our so-called “liberated” generation has nothing on Solomon.

Solomon dazzled the world with his wealth, wisdom, and construction genius, as seen in the temple he built in Jerusalem, one of the most beautiful and expensive buildings in history. After trying possessions, pleasure, prestige, and power, what does Solomon write in Ecclesiastes 2:17?

Why did Solomon feel like this? He felt his life had no purpose. Solomon had everything and was miserable; Paul had nothing and was happy and joyful. Why? Because Paul knew for him *to live is Christ*.

Paul also writes *to die is gain* (Philip. 1:21b). The word translated *gain* refers to profits on an investment. For Paul, death would simply be cashing in his life's investment. Dying would be *gain* to Paul because he had obeyed what command of our Lord found in Matthew 6:20a?

While dying would be *gain*, Paul goes on to write: *If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!* (1:22). Paul knows there are certain attractions in both life and death, and if the choice were his, he doesn't know what he would do.

Therefore, Paul writes: *I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far* (1:23). The word translated *depart* (ANALUŌ, ahn-al-oo'-oh) is a term describing the untying of the ropes (we sailors call them "lines") that hold a ship in port. When it came time to *depart*, the lines that held the ship in port were loosed, and the ship would set sail for a new destination. To Paul, his own death was a time when the "ship" of his life would be loosed so he might *depart* and make his way to his final port. Thus, Paul had a purpose in life and in death. To deal with the stress of waiting, we must wait with ***expectation, motivation, and ...***

### **Wait while making a donation (1:24–26)**

Paul knows the Philippians need him to disciple them; so he writes: *but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body* (1:24). Paul knows his

personal desires must be subordinate to God's will. His ministry on earth is not yet complete because he needs to help the churches he has established grow and solidify. As we wait on God, we must remember what promise in Galatians 6:9?

Farmers sow in one season and harvest in another. That's also true of the Christian life. There is always a period of waiting for the harvest. All the great saints in the Bible endured long periods of waiting. Noah waited 120 years while building the Ark (Gen. 6). Abraham waited 25 years for the son God promised him (Gen. 12:2 & 17:17). Moses waited forty years in Midian (Acts 7:30). The Bible is one story after another of people who wait on God because faith always waits.

Paul writes: *Convinced of this, I know that I will remain* (1:25a). As long as the Lord has a purpose for Paul on earth, that's where he wants to stay. Paul is practicing what admonition he gave the Corinthian believers in 1 Corinthians 15:58c?

Paul continues: *and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith* (Philip. 1:25b). Paul is persuaded God will let him remain alive to help other believers progress in their faith. The result of progress is *joy*. Spiritual progress always produces *joy*. In the Christian life if we don't progress, we regress. When we regress, we get depressed. When we progress, we get blessed.

Paul ends this passage by writing: *so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me* (1:26). There is an old saying, "Life is not judged by its duration, but by its donation." What you do to impact the lives of other people for Christ is your "donation."

Like Paul, as we wait on God, we must sometimes go through lots of adversity. Maybe you have been waiting a long time for your spouse to become a dedicated Christian. Maybe you have been waiting for your finances to improve or for a prodigal child to turn around. I don't know **how long** you will have to wait, but there is a verse that sums up **how** to wait. It is Psalm 130:5. Write it below:

God wants us to wait because the longer we wait the stronger our faith. How long does it take God to make a mushroom? About two days. How long does it take God to make a giant oak tree? About 60 years! The real question is: do you want to be a "mushroom" Christian or an "oak tree" Christian?

**Strangling the stress of waiting** requires you do three things: **wait with expectation**, **wait with motivation**, and **wait while making a donation**. Which of these do you need to work on most in your life, what will you do about it, and when?

## LESSON 5    How To Curtail Conflict (Philippians 1:27–2:4)

As Paul writes this letter he is aware of the relational stress in the church at Philippi due to conflict. Therefore, in this passage we find **four** essentials for curtailing conflict, and thus relieving some stress in our lives.

### A Spirit of Cooperation (1:27)

Knowing conflict is brewing in the church at Philippi, Paul writes: *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ* (1:27a). The word translated *worthy* means to be of equal value. Our salvation and forgiveness were bought at a very high price—the precious blood of Jesus. How do we live a life worthy of the high price paid for our salvation and forgiveness? Paul tells us: *Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel* (1:27b). The phrase *one spirit* refers to unity or getting along with other people. The phrase *contending as one* pictures a team effort or cooperation. Success in marriage, church, parenting, business, government, education, or whatever depends on cooperation with people and commitment to the principles of God's Word. Therefore, what does the Bible tell us in Romans 12:18?

Curtailing conflict requires a **spirit of cooperation** and ...

### A Spirit of Confidence (1:28–30)

Paul continues: *Without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you* (1:28a). There are always people who don't want to cooperate and try to intimidate those who do. When you try to bring peace and cooperation, don't be *frightened* by these people. How sad that many churches spend much time and effort fighting against one another instead of the real

enemy! It takes a lot of courage to cooperate and be a peacemaker. That's why we need confidence in what promise of Jesus in Matthew 5:9?

Paul also writes: *This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God* (1:28b). This means trying to cooperate and bring peace is a *sign* we are the children of God. On the other hand, those who always cause conflict and controversy are revealing they aren't Christians. Few things disclose what kind of people we really are as how we handle conflict. How we react is a *sign* of whether or not we are truly Christians.

If we live for Christ, we will experience opposition—the Evil One will see to that. That's why Paul writes: *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him* (1:29). Jesus says we are “*blessed*” when people *insult* us, *persecute* us, and *falsely* say bad things about us because we are following Him (Mt 5:11). Then, what does He say in Matthew 5:12a?

Paul and the Philippians have some things in common with us because Paul writes: *since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have* (1:30). When people misunderstand us and say all kinds of bad things about us, we are facing the *same struggle* as believers who have gone before us. However, we must always have what confidence found in Deuteronomy 31:8?

Curtailing conflict requires **a spirit of cooperation, a spirit of confidence**, and ...

### **A Spirit of Consolation (2:1–2)**

Reducing conflict in relationships requires genuine concern for other people, even those with whom we disagree. Therefore, Paul writes: *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort*

*from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose (2:1–2).* The word translated *encouragement*, or “consolation” is the same Greek word Jesus used when He called the Holy Spirit the *Counselor*, or “Comforter,” in John 14:16.

Many times in my life I have been so discouraged I seriously considered getting out of the ministry. At those times the Lord has encouraged and comforted me. He has never sent an angel, called me on the phone, or sent an email. Instead, He encouraged and comforted me through other believers who obey what command in 1 Thessalonians 5:11a?

There have also been times in my life when my relationship with some church members has become strained to the point of conflict. However, over the years I have learned as I pray for that relationship to improve, God will give me an opportunity to minister with encouragement by showing tenderness and compassion to them during a crisis. People will never forget the comfort we give them during their times of crisis.

Curtailing conflict in relationships requires **a spirit of cooperation, a spirit of confidence, a spirit of consolation**, and ...

### **A Spirit of Consideration (2:3–4)**

Paul now gives us two main reasons for conflict in relationships: *selfish ambition and vain conceit* (2:3a). The word translated *selfish ambition*, or “*strife*,” (ERITHEIA, air-ith-ay'-ah) denotes selfishness and rivalry. Selfishness always breeds contention, resentment, and rivalry. Division and discord are the results of people focusing exclusively on their own agendas and preferences.

A second reason for conflict is *vain conceit*, which refers to ego or pride. Wherever there is conflict, the culprit is usually ego or pride. How does Proverbs 13:10a confirm this?

To live in peace with everyone, we must sometimes swallow our *pride* and say the two most difficult words in the English language: “I’m sorry;” or we must say the three most difficult words, “I was wrong.” Swallowing our *pride* sometimes means forgiving people we don’t feel deserve to be forgiven. However, we must because of what command in Colossians 3:13?

Only one thing keeps us from *forgiving* and seeking reconciliation, and that is our *pride*. When we are proud we have an exaggerated opinion of ourselves and feel others should bow down before us and ask for our forgiveness. *Pride* causes us to wait until someone else makes the first move toward reconciliation.

To curtail a spirit of contention and conflict, we must have a spirit opposite of *selfish ambition* and *vain conceit*. How does Paul describe this opposite spirit in Philippians 2:3b?

The word *better* doesn’t mean you put yourself down and act like you are inferior. Rather, it means you treat people like they are worthy of respect and consideration. It means your focus isn’t exclusively on yourself but on other people as well.

When I fail to consider others *better* than myself or when I fail to value other people by treating them with less respect than they deserve, I am creating an atmosphere for conflict and adding stress to my relationships. How does Paul describe **a spirit of consideration** in Philippians 2:4?

This means we are willing to put our own comforts, preferences, and desires aside because we are more concerned about other people. When we don’t look to the interests of others, we will have problems in our marriages, with our kids, with people at school, at church, at work, and everywhere.

**To curtail conflict** in your relationships, you must have **a spirit of cooperation, a spirit of confidence, a spirit of consolation, and a spirit of consideration**. On your “journey into stress-free living,” which of these do you most need to work on, and when will you begin?

## LESSON 6 Attitudes That Annihilate Stress (Philippians 2:5–11)

Our attitudes can create a lot of stress in our lives. That's why Paul writes: *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus* (2:5). Having the *attitude* of Jesus requires being able to control our attitudes and that is the secret to "stress-free living." The Bible teaches a person must repent to become a Christian (Lk 13:3). The word translated *repent* (METANOEŌ, met-ahn-oh-eh'-oh) means a change of *mind* or attitude. How does 2 Corinthians 5:17 describe this change of attitude?

When we accept Christ as Savior and Lord we receive a *new* attitude, literally a change of *mind*. This new *mind* causes us to see things in a *new* light. Philippians 2:5 introduces one of the most profound passages in the Bible. As revealed in these verses, having the *mind* or attitude of Christ can be divided into **three** parts, beginning with ...

### An Attitude of Servanthood (2:6–7)

Many scholars believe verses 6–11 were an early church hymn. Paul is using this hymn to portray Jesus as a Model for all of us. It begins: *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped* (2:6). This verse clearly teaches Jesus Christ is God. That's the reason Jesus makes what declaration in John 10:30?

Someone has said, "Jesus is God with skin on His face, spelling Himself out in language we can all understand." Jesus has always been God because *in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (Jn 1:1). Then, what does John 1:14a tell us about Jesus the Word?

The word translated *dwelling* (SKENOŌ, skay-nah'-oh) means tabernacle. In other words, Jesus Christ, who is God, took on a body of *flesh* and *blood* and "tabernacled" among us.

Even though Jesus was God come to earth in *flesh* and blood, Paul writes: *But made himself nothing*, or “of no reputation” (2:7a). This means He emptied Himself of His divine privileges and status, left His heavenly throne that had been His for all eternity past, and entered the body of the Virgin Mary as an unborn baby. That is **an attitude of servanthood** far beyond the power of our finite minds to comprehend. This truth is what we call the Incarnation, which means God took on a body of *flesh* and blood.

Verse seven also tells us Jesus took *on the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness*. While on earth, even though He was the God who spoke the world into existence, Jesus continually had **an attitude of servanthood**. How does Jesus describe His purpose for coming to earth in Mark 10:45?

How do you feel when you must serve others? How do you feel when people interrupt your busy day to talk about their problems? It is impossible to have the attitude of a *servant* on your own. Your human nature is selfish, causing you to think only of yourself. However, not needing to be number one or have things your own way takes all kinds of stress out of your life and makes you willing to serve others instead of wanting to be served.

To have the **attitudes that annihilate stress**, we must have **an attitude of servanthood** and ...

### **An Attitude of Sacrifice (2:8)**

Paul continues: *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!* (2:8). Because Jesus had **an attitude of sacrifice**, He took the biggest demotion in history. We cannot imagine what position of splendor and power Jesus had in heaven. But for what does Jesus pray just before He is arrested and crucified (John 17:5)?

This prayer of Jesus gives us just a glimpse of His *glory* in heaven. From the *glory* of heaven Jesus came to die on the cross for our sins. In the time of Christ, being put to death on a cross was the most contemptible thing that could happen to a person. The Romans only crucified the most notorious criminals. It was the worst torture imaginable because such sentenced prisoners were nailed to a cross and left to die a slow agonizing death which could take several days. There was nothing lower than a crucified criminal.

Because Christ had **an attitude of sacrifice**, He came down from the highest, most honorable place in heaven to the lowest, most despicable place on earth. He did this so we would not have to experience the pain and torment of eternal separation from God. To have the *mind* or attitude of Christ, we must be willing to sacrifice for the benefits of others. How does Romans 12:1 describe what you must do to have **an attitude of sacrifice**?

Being *living sacrifices* means we offer our minds, our ears, our mouths, our hands, our feet, our talents, and our abilities to God to minister to others. Ministering to others may involve lending a compassionate, listening ear to someone in need. Some need the tender touch of loving hands to bring comfort, while others may need our feet to bring them the message they are important and have a friend who cares about them. Still others need our minds and mouths to share Christ and encourage them to respond in faith. But all these actions require sacrificing our selfishness. If we live just for ourselves, life is so stressful, but it's amazing how **an attitude of servanthood** annihilates stress from our lives.

To have the **attitudes that annihilate stress**, we must have **an attitude of servanthood, an attitude of sacrifice**, and ...

### **An Attitude of Expectation (2:9–11)**

Because Jesus had an **attitude of servanthood and sacrifice**, *God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name* (2:9). The Christian life is filled with paradoxes. For example, in the Christian life, the way up is down. That's why the Bible gives us what command, with what result, in 1 Peter 5:6?

The greatest example for this truth is the exaltation of Christ. The first time Jesus came to earth, He was ridiculed, arrested, mocked, beaten, and finally tortured to death on the cross. In contrast, when He returns, *at the name of Jesus every knee ... in heaven will bow* (Philip. 2:10). This refers to angels and saints already in heaven. Also, *every knee on earth*, whether living or dead, will *bow* (2:10). This means every Caesar, every president, every king, every general, and everyone who has ever lived will *bow*. When Jesus returns, those who know Him as savior will *bow* in love, adoration, and worship. But those who have rejected Him as Savior and Lord will *bow* in fear and submission.

When Christ returns, not only will every knee *bow* but also *every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (2:11). This doesn't mean everyone will be saved but that every human being who has ever lived will ultimately acknowledge who Jesus is. This includes Buddha, Mohammad, Adolf Hitler, Pilate—everyone who has ever lived. As Jesus is standing trial before Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest, Caiaphas asks Him if He is the Christ. How does Jesus reply in Mark 14:62?

Caiaphas has been dead for around 2,000 years. When Jesus returns, even the high priest, who through deceit and lies had Jesus crucified, will *bow* his knee in the awesome presence of the glorified Christ. Then, Caiaphas will confess that *Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*.

The Bible teaches we have a choice. We can confess Jesus as Lord now or later. Our willingness to do so now will determine where we spend eternity. How does Romans 10:9 express this truth?

The word translated *confess* means “to give verbal affirmation.” In this case it is acknowledging verbally Jesus is Lord and that He rose from the dead to prove He was God’s Son who is coming again in glory. This **attitude of expectation** can **annihilate stress** because believing Christ could return at any moment takes enormous amounts of stress out of our lives.

Having an **attitude of servanthood, sacrifice, and expectation** can indeed **annihilate stress** in your life.

## LESSON 7    Becoming a Better Person (Philippians 2:12–18)

One thing that causes a lot of stress is being unable to make positive changes in our lives to become better people. When this happens, we can be overcome by guilt and feelings of inferiority. In this passage the Bible tells us **four** things we need to know if we are to become better people.

### First, there is potential to activate (2:12)

Paul talks about this when he writes: *continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling* (2:12c). Paul is writing to people who are already Christians, so he is not suggesting we earn our salvation (see Eph. 2:8–9). Paul is not saying we work **for** our salvation, but rather we work **out** our *salvation*. The word translated *work out* refers to working a mine. It is the idea of getting from the mine as many valuable minerals as possible. What does Romans 12:6a tell us about our potential?

Of every church it could be said, “Thar’s gold in them thar pews.” This is because every believer has at least one spiritual gift that is full of potential. The local church is a gold mine of talents and gifts, but most believers are not working out their salvation because they are not activating their potential.

As we grow to be all God wants us to be, we are to *work out* our *salvation with fear and trembling*. This refers to a holy *fear* that trembles at the thought of boarding up the spiritual gold mine of *salvation*. The thought of missing out on being the people God wants us to be should cause *fear and trembling*. Why, according to Romans 14:12?

Of what will we give an *account*? Our lives, our gifts, our talents—our potential! God will judge us by how we have worked out our salvation, how we have lived up to the potential and purpose He has given us as Christians.

To become a better person, we must realize there is **potential to activate** and ...

### **Second, there is a power to stimulate (2:13)**

Working out our salvation is not something we do under our own power. That's why Paul writes, *for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose* (2:13). The word translated *works* (ENERGEŌ, en-erg-eh'-oh) is the word from which we get our English words "energy" and "energize." In other words, God through the Holy Spirit energizes or stimulates us to be better people. How does Ephesians 3:20 describe this power?

The stimulation to become a better person, as well as the power to do so, originates with God. **Becoming a better person** is synonymous with the phrase *act according to his good purpose*. What is God's *good purpose* for our lives? God created us in His image, or to be like Him (Gen. 1:26). God doesn't want us to become gods, but He does want us to become godly. To help us do that, God gives us written instructions, a manual we call the Bible! The entire Bible is *God-breathed* (inspired by God) and is *useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness* (2 Tim. 3:16). Why, according to the next verse (3:17)?

If you want to become a better person, get into the Bible. As you read the Bible, the Holy Spirit will give you the desire and power to become a better person.

To become a better person, we must realize there is **potential to activate**, **a power to stimulate**, and ...

### **Third, there is a practice to eliminate (2:14–16)**

To become a better person, we must *do everything without complaining or arguing* (2:14). The word translated *complaining*, or "murmurings,"

refers to a bad attitude that expresses itself in constant grumbling. *Complaining* is a habit, and habits are only broken by replacing them with something else. To stop *complaining*, we must replace it with positive speaking. We can do this if we remember what principle found in Proverbs 16:24?

Therefore, our speech should be a source of sweetness and blessing, as well as bringing healing, or renewal, and encouragement to others. If we practice this principle, we can replace complaining with compliments. Here is your assignment: for the next seven days, every time you are tempted to complain about something, replace the complaint with a compliment or something positive. Imagine how much stress that will take out of your life and what a better person you will be.

The word translated *arguing*, or “disputings,” (Philip. 2:14) means expressing opinions that stir up division. More churches have been harmed and more churches have split because of *arguing* than because of false doctrine or immorality.

The result of refraining from *complaining and arguing* is so that you may become *blameless and pure* (2:15a). The word *blameless* means without outstanding faults. It means there is nothing in one’s life that would ruin their Christian witness. The word translated *pure*, or “harmless,” means “unmixed” and refers to pure metal that has not been alloyed or mixed with other metals. It basically means having integrity. People who are not guilty of complaining or arguing are people of integrity.

If we become *blameless and pure*, we can be the children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation (2:15). The word translated *crooked* (SKOLIOS, skol-ee-os') is the word from which we get our word “scoliosis,” which is an abnormal curvature of the spine. It refers to that which is morally or spiritually twisted or corrupt. Knowing we live in a *crooked and depraved* generation, what does Jesus pray in John 17:15?

We should contrast so much with the culture in which we live that we will *shine like stars in the universe* (Philip. 2:15c). If we are genuinely positive and complimentary, we will stand out from our culture like beautiful stars against the dark night sky. That's one reason Jesus makes what declaration in Matthew 5:14a?

Complaining, negative people always bring darkness, but positive, complimentary people always bring *light* wherever they are. Wouldn't it be great if our churches had reputations that caused people to say, "That church is where all the positive people in town go!" Do you think that kind of church would be attractive to unbelievers? Certainly! What would your home be like if you stopped complaining and being critical? What would your school be like if all the griping, complaining people left town? What would your city be like if all the griping, complaining people moved?

As we *shine like stars* by being positive and complimentary, Paul says we *hold out the word of life* (Philip. 2:16). What is *the word of life*? How does Jesus answer that question in John 6:63b?

Also, Peter said to Jesus, "*You have the words of eternal life*" (Jn 6:68b). *Eternal life* comes from hearing the *words* of Christ contained in the Bible. However, unbelievers will not come to hear His *words* in a church filled with negative, argumentative, complaining people. That's why complaining and griping are such serious sins. They destroy the witness of the church and drive people away from Christ, who has the *words of eternal life*.

To become a better person, we must realize there is **potential to activate, a power to stimulate, a practice to eliminate**, and ...

**Fourth, there is a Person to emulate (2:17–18)**

Paul looked at his imprisonment and possible execution as an opportunity to be an encouragement to other believers. Therefore, he writes: *But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith* (2:17a). The *drink offering* refers to the Jewish practice of pouring wine on an animal at the altar of sacrifice in the temple as an act of dedicating it to God (Ex 29:40; Num. 15:5–7).

If Paul's imprisonment and possible martyrdom would in any way encourage others, he says: *I am glad and rejoice with all of you* (2:17b) and adds: *So you too should be glad and rejoice with me* (2:18). Paul is just reflecting the mind of Christ whom we are to emulate. How does Hebrews 12:2a–b describe this fact?

If we emulate Christ, whose example Paul is following, and look at our adversities as opportunities to build the faith of others, our problems will turn into sources of joy, which will enormously reduce stress in our lives.

To become a **better person**, you must realize there is **potential to activate, a power to stimulate, a practice to eliminate, and a Person to emulate**.

## LESSON 8    Making and Keeping Friends (Philippians 2:19–30)

Do you have too many friends? Have you ever been lonely? Have you ever felt like the Hank Williams' song "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry"? One survey revealed the number one emotional problem in America is loneliness. A man named Dale Carnegie wrote a book entitled "How To Win Friends and Influence People" that stayed on the New York Times' best-seller list for ten years—an all time record. It has sold more than 15 million copies.

We not only **want** friends; God made us so we also **need** friends. When God made Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden, he was in a perfect paradise, but he was not happy. What was the problem? How does God answer that question in Genesis 2:18a?

Real friendships don't just happen. They are made intentionally. In Philippians chapter two we are going to look at **four** essentials for **making and keeping friends**.

### Be concerned (2:19–20)

Paul's imprisonment in Rome made it impossible for him to visit his friends in Philippi. Therefore, he writes: *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you* (2:19). Timothy was Paul's young associate who traveled with him on his second missionary journey when Paul established the church at Philippi. Because the Philippians knew Timothy, Paul writes, *I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare* (2:20).

Paul says he is sending Timothy to Philippi so Paul might *be cheered* or encouraged because he expects to hear good things about them. One reason Paul had so many friends was his continued concern for them.

Most of us do not have many friends like this because we are so consumed with our own families, our own careers, our own problems, and our own lives. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 2:8 that he and his associates loved

the Thessalonians so much they shared not only *the gospel* with them but what else?

That's concern! Concern is when we are willing to share *our lives*, or "souls," which means our time. There's an old saying that is so true of most of us. It goes: "I'd rather make enemies than friends because it's less trouble."

To make and keep friends, **be concerned** and ...

### **Be consistent (2:21–24)**

Timothy was evidently a great friend because Paul writes of him: *For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself* (2:21–22a). Timothy was willing to drop what he was doing in Rome and make the 40-day journey to Philippi. Timothy was a great friend because he proved himself to be consistent and dependable. How is being a consistent friend described in Proverbs 17:17a?

Many men do not have even one really close friend. They have acquaintances and know a lot of people, but not one close friend. The main reason for this is just being too busy. We don't take time to make close friends.

Even Jesus, because of His human nature during His incarnation, needed close friends. The night before He is crucified, He goes to the Garden of Gethsemane. As He enters the gate, He says to His disciples: "*Sit here while I go over there and pray*" (Mt 26:36). Then, He takes His inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, and John—with Him deeper into the Garden and tells them His "*soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*" (Mk 14:34a). What does Jesus then say to them in Mark 14:34b?

In other words, Jesus is saying, “Guys, I just need you to be close to me right now.” Even Jesus needed close friends, and so do you.

You may say, “I really need a good, close friend. How do I get one?” You get one by being a good friend like Timothy. It is really just practicing what principle found in Proverbs 18:24a (KJV or NKJV)?

Paul tells the Philippians, *I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me* (Philip. 2:23). Apparently, Paul’s trial was to be decided soon and would result in either execution or release, so he wants Timothy with him until then. Though Paul does not know for sure, he believes he will be released; so he writes, *And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon* (2:24).

To make and keep friends, **be concerned, be consistent**, and ...

### **Be real (2:25–27)**

Now Paul mentions another friend named Epaphroditus [e-paf-ro-die'-tus] who has come from Philippi to Rome to deliver a love offering to Paul from the Philippian church (4:18). It appears Epaphroditus was to have remained in Rome with Paul indefinitely to minister to and encourage him. However, Paul is sending him back because *he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill* (2:25–26).

The Philippians’ concern about Epaphroditus was well-founded because Paul writes: *Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow* (2:27). Whatever illness Epaphroditus had, it must have been very serious because he *almost died*. It is interesting that earlier Paul had exercised extraordinary gifts of healing so *even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick*, and they were healed (Acts 19:12). However, apparently Paul lost his gift of healing as the New Testament was nearing completion. That’s why he writes what fact in 2 Timothy 4:20b?

Paul didn't try to act super-spiritual; he didn't pretend to be a healer. He was real. If you want to win close friends, be authentic and honest. Paul never tried to act like a super-saint. Therefore, how does Paul describe himself in 1 Timothy 1:15b?

Paul had many close friends because he was real. Being real is what builds friendships. We must drop the mask and be transparent and honest about ourselves. I don't want to shock you, but I want to tell you a little secret about yourself. Are you ready? Ok! Everyone already knows you are not perfect! Does that surprise you? Don't pretend to be something you are not. Don't pretend to be a super-Christian. Get off the pedestal and be real, and you will have a lot more friends.

To make and keep friends, **be concerned, be consistent, be real**, and ...

### **Be complimentary (2:28–30)**

Now that Epaphroditus has recovered, Paul is sending him back and writes: *Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me* (2:29–30). Paul lets the Philippians know Epaphroditus had not failed in his mission, and he should be given *honor*. What a compliment! Nothing builds friendships like compliments. If you want to make and keep friends, look for something in people you can genuinely compliment. How does Proverbs 22:11 express this principle?

The Hebrew word translated *gracious* refers to kind, favorable speech. Compliments! If you are complimentary, you can be friends with anyone, including kings, but negative, critical people don't have close friends.

To make friends, you must take off the blinders and look for the good in others; you will see it. How about your spouse? If you want to be good friends, find something to compliment. What about your kids or grandkids? I know they do stuff that irritates you, but look for the good in them to compliment, and you can be wonderful friends with your kids or grandkids. The reason it's hard for some of us to find something to compliment is we are often oblivious to the obvious. We are in a mode to just focus on the negative. But having *gracious* speech and being able to make friends requires obeying what command in Hebrews 3:13a?

A friend brings out the best in others with compliments. So, bring out the best in others by encouraging them and building them up, not tearing them down.

To make and keep friends, **be concerned, be consistent, be real, and be complimentary**. Which of these areas needs the most attention in your life? What will you do about it and when?

## LESSON 9     Stress-free Salvation (Philippians 3:1–6)

Salvation causes stress in many believers' lives because they don't understand salvation in Christ is stress-free. They are all stressed out because they are frantically trying to work their way to heaven. In this passage, Paul reveals the principles of **stress-free salvation**.

### Salvation is based on Christ (3:1–3)

Paul writes: *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!* (3:1a). We should *rejoice* because we have been forgiven of all our sin and have eternal life *in the Lord*. The context in which we *rejoice* is not our own character or our good works but in our salvation *in the Lord*. Salvation that causes us to *rejoice* is based on a relationship with Jesus Christ that produces a firm confidence in God's purpose and power. What other reason does Psalm 13:5 give for having a salvation that should cause us to rejoice?

Paul continues: *It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you* (3:1b). To have a **stress-free salvation**, we must be able to discern false teachings and understand the basics of the faith. Thus, Paul warns the Philippian believers: *Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh* (3:2). Paul is referring to the Judaizers who were trying to convince the Philippian believers to trust in a religion of rites, rituals, and regulations rather than a **stress-free salvation** based on their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul uses three words to describe the Judaizers. First, he calls them *dogs*. Today when we think of *dogs* we visualize cute, cuddly pets. But in biblical times *dogs* were dirty, disease-carrying, vicious animals that roamed the streets in packs and attacked passersby. The word *dogs* was a very uncomplimentary term (see Rev. 22:15). Another example is in Proverbs 26:11. Write it below:

Like repulsive, vicious *dogs*, the Judaizers attacked new converts with their false, legalistic teaching. Like dangerous *dogs*, all false teachers who teach salvation by works are to be avoided.

A little boy had a dog he claimed was a pure-bred police dog. However, it was obvious his pet was just an ordinary, mongrel dog. One day a man questioned the boy's claim by saying, "That dog just looks like an ordinary alley dog to me." The little boy replied, "He works undercover."

Next, Paul calls these false teachers *men who do evil*, or "evil workers," (Philip. 3:2). The word translated *evil* (KAKOS, kock-os') means injurious or harmful. Thus, the Judaizers were hurting the Philippians by substituting legalism for a relationship with Christ. Paul also calls these teachers *mutilators of the flesh* (3:2) because they taught circumcision was essential to salvation. Therefore, Paul writes: *For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God* (3:3a). To *worship by the Spirit of God* involves much more than going to worship services on Sunday, singing, and listening to a sermon. The word translated *worship* (LATREUŌ, lat-roo'-oh) means to render religious service or to serve. True worship is living a life of service to God. How is this kind of worship described in Hebrews 13:16?

As we worship God by serving Him, we can have *no confidence in the flesh* (3:3b). To have **stress-free salvation**, we must abandon all efforts of saving ourselves and place our faith in salvation by grace alone, which cannot be mixed with works or self-effort. Why, according to Romans 11:6?

When it comes to salvation, *grace* says "done!" Legalism says "do!" We are not saved because of what we do but by *grace* because of what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. That's why **stress-free salvation is based on Christ** and ...

### **Salvation is not based on character (3:4–6)**

Prior to becoming a Christian, Paul was a pure-blooded super star in Judaism. He writes: *though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more* (3:4). If anyone had reason to trust in works or character to get them to heaven, it was Paul. In this passage Paul gives us **four** examples of what will not save us.

**1. We are not saved by rituals.** Paul was *circumcised on the eighth day* (3:5a). This means Paul was born a Jew; he was not a proselyte Jew. People today still trust in rituals. You can take communion until you turn grape-purple and still not be saved. You can be baptized until your skin looks like a prune and still not know the Savior. If you are trusting in any ritual to get you to heaven, you are in big trouble. Why, according to Titus 3:5a?

**2. We are not saved by relatives.** Another of Paul's impressive credentials is being *of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews* (3:5b). Paul was born a member of God's chosen people, the Israelites. He was born into *the tribe of Benjamin*, one of the most prominent and respected tribes. When the nation of Israel divided at the death of Solomon, only the tribe of Benjamin was faithful to the tribe of Judah, the royal tribe of David and the tribe through which the Messiah would be born. Mordecai, who saved the Jews from genocide during the time of Esther, was of the tribe of Benjamin (Est. 2:5).

The Jews of Jesus' day thought they would go to heaven because they were the children, or descendants, of Abraham. In the same way, some people today think they will go to heaven because their parents were Christians. What did Jesus say to the Jews who thought they would get into heaven because they were the children of Abraham (John 8:39b)?

Abraham believed God's promises and acted upon them (Gen. 15:6). Today, the true children of Abraham follow his example. Just because you grew up in a Christian home doesn't make you a Christian anymore than

being born in a garage would make you an automobile or being born in a kitchen would make you a biscuit.

**3. We are not saved by religion.** Paul was also a *Pharisee* (Philip. 3:5c). The Pharisees were the strictest sect of the Jews and were the most zealous observers of the Law. Because Jesus often criticized the Pharisees' hypocrisy, many of us have the wrong impression of them. The average Pharisee was sincerely religious; he fasted twice a week, prayed three times a day, believed the Bible, tithed, and was totally faithful to his wife and family. Even in our day, any church would be glad to have such a member and would probably make him a teacher or a deacon.

Paul writes of his pre-Christian life: *as for zeal, persecuting the church* (3:6a). This means Paul was so sincere about his religion he persecuted people he believed were heretics. When it comes to religion some people say, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are sincere." However, sincerity is no substitute for believing the truth. If you go to your medicine cabinet in the middle of the night and in the darkness take some deadly poison by mistake, even though you sincerely believe it is medicine, the next morning you will be sincerely dead. You can sincerely believe 2 plus 2 equals 5, but no matter how sincerely you believe it, you are still wrong.

Sincere religion is the most dangerous thing in the world because the false assurance of religion causes a person not to see himself or herself as a sinner who needs a savior. The Pharisees were sincerely religious, but what does Jesus tell them in Matthew 21:31?

Jesus is not glorifying dishonesty and immorality. He is saying sinful people who admit their sin will go to heaven before those who are self-righteous because of some religion that blinds them to their sinfulness.

**4. We are not saved by right living.** Paul writes: *As for legalistic righteousness, faultless* (Philip. 3:6b). This doesn't mean Paul thought he was perfect, but no one could fault him for not keeping any part of the Law. In other words, Paul lived right or as righteously as he knew how. But trying to be saved by right living is like trying to jump the Grand Canyon. Oh, you might jump further than most, but you will still fall to your death. You may live better than most people and may be a good moral person, but what does the Bible say in Isaiah 64:6b?

*Filthy rags* were used to wipe puss from the sores of lepers, and they were also used as menstrual rags. Compared to the righteousness Christ offers us, the best day of our lives is like a *filthy* rag.

Knowing how we are saved will take a lot of stress out of life. We are not saved by **rituals, relatives, religion, or right living**. We are saved by a Redeemer. How does Romans 10:4 express this truth?

**Stress-free salvation is based on Christ not character**, which means your salvation is not based on what you do but what Jesus did for you on the cross.

## LESSON 10 Making the Most of Your Life (Philippians 3:7–14)

One thing that causes a tremendous amount of stress is not knowing how to make the most of our lives. Jesus didn't come just so we could have all our sins forgiven and a home in heaven. He also came so we could make the most of our lives here and now—to have life *to the full* (Jn 10:10b). In this passage, Paul tells us **three** things required for making the most of our lives.

### Make an exchange (3:7–9)

Paul writes: *But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ* (3:7). Paul once highly valued his religious pedigree but now considers it *loss*. Paul considered everything that kept him from trusting in Christ as Savior and finding real joy in his life as *loss*. Before he received Christ, what Paul thought were assets were really liabilities as far as his salvation and joy were concerned.

When Paul came to understand *the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus*, all his accomplishments became nothing more than *rubbish* by comparison (3:8). The word translated *rubbish* (SKUBALON, skoo'-bal-on) can also be translated “manure” or “dung”. Paul used the strongest possible word to describe his disdain for all the religious elements that had kept him from knowing Christ. Apart from Christ, how does Paul describe all humanity in Romans 3:10?

When you become a Christian, you exchange your sin for Christ's righteousness. You exchange your guilt for a clear conscience, and a meaningless life for a life with purpose and significance. Last, but not least, you exchange an eternity in hell for eternity in heaven.

Paul was overjoyed to exchange the tremendous burden of futile, self-righteous efforts for *that which is through faith in Christ—the*

*righteousness that comes from God and is by faith* (Philip. 3:9b). How does Paul describe this *righteousness* in 2 Corinthians 5:21?

This *righteousness* is unattainable by obedience to the Law or by any human efforts. When we place our faith in Christ, we exchange our sins for the *righteousness of God in Him*. This means in Christ we are all God requires us to be and all we could never be in ourselves. Because of Christ's death on the cross, we can exchange our sins for the *righteousness that comes from God and is by faith*. How does Galatians 2:16a express this truth?

To make the most of our lives, we must **make an exchange** and ...

### **Develop a growing relationship with Christ (3:10–13a)**

Christianity is not a religion; it is a relationship. Therefore, Paul writes: *I want to know Christ* (3:10a). The word translated *know* (GINÓSKŌ, ghih-oh'-skoh) refers to knowing someone and establishing a relationship. Paul did not just want to *know* the facts about Christ; he wanted to *know* Him personally. Do you *know* who the president of the United States is? Do you *know* where he lives? Do you *know* his wife's name? Do you *know* him personally? There is a big difference in knowing about someone and knowing him or her personally. Being a Christian is much more than knowing the facts of Jesus' life; it is knowing Him personally. You may say, "How do I *know* if I *know* Him personally? I go to church; I read my Bible and pray." However, you can do all these things and still not *know* Jesus. How does 1 John 2:3 tell us we can *know* if we *know* Jesus personally?

This doesn't mean we must follow a list of rules without messing up before we can really *know* the Lord. It means obedience is the natural result of getting to *know* Jesus personally. Jesus came to earth and died on

the cross so we could have eternal life. In His prayer the night before His crucifixion, how does Jesus explain *eternal life* in John 17:3?

Paul knew getting to *know* Jesus personally meant he would experience *the power of his resurrection* (Philip. 3:10a). The same *power* that raised Jesus from the dead and gives us new life in Christ enables us to *know* Jesus and become more and more like Him.

Paul tells us getting to *know* Christ includes *the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings* (3:10b). As we get to *know* Jesus personally our lives are transformed, and then we sometimes must deal with rejection and ridicule by those who don't *know* Christ. Thus, we are sharing in *his sufferings*.

The same *power* that raised Jesus from the dead gives us the *power* to live for Him, which means we are *becoming like him in his death* (3:10c). In other words, we die to our old natures and desires.

Paul wants to *know* Christ even more personally *and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead* (3:11). Paul is confident of his salvation and resurrection (Rom. 8:38–39 & Philip. 1:6). I think Paul is referring to something he wants to *attain* that is more than just *the resurrection*. It is something Paul wants to *attain* at *the resurrection* and is the same thing we should want to *attain*. It is found in 1 John 2:28b. What is it?

Paul knows the Christian life is a process, a lifetime of learning and growing. Therefore, he writes: *Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect* (Philip. 3:12a). Paul doesn't want to be misunderstood—he is not claiming his conversion made him *perfect*. This would lead to haughtiness and pride, which are very dangerous because of what truth found in Proverbs 16:18?

To become better Christians, we must, like Paul, be dissatisfied with our present spiritual condition. Paul continues: *but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider*

*myself yet to have taken hold of it* (Philip. 3:12–13a). We will never grow in our relationship with Christ until we realize growth is necessary.

To make the most of our lives, we must **make an exchange, develop a growing relationship with Christ**, and ...

### **Let go of the past (3:13b–14)**

Paul writes: *But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind* (3:13b). To make the most of your life, stop wasting time regretting the past. It's passed, it's gone. Let go of your guilt, grief, and grudges. You can't change the past, but with God's help you can change the future. Holding on to the past can prevent us from being what God wants us to be in the present. How does Jesus express this truth in Luke 9:62?

We can't drive our cars looking in the rearview mirror. We can't run a race looking behind us. Similarly, we can't run the race the Lord has for us without *forgetting what is behind* (3:13b) and letting go of our guilt, grief, and grudges.

You can only forget what is in the past if you are *straining toward what is ahead* (3:13c). To make the most of your life, stop concentrating on what you have been and start concentrating on what you can be in Christ.

Paul continues: *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus* (3:14). The *goal* and the *prize* are the same. At the Greek games, the winner of a race was taken to the seat of the judge and a wreath was placed upon his head. This is the *prize* Paul is *straining* and pressing toward. Paul describes his goal in his last letter, *2 Timothy*, written just before he was executed. He writes in chapter two that he has *fought the good fight ... finished the race ... and ... kept the faith* (2 Tim. 4:7). Therefore, what does he write in *2 Timothy 4:8a*?

I hope I can say when it comes time for me to die that I have *fought the good fight ... finished the race ... and ... kept the faith*. Then, as a result, in heaven the Lord will put a *crown* on my head and say to me what words we all should want to hear (see Matthew 25:23a)?

To make the most of your life, you must do three things: **make an exchange, develop a growing relationship with Christ, and let go of the past**. Which of these needs the most attention in your life, and what will you do about it?

## LESSON 11    Becoming More and More Like Jesus (Philippians 3:15–4:1)

As Christians we should be continually growing and becoming more like Jesus Christ. Christians should be like green fruit on a tree, always maturing. When a piece of fruit reaches maturity and becomes ripe, what happens? It begins to rot. When you think you are all you need to be as a Christian and are completely mature, you will begin to rot spiritually. We find **four** things in this passage we must do to become more and more like Jesus and to keep from rotting spiritually.

### 1. Live biblically (3:15–16)

Paul writes: *All of us who are mature should take such a view of things* (3:15a). Like Paul, we should all be focused on the *goal* and *prize* (3:14) of becoming more and more like Christ, so when we stand before God He will say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (Mt 25:21a).

Paul was an experienced Bible teacher and knew not all believers would agree with Him, so he writes: *And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you* (3:15b). Some Christians think they do not need to grow and mature continually, but Paul says God will make it *clear* they do. The primary way God makes things *clear* to us is through His Word. For example, what command does God give us in 2 Peter 3:18a?

Is that a command or a suggestion? It is a command! Therefore, it is a sin not to be growing in Christ.

Sometimes God also makes things *clear* to us through problems. As Christians we don’t stand still; we are either growing and getting closer to God or we are moving away. As we move away from God, at some point we move into sin. When we do, God disciplines us. How does Psalm 119:67 describe this truth?

Paul writes: *Only let us live up to what we have already attained* (3:16). The word translated *live*, or “walk,” (STOICHEŌ, stoy-keh'-oh) is a military term that means “to march in rank” or march in line. It means we stay in line with what we *have already attained* or already know about God’s Word.

The problem with most Christians is not that they don’t know enough Bible; the problem is they don’t live the Bible they already know. Do you already know enough Bible to be a much better Christian? Of course! Then live what you *have already attained* in biblical knowledge.

To become more and more like Jesus, **live biblically** and ...

## 2. Live cautiously (3:17–19)

Now, Paul urges the Philippians to follow his example of having as his goal a desire to become more and more like Jesus Christ (3:17a). Then, he writes: *take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you* (3:17b). The two key words in verse 17 are *example* and *pattern*. Let me ask you a very personal question: what kind of Christian will new believers in your church become if they use you as an *example* or *pattern*? All of us need to remember what words of Jesus in John 13:15?

Becoming more and more like Christ means living as He lived and never forgetting we are examples to others at home, at school, and at work.

Next, Paul warns of examples to avoid. He writes: *For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ* (3:18). Here Paul is referring to people who call themselves Christians but pervert the principles of God’s Word. They are not openly hostile to the faith; they just want to change it. They are often church members who seek acceptance so they can gain places of influence

or leadership. In Matthew 7:15b, how does Jesus warn us about such *enemies*, whom He calls *false prophets*?

Paul tells us about such people in verse 19: *Their destiny is destruction*, which means eternal separation from God. Also, he writes *their god is their stomach*. This means the most important thing in their lives is satisfying their physical appetites. Then, Paul writes: *their glory is in their shame*, which means they take pride in justifying behavior the Bible condemns as sin. How does Isaiah 5:20a describe such people?

Paul's final description of *enemies of the cross* is: *Their mind is on earthly things* (3:19d). They judge everything by culture rather than by Christ. They choose to live by the standards of the world rather than the Word. To such people, what does James 4:4a declare?

*Adulterous people* claim to be Christians but want the church to accept the ways of the *world*. The word *world* refers to the values of sinful culture. If you claim to be a Christian but believe like the world, the Bible says you are an enemy of God. Therefore, if you claim to be a Christian, you are either an example or an enemy of the cross.

To become more and more like Jesus, we must **live biblically, live cautiously**, and ...

### 3. Live expectantly (3:20–21)

As we discovered in our last lesson, we must let go of the past and look to the future. Paul reminds us *our citizenship is in heaven* (3:20a). As Christians, we are “resident aliens” living temporarily in a foreign country. Therefore, *we eagerly await a Savior from there* (heaven), *the Lord Jesus Christ* (3:20b). We are not to wait with resignation or disinterest, but eagerly. To eagerly wait for Christ gives us the motivation to become more like Him.

Do you really believe Jesus could return at any time? Jesus said He will come unexpectedly, and even believers will be going about their daily routines. He said *two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left* (Mt 24:40–41). Then, what does our Lord say in verse 42?

When Jesus comes, He, *by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body* (3:21). When Christ returns we will get what is called our redeemed or glorified bodies. They will be like Christ's resurrected body—they will be perfect, they will not age, and they will not be susceptible to disease or decay. We will be able to eat, drink, talk, walk, and do all the things we want to do to enjoy life, but will not have the physical limitations of our present bodies. In heaven I will be able to eat all the hot fudge sundaes I want without worrying about gaining weight.

To become more and more like Jesus, we must **live biblically, live cautiously, live expectantly**, and ...

#### 4. Live lovingly (4:1)

Paul concludes this section: *Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!* (4:1). When we see the word *therefore* in the Bible, we should always ask, “What is it there for?” It refers to what Paul has said in the previous chapter about striving *toward the goal* or *prize* of **becoming more and more like Jesus**.

We know Paul lived lovingly by seeing how he refers to the Philippian believers. He refers to them as *brothers, whom I love and long for*, his *joy*, and his *crown* and *dear friends*. These are all terms of endearment. Paul passes what test Jesus said the world could use to determine who are His real disciples (John 13:35)?

The *crown* (STEPHANOS, stef'-ahn-os) in Philippians 4:1 doesn't refer to a royal crown but a victor's *crown*. It was a woven garland or wreath of oak or olive branches, or a replica of these in gold. The *crown* was a symbol of victory and celebration. One of Paul's greatest rewards in heaven would be knowing the Philippians were there because of his ministry. What could make us more like Jesus than loving people into heaven, as Paul did! We can do this because of what truth found in 2 Corinthians 5:14a?

This means whatever we do we do because Christ's love controls us. Because Christ in love died for others, in love we should live for others.

To become more and more like Jesus, **live biblically, live cautiously, live expectantly, and live lovingly.**

## LESSON 12 Strangling Stress (Philippians 4:2–9)

Stress causes us to do some strange things. This week I read about a woman who shared with her friend: “My husband bought me a mood ring the other day. When I’m in a good mood it turns green. When I’m in a bad mood, it leaves a red mark on his forehead.” In chapter four Paul tells us **four** things we must do to strangle stress in our lives.

### Eliminate conflict (4:2–3)

Paul knew relationship problems create a great deal of stress—probably the most painful and draining stress of all because they take joy out of every area of life.

Paul also knew relationship problems get us sidetracked in our Christian lives, so he writes: *I plead with Euodia (u-oh-dee'-ah) and I plead with Syntyche (sin-tie'-key) to agree with each other in the Lord* (4:2). We don’t know who these two women are, but Paul writes of them: *these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel* (4:3). Paul tells them *to agree with each other in the Lord*. This is reminiscent of what command in Romans 14:19?

How can you *make every effort* to do things that lead to *peace*? There are **three** approaches to effective conflict resolution or peace making.

**1. Compromise.** This approach to a disagreement looks for common ground. It requires each person be willing to give a little, but neither should have to do all the sacrificing. Neither person gets everything, but both get something.

**2. Concession.** This means one person does all the sacrificing or giving in. If, however, the concession is made through pressure or coercion, the resolution will not last. Concession must be the free choice of the person making the concession. This involves what principle in 1 Peter 3:8?

**3. Can it.** This approach is for people with an irreconcilable disagreement. They put the disagreement “on a shelf” for a time, agreeing to disagree. Before using this method of conflict resolution, the first two methods should be tried and every effort made to reach an agreement.

To strangle stress, we must **eliminate conflict** and ...

## Celebrate today (4:4–5)

Stress is mostly attitude. That’s why Paul writes: *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!* (4:4). How could a prisoner, who didn’t know if he would be executed or released, write that? Paul could *rejoice* because he knew no matter what happened to him, God was in control and allowed his circumstances for some good purpose. How do we obey the command to *rejoice in the Lord always*, or every day? By remembering what wonderful verse in Psalm 118:24?

Take a blank sheet of paper and put a dot right in the middle. When you look at the paper, what do you see? The dot, right? The dot represents your problems and the white space your blessings. Our problem is the moment one black spot appears, we fix our attention on it and fail to focus on all the good things in our lives.

Have you ever asked someone, “How’s your day going,” and they whine, “Oh, so, so” or “Oh, it’s going?” What kind of attitude is that toward a *day the LORD has made*? To *rejoice* in every day the Lord makes, when someone asks you, “How’s your day going,” say “Teeerrific!” If you can’t bring yourself to say “teeerrific,” say “good.” **Stress-free living** means we *rejoice* in today because God made it, and it’s better than we deserve.

Next, Paul writes: *Let your gentleness be evident to all* (4:5a). The word translated *gentleness*, or “moderation,” means being mild or patient. It is the idea of not getting all uptight. Basically, it means “lighten up” or “chill.” Why should we lighten up? Because *the Lord is near* (4:5b). The word translated *near* (ENGUS, eng-goos’) can mean near in presence or

near in time, referring to the Second Coming. Here I think it refers to the nearness of the Lord's presence because in the next verse Paul encourages us to pray, and what truth do we find in Psalm 145:18?

To strangle stress in our lives, we must **eliminate conflict, celebrate today**, and ...

### **Anticipate tomorrow (4:6–7)**

How can we strangle stress when we know tomorrow is coming? Paul puts it like this: *Do not be anxious about anything* (4:6a). That means not to worry about anything. Worry is simply fear or apprehension about tomorrow or the future. How can we not worry about tomorrow? By giving tomorrow to God! How do we do that? Paul tells us in the next part of the verse: *but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God* (4:6b).

The word translated *prayer* (PROSEUCHĒ, pros-yoo-kay') refers to an attitude of worship and earnestness. *Petition*, or “supplication,” means requests or asking the Lord for something. In our petitions we need to remember what truth found in Psalm 84:11c?

God doesn't want to withhold any *good thing* from us but the problem is we don't ask (Jas. 4:2d). To pray and *petition* with *thanksgiving* means we are thankful for God's previous blessings as we anticipate future ones. Few things strangle stress like an attitude of gratitude. It is the healthiest human emotion. Nothing makes us happier, and being grateful even strengthens our immune systems. Ungrateful people tend to be unhappy and sick. For good mental and physical health we must obey what command in 1 Thessalonians 5:18?

This verse doesn't say to *give thanks for all circumstances*; it says to *give thanks in all circumstances* (emphasis mine). In all *circumstances* you can

thank God that He is with you and has a purpose for whatever happens in your life. Right now in the right hand margin, write down **five things** for which you are thankful, including at least two people. Now, share some of them with your class.

If we do what Paul says in verse six, the result will be ... *the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (4:7). The word translated *guard* is a military term referring to a soldier or sentinel guarding a garrison or fort. God's *peace* is like soldiers surrounding our *hearts* (feelings and emotions) and *minds* (mental processes and dispositions), protecting them against harmful forces like confusion, worry, doubt, and stress. This is simply a fulfillment of what promise found in Isaiah 26:3?

The steps to **strangling stress** are: **eliminate conflict, celebrate today, anticipate tomorrow**, and ...

### **Concentrate on good things (4:8–9)**

To strangle stress, we must change the way we think. Stress is always an inside job; it has to do with our thoughts. Therefore, Paul tells us how we should think. We should think about what is *true* ... *noble* ... *right* ... *pure* ... *lovely* ... *admirable* ... *excellent or praiseworthy* (4:8). This means we need to be careful about what we listen to, watch, and read because what we put into our minds affects how we feel and live. How does Proverbs 23:7a [KJV or NASB] remind us of this fact?

**Strangling stress** involves a deliberate, conscious choice to let our minds be saturated with the positive, good things Paul lists in verse 8. If you think good thoughts, how will you feel? Good, right? If you think praiseworthy thoughts, you will go around praising and encouraging

people, not gossiping and criticizing. Think of the stress that will take out of your life!

Paul concludes this section: *Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice* (4:9). This means **strangling stress** requires obeying what command in James 1:22?

Just hearing or reading this lesson won't strangle your stress; you must *put it into practice*. When you *put* these things *into practice*, the Bible says *the God of peace will be with you* (Philip. 4:9), and His *peace* will strangle your stress.

To strangle stress in your life, you must **eliminate conflict, celebrate today, anticipate tomorrow, and concentrate on good things**.

## LESSON 13 Enjoying the Rest of Your Life (Philippians 4:10–23)

Would you like to enjoy the rest of your life? In today's culture, people have never had so much and enjoyed it so little. Enjoying life is not based on the houses we live in, cars we drive, or incomes we attain. In this final passage Paul shares with us the principles for enjoying the rest of our lives, which requires doing **four** things:

### **First, learn to be content (4:10–12)**

Paul expresses his gratitude for the Philippians by writing: *I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it* (4:10). Paul had apparently been receiving financial support from the Philippians, but for some reason it had stopped, perhaps because of Paul's uncertain itinerary or their having no way to get the love offering to him. That's why Paul writes they *had no opportunity* to show their concern. He continues: *I am not saying this because I am in need* (4:11a). Then, Paul

shares one of the secrets for **enjoying the rest of your life**. What is it (4:11b)?

The word *content* means “satisfied.” Contentment is not complacency. It doesn’t mean we have no goals or ambitions in life. It simply means we don’t need to have more to be happy and stress-free.

We are not born with contentment. I am reminded of this every time I go with my grandkids to a toy store. They always want another toy, even though their toy boxes at home are filled to overflowing. Contentment is *learned*.

## How do we learn to be content?

**1. Stop comparing.** Comparing yourself to others always leads to discontentment. If you want to learn *to be content* and enjoy the rest of your life, stop comparing your spouse with someone else’s. Stop comparing your home, car, or income with someone else’s. The Bible teaches you should not compare or measure yourself with others (2 Cor. 10:12). If you do compare, what does the last phrase of that verse say about you?

There will always be someone who makes more money, drives a nicer car, has a more attractive spouse, and lives in a larger, fancier home. If we compare ourselves to others, we *are not wise* because we will never *be content* and never enjoy what we have.

If someone drives a nicer car than you do, is that person happier than you are? No, he or she is probably more stressed because of a larger car payment. Don’t be foolish; stop comparing!

**2. Stop being obsessed with having more.** Happiness has nothing to do with how much we have; it has everything to do with our attitudes toward what we have. We must stop thinking more stuff will make us happier. This is because of what truth found in Ecclesiastes 5:10?

**3. Accept change.** Life is a series of changes. We all have our “ups and downs”—emotionally, physically, and financially. There is nothing constant in life, except change. One key for learning *to be content* is adjusting to our changing circumstances. To a large degree, **enjoying the rest of your life** is based on your ability to adapt and to accept change. Paul puts it like this: *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want* (4:12).

When Paul wrote these words he was in prison, awaiting possible execution. He had been deserted by most of his friends and was seeing charlatan preachers get rich. How could he be content? He didn’t compare, he didn’t think more would make him happy, and he could accept change. To enjoy the rest of your life, you must **learn to be content** and ...

### **Second, lean on God’s power (4:13)**

Paul knew if he was to enjoy the rest of his life, he couldn’t depend on people, possessions, popularity, or pleasure. Instead, he was aware that enjoying the rest of his life depended on supernatural power. Therefore, what does he write in Philippians 4:13?

The Greek word translated *strength* is the word from which we get our English words “dynamite” and “dynamic.” A dynamic person is vivacious and energetic. Christ can give you the energy and power to *do everything*.

This means I can enjoy life when the grandkids come and make my house look like an explosion in Toys “R” Us. I can enjoy life when I don’t have perfect health. I can enjoy life when the stock market is way down and when I have problems that don’t seem to go away. However, I can enjoy the rest of my life only if I rely on supernatural power. This is because of what promise found in Isaiah 40:29?

Do you need *strength* to be a better wife, husband, parent, or grandparent? Do you need *strength* to make your marriage work, get out of debt, resist peer pressure, break a bad habit, lose weight, control your temper, or be nice to a difficult person? Jesus Christ can empower you to do anything.

Don't let your problems prevent you from enjoying life; **learn to be content, lean on God's power**, and ...

### Third, live generously (4:14–18)

Paul thanks the Philippians for their financial support, which had apparently been ongoing in the past because he thanks them for sending him *aid again and again* (4:14–16). Paul wants the Philippians to know they could expect dividends on their investments in his ministry, so he writes: *Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account* (4:17). The word translated *account* is a business term that refers to accruing interest. This is consistent with what spiritual principle found in Proverbs 11:25?

When life seems to be getting you down and you need refreshment, what you should do is refresh others. We block God's blessing on our lives by being selfish and stingy. To enjoy life, we need to remember what words of Jesus found in Luke 6:38a?

Paul refers to the gifts given him by the Philippians as *a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God* (4:18c). There is nothing you can do to make God more pleased with you than to be generous. Whenever we help others, especially those who minister to others, we are presenting *a fragrant offering* to God. There are really only two kinds of people in the world—takers and givers. The only ones who really enjoy life are the givers. If you want to go through the rest of your life all stressed-out, be

selfish and stingy. If you want to enjoy the rest of your life, be generous with your time, talent, and treasure.

To enjoy the rest of your life, **learn to be content, lean on God's power, live generously**, and ...

#### **Fourth, let God meet your needs (4:19–23)**

When we live generously, God will not forget our needs. Therefore, Paul writes: *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus* (4:19). Like all promises in the Bible, this promise has a premise. The premise is we can only claim this promise if we are generous like Paul describes in the previous verse. If you meet the premise, you can count on the promise.

The promise is *God will*, not God “might.” What will God do if you are generous? *Meet all your needs*—not some or most, but *all!* This means emotional, physical, relational, financial, and spiritual. This promise does not say all your “wants.” It says *all your needs*, not all your “greeds.” To have God meet all our needs, we must remember a principle taught throughout the New Testament. How is it phrased in 2 Corinthians 9:6?

The *glorious riches* God wants to give us are in *Christ Jesus* (Philip. 4:19b). The reason so many people are unhappy, unsatisfied, and unfulfilled is they don't know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Therefore, they run from job to job, relationship to relationship, hobby to hobby, fad to fad, etc. **Enjoying the rest of your life** begins by receiving Christ Jesus as Savior and Lord. That's why Jesus made what statement in John 10:10b?

In the last verses of this epistle, Paul writes: *To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen* (4:20). The word translated *glory* (DOXA, dox'-ah) is the word from which we get our English word “doxology.” It refers to an outburst of praise and worship that honors God. Doxologies

in the Bible are in response to wonderful truths revealed about God, such as this one about God supplying all our needs *in Christ Jesus*.

God usually meets our needs through other believers. Therefore, Paul mentions people through whom God has met his needs and who send greetings from Rome to the Philippian believers. All were used by God to support and encourage Paul during his imprisonment in Rome. He sends greetings from two different groups. First, he sends greetings from *the brothers who are with me*, which undoubtedly includes at least two people: Timothy (1:1 & 2:19), Paul's protégé, and son in the faith, and Luke, Paul's dear friend, associate, beloved physician (Col. 4:14), and the biographer of Paul's ministry. When Paul is imprisoned for the second time and later martyred, what does he write to Timothy when he tells him to come and bring John Mark (see 2 Timothy 4:11a)?

The second group is *all the saints ... especially those who belong to Caesar's household* (4:22). This refers to believers in the church at Rome, some of whom served in Caesar's palace and probably included some of Paul's guards he had won to Christ (1:13).

Paul ends this epistle: *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen* (4:23). This letter to the Philippians begins (1:2) and ends with *grace*. As we learned in Lesson One, there are three kinds of *grace*: "saving *grace*" (Eph. 2:8); "equipping *grace*" (Rom. 12:6 & 1 Pet. 4:10), and "empowering" or "sustaining *grace*" (2 Cor. 12:9). Through *grace* God saves us, equips us, and sustains us. Here Paul is referring to "sustaining *grace*" or how God meets our needs. To obtain God's *grace* to meet our needs, we must remember what fact in the last sentence of James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5?

To enjoy the rest of your life, **learn to be content, lean on God's power, live generously, and let God meet your needs.**