

Alleviating Stress

Since Christians reside in a *Fallen World* where actions are heavily influenced by the *Old Nature*, we find ourselves in a moral incubator which promotes sin. Inside this choice-requiring atmosphere stress levels increase each time we succumb to a trial. If believers are to taste victory through this course of character building, we need to learn how to avoid outcomes that end in discouragement.

Stress which affects all of us is a well-known factor contributing to physical illness and psychological disorders. Given the option, no one wants tension in their life since it disrupts the core of our being as it stakes a claim in our heart. So, how should believers deal with it? Thankfully, a resource intended to handle anxiety awaits those who tap into God's power through His Word. By identifying and adopting these divine solutions, we can enter into a gratifying safe haven cradled by peace. In this spiritual refuge, the believer is able to truly escape life's pressures triggered by stress.

Tools Provided for Stress Release

When we are saved, our journey begins as spiritual babes. In this new born state, believers are righteous in the presence of God through the work of Christ, but our actions are still primarily controlled by sin. This adolescent condition leaves us vulnerable to the Devil's temptations and lusts of our flesh, influences which prompt us to fall short of God's desired way of life. Unless something is done to counter this negative stimulus, we as naïve subjects will often surrender to sin and be thrust into a reality dominated by discouragement, stress and even depression. On a positive note, God-given direction is available which explains how we can grow out of this juvenile state and enter into the joy of salvation.

Peter speaks about this provision when he addresses the believer's initial state, "as now-born babes, completely desire the reasonable, deceit-less milk in order that by it you might be caused to grow unto salvation"¹ (1 Pet. 2:2). In this verse, the word "milk" (γαλα) figuratively refers to *sustenance from the Word of God* which nurtures us during *spiritual infancy* (Heb. 5:11-14). The verb "you might be caused to grow" (αυξηθητε) appears in the *passive voice* which identifies the *outside force prompting* our growth – the Spirit of God (1 Pet. 1:5; 4:14).

Paul teaches much the same thing when he ties the Corinthian's immaturity to their habitual disregard for his message. To remedy this blockade for growth, as a physician, Paul redirects their attention to *truth he received to guide the Church*, the "wisdom of God in a mystery" (1 Cor. 2:7). He prescribes this revelation as the *growth-enabling source* "God predestined before the ages for

our glory” since it holds potential to conform us into the image of God (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 3:13).

As Christians gain perspective from *God’s wisdom found in these newly revealed guidelines*, we can experience peace (Phil. 4:9). This occurs when our mind is renewed as we “let the word of Christ dwell in” us “richly” so our natural way of thinking is discarded in favor of divine truth (Rom. 12:2; Col. 1:25 – 2:3; 3:16). Within this transformation, His indwelling Spirit enables us to “know the things having been freely given to us by God” as well as to properly discern what is in our “heart” (Rom. 5:3-5; Heb. 4:12; 1 Cor. 2:12; Phil. 2:13; 3:10; Titus 3:5). Now that we are morally alive, we should choose to utilize *the Spirit’s power* in order to activate *this message*. By use of these two instruments we can achieve peace and defeat stress in everyday circumstances (Rom. 8:7-10; Eph. 2:1-5).

Our Righteous Standing with God Reduces Stress

Having identified the divine communication that coaches us to victory, let us glean some truths from it which design a game plan for handling stress. First, the *righteous standing Christians have in Jesus Christ* should greatly diminish worry. Romans 5:1 supports this thought as it reads, “Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ.” The word “peace” (εἰρήνην) speaks of a *state of tranquility* or *lack of tension*. Therefore, the “peace” which results from a relationship “with God” affects our lives by replacing the fear of His wrath against sin with a *spiritual calm* (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; Eph. 2:3; 5:6). This conversion expressed by the *aorist participle* “having been justified” (δικαιωθέντες) indicates we have *already been vindicated* from this eternal penalty.

In addition, the verb “we have” (εχόμεν) in its *present tense form* emphasizes the point believers *currently possess* this divine “peace” (Rom. 3:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:21). Because of the work of Christ, we are no longer God’s “enemies” but have been “reconciled” to be His friends. Within this restored relationship, we are a new creation, enjoy a *tranquil union* with our Father, and gain the capacity to have “peace” with all men (Rom. 12:18; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 1:20-22).

Second, in this position of being acceptable to God, Christians can find *rest from the sure hope of being changed into Christ’s sinless character* when He returns, which is a guarantee entirely founded on God’s predetermined purpose (Acts 13:48; Rom. 8:29-30; Eph. 1:4-5; Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 1:27; Heb. 6:18-19). However, this *rest* can only become a reality after we grasp how these promises were activated in us at the point of salvation and as we increasingly enter into

communion with the Person of God who made them (Rom. 9:21, 23; 1 Cor. 12:18; Heb. 4:1-13). To the extent this “hope” takes root in our heart, we will be encouraged during life’s trials as well as relieved from concerns related to death and the afterlife.

Third, Christians’ solid standing with God should spawn *emotional security* since we are assured no “created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God” (Rom. 8:38). When this declaration is followed to its ultimate conclusion it is clear that not even we, as part of the creation, are able to disconnect ourselves from the Creator. For, both our enlightenment and eternal association with Him are initiated by the “faithfulness of the operation of God” (Col. 2:12; 2 Cor. 4:3-6). Even though the Bible states our salvation is fully accomplished by Him, this certainty will give rise to *confidence only after we internalize it by faith*.

A fourth psychological sanctuary resulting from our position in Christ is the fact our *Father has made us His children*. This reality is interconnected with His purpose for us to inherit glory (Rom. 8:16-17, 29-30; Eph. 1:5-6). Now that we are His offspring, we find ourselves in a cocoon of redeeming love and in a morally alive state where His indwelling Spirit provides us with both the desire and power to be transformed into God’s righteous character (Rom. 8:10; Eph. 3:16; Phil. 2:13).

Fifth, as His family, we can experience additional tranquility by comprehending how *valuable we are to God*. Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1:18 centers on this thought when he expresses a desire for believers to realize what God has done for us so we might know “what is the richness associated with the glory of His inheritance in the saints”. This verse teaches God in effect created His own “*inheritance*” by making us “*saints*” when He “chose us” in Christ “to be holy and blameless” and forgave our sins through the “blood” of the cross (Eph. 1:4, 7, 11, 14; 2:7; 3:10). When believers recognize how we represent part of God’s legacy as *His precious trophies*, our self-esteem will increase. This new outlook will yield a healthy pride which naturally counters the destructive feelings of condemnation and fear promoted by sin (Rom. 7:17-25).

Finally, as the “called ones according to” God’s “purpose”, Christians benefit by experiencing the promise, “*all things work together for good*” (Rom. 8:28). This “good” builds character in us in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, we gain qualities such as “peace” and “joy” as we obey the Word by submitting to the power of His Spirit (Gal. 5:22; Phil. 2:12-13; 4:8-9). Then, when correction is needed, we have the assurance “whom the Lord loves, He disciplines” (Heb. 12:6-8). Those who endure God’s corrective acts of love will profit by receiving the “peaceful fruit of righteousness” (v. 11). So, whether we choose the easy

way or the hard way, both paths eventually lead to a *favorable outcome* (Phil. 1:6).

A Humble Mindset helps Diminish Stress

Now that we have discussed the solace Christians can have because of our connection with God, let us focus on the *mental outlook we need to sustain* in order to further benefit from this relationship. Paul addresses this challenge in Romans 12:3, where he writes, “I say through the grace having been given to me to everyone being among you not to think highly beyond what is necessary to think, but to think with the outcome of acting in a sound-minded fashion, as God has measured to each one a measure of faith.”

The infinitive translated “to think highly beyond” (υπερφρονειν) combines the verb “φρονεω”, expressing *activity in the mind*, with the preposition “υπερ”, which adds the idea of *above*. Since this term appears in the *present tense*, it exhorts Christians “not to” *maintain a mindset above* what we are supposed to have so we can remain humble. The immediate context indicates we can attain this *balanced view of our worth* by coming to assess “what the will of God is” from His Word as our “mind” goes through a process of “renewal” (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23). This training enables us to walk “with the outcome of acting in a sound-minded fashion” (σωφρονειν), that is, to generate conduct representing a *sensible mindset* or *morally secure thinking* (Titus 2:6; 1 Pet. 4:7).

So, how can believers achieve this well-adjusted lifestyle? Paul proceeds to cite a theological factor which helps us reach this condition when he says, “. . . as God measured to each one a measure of faith”. By reading the lessons in Romans leading up to this passage, we are able to grasp how God *gives* His elect a *measure of “faith”* in the process of *calling us to accept* the Gospel (8:14-16, 28-30, 33; 9:11-33; 10:14-21; 11:5-10). Although these Scriptures defined as “the mercies of God” illuminate the manner in which we were brought to salvation, we can only understand these sovereign acts when we allow the Holy Spirit to direct our thoughts (9:14-23; 11:30-32; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 4:3-11). As conviction deepens about how our destiny rests in His able hands, we will be moved to adopt a *more humble mindset* and feel a *higher level of emotional comfort* (Phil. 1:6).

In addition to being saved by Grace, a modest outlook can be augmented by understanding *the gifts given to each believer are God’s sole provision* which enable us to benefit the Body of Christ and the world (Rom. 12:4-8; Eph. 4:7-13). We can enjoy greater humility in our relationships if we accept how God has gifted all Christians in a way to promote unity and avoid division (1 Cor.

12:18-26). When we embrace this truth, it shields us from thinking our service is more valuable than the ministry of others. However, those who refuse to comply with this heavenly purpose will develop a belief of self-importance, which promotes a sectarian attitude and causes a great deal of stress.

Concluding this section, when our spirit surrenders to how the Creator saved and gifted us, and while we congregate with those who respectfully acknowledge the same, we can advance up the road of humility and live on a *more sound-minded plane*. (Rom. 12:16; 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 1:7; Titus 2:2, 4-6, 12). As a result of giving God credit for what He has done, we will circumvent a substantial amount of emotional turmoil brought on by fleshly pride.

A Transformed Life Eases Stress:

. . . By Dealing with Sin

Contrary to popular belief, Christians do not bring about permanent stress reduction by participating in activities that please our natural desires; the primary way we achieve happiness is by *dying to sin*. And, since we will no longer be affected by anxiety or discouragement once we are conformed to the image of Christ when He returns, it is evident the key method we should employ to alleviate 'downer' feelings during this life is to replace our sinful acts with the qualities of the Savior. Providentially, we have instructions which define a course of action to "*put off*" the *inherited personality of the "old man"* and "*put on*" the *"new man"* (Rom. 5:12-14; Eph. 2:1-3; 4:22-25; Col. 3:5-15).

This procedure is highlighted in the following contexts. Introducing a Christian growth passage, Colossians 3:5 commands us to "Put to death the members upon the earth". Then, Philippians 3:10 articulates how we come to "know" the Savior through the practice of "being conformed to His death". Finally, Romans 8:11 describes how the indwelling Holy Spirit "will make alive your mortal (subject to death) bodies". Dying to our sin-infested flesh is painful at first, but it is the exclusive exercise which helps us obtain living characteristics such as "love, joy, peace", etc. (Gal. 5:16-22). This technique of mortifying our flesh is the door God has installed which leads to stress reduction and "peace". All we need to do is walk through it.

Temptation to sin originates in the mind, where all spiritual battles begin. For this reason, Paul offers a pattern we can use to successfully fight these trials by sharing how he and his fellow ministers overcame "strongholds" and "reasonings" in addition to "dismantling every high thing against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:4-5). In this conflict, they did not use "implements of warfare" empowered by their own "flesh". Instead, by *the power of God*, they practiced

“taking every thought captive toward obedience associated with Christ”, and were “holding a ready state to avenge every disobedient act, whenever your obedience might be made full” (vv. 3, 5-6).

The infinitive “to avenge” (εκδικησαι) is derived from the same Greek root as the noun used in Romans 12:19 which states, “vengeance is Mine, I shall repay, says the Lord”. Just as God’s vengeance in judgment results in death, when Christians *avenge* or literally *give out justice against* sin, the outcome² will *involve terminating acts of disobedience* and, in turn, yield fruits of “obedience”. Therefore, when we *draw upon the power of God* we can sidestep sin as we take a “stand against the methods of the Devil” (Eph. 6:10-20). At the same time, *we are capable of obeying*, which produces tangible victory and the joy we read about in His Word.

. . . By Practicing Obedience

God has revealed a clear description of His moral standards which believers need to personalize if we are to accomplish “every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3-4). Inevitable consequences result from whether or not we obey these guidelines, for “whatever a man sows, this he will also reap” (Gal. 6:7). The outcome of acting “in the direction of the flesh” results in *discouragement* and *depression* – fruits of “corruption” (6:8-9). However, while “sowing in the direction of the Spirit”, being willingly empowered by Him, “will reap” traits associated with “eternal life”, including *joy* and *peace* (6:8).

It should be noted, Paul equates one way of walking by our “flesh” with following parts of the Bible where the Law of Moses intended for Israel is in effect (Rom. 7:9-12; Gal. 2:17-19; 5:16-18). When he personally tried to live according to this standard after becoming a believer, his testimony shows this caused mental anguish which rose from a sense of overwhelming condemnation (Rom. 7:13-25; Gal. 5:19-21). In contrast, Christians who follow instructions contained in the Gospel of Grace, centered in the Epistles of Paul, can generate fruits which “against such things there is no law” (Gal. 1:6-12; 5:2-6, 18, 22-26). For, these Letters contain *an inventory of “good works* which God prepared beforehand in order that we might walk in them” (Eph. 2:10). He now expects us to activate these distinct deeds by choosing to submit to His Spirit which is how we “put on” the qualities of “the new man” (Eph. 3:16; 4:23-24; 5:18).

In line with this principle, Paul says, “which things you learned and received and heard and observed in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:9). The verb translated “practice” (πρασσετε) is in the *imperative mode* and *present tense* meaning we are *commanded to continually*

set into motion every aspect of Paul's lifestyle we observe in the biblical record. We are to imitate him as he imitates the directives Christ delivered to him for the Church (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:9).

Why should we focus attention on this standard of conduct? Because applying Paul's pattern of life and teaching presents us with the opportunity to enter *an earthly utopia* where the "peace" of God truly exists (Rom. 16:25-26; Gal. 1:8-12; Eph. 3:1-13; Col. 2:24 – 3:3; 1 Tim. 1:12-16; 2 Tim. 1:12-14). The *future tense* form of the verb of being "will be" (εσται) supports this thought by emphasizing this "peace" *will exist* as a reality for us. It *will be present* in our hearts and minds (Phil. 4:7). It *will occur* in our lives as a result of following the doctrine-put-into-action we witness in Paul's life. While imitating his example, Christians can enjoy genuine comfort in the midst of this cruel world.

Balancing Doctrine and Practice Cultivates Peace

So far, we have considered the peace which is available when we implement truths concerning our righteous standing with God and spiritual renewal subsequent to salvation. However, since our walk takes place in the flesh where sin rigorously hinders us from appropriating these realities, how can we sustain a positive attitude during our quest for a stress-free lifestyle?

Thankfully, Paul tackles this dilemma in the third chapter of Philippians. He begins by recounting the divine game plan – how he was *enlightened* to see his own effort to accomplish "righteousness" merely produced "loss". Simultaneously, he was shown *the work of Christ* enables him to truly "gain" a right standing before God (3:3-9). At this point, he proceeds to comment on life after salvation when believers can participate in the "fellowship of His sufferings, while being conformed to His death" (v. 10). Then he explains how this process of dying to sin is foundational to putting on "resurrection" qualities in our pursuit of perfection (v. 11). Although Paul immediately admits he has not personally reached *perfection*, he records a God given solution which can help all believers make headway toward this goal (vv. 12-16).

This *exercise designed to perfect believers* is stated as follows, "forgetting the things behind and stretching out to the things in front" (Phil. 4:13). When we activate this routine in regard to both our position in Christ and journey toward maturity, we will build *a channel for maintaining the optimism needed* for continued growth. For, this approach focuses our attention on steady movement which accomplishes *incremental progress gained over time*. As we experience positive change we will be more encouraged and less affected by the disorders of our present sinful state. Therefore, this procedure is a critical part of the growth-formula since it helps us reach "the prize of the upward calling of God",

another way the context defines *perfection associated with glory* (Phil. 3:14-16; Col. 3:1-4).

Having summarized how Christians can profit from Philippians 3:13, let us examine the details of this verse which support this claim. First, the participle “forgetting” (ἐπιλανθάνομενος) comes from the preposition “ἐπὶ”, meaning *upon*, affixed to the verb “λανθάνω” which conveys the idea of *not noticing*. This word means we should act *on the basis of being mentally unaware* of “the things behind” (τα . . . ὀπίσω), that is, *things in the past – our sinful condition*. We can accomplish this in part by “forgetting” Satan’s lie that *we are not really acceptable to God and are hopelessly stuck in lingering guilt from past sin*. Bear in mind, the Devil wants to poison our thoughts by prompting repetitive, negative inner dialog which, if allowed, will thwart spiritual progress.

The second participle, “stretching out” (ἐπεκτεινόμενος), combines the prepositions “ἐπὶ” and “ἐκ”, respectively meaning *upon* and *out*, with the verb “τείνω”, which means *to stretch*. This word portrays the idea of *stretching out or extending on the basis of “the things in front”* (τοῖς . . . ἐμπροσθεν) – *truths we can see which hold the potential to transform*. These “things” are biblical solutions which when sought out can ease our mind by helping us visualize the freedom from sin we have in Christ. Plus, when we put these “things” into practice, they help us succeed in our stand against the evil which lurks to control us (Rom. 16:25; Gal. 5:1; Eph. 6:11-14; Heb. 4:1-11; 12:1-13). So, as we “pursue” the things set before us, we can move from a place of bondage into a more relaxed and joyful state (Phil. 3:12).

Furthermore, since these two participles appear in the *present tense* and *middle voice* they underscore our need to *constantly act upon ourselves* so we will be able to ignore temptations which strive to impede our growth. On the positive side, these grammatical forms emphasize how we should stretch out to *persistently zero our focus* on internalizing the righteous position we have in Christ as well as submitting to spiritual renewal. Simply stated, the tense and voice of these terms accentuate a *continual need to take responsibility* for our part in the Christian walk. As we partner with the Holy Spirit, we are able to forget our faults and pursue the qualities of Christ, dual practices which together accelerate constructive change (1 Cor. 15:10; Gal. 5:16-18; Eph. 5:18-21; Phil. 3:12-13).

In summary, Christians can apply the lessons detailed in this section by first confidently embracing the fact we are acceptable to God solely by the work of Christ. Then, when discouragement arises from sin, we can always retreat to this blessed truth for comfort and security. However, in order to experience the

full measure of spiritual development, we should not allow this positional truth to lure us into complacency. For, comprehending our righteous standing before God in and of itself cannot fully satisfy unless it is accompanied by Spirit-energized obedience which also plays an important role in our ability to “walk in newness of life” and not “continue in sin” (Rom. 6:1, 4). In short, only as we engage in both of these pursuits can an optimistic mindset be sustained during our earthly walk.

Now that Paul has laid out instructions for spiritual development, he states, “Therefore, as many as are mature should think this thing” (Phil. 3:15). The *demonstrative pronoun*, “this thing” (τουτο), refers to a *concept* pointing back to the *entire model* presented to help believers advance toward resurrection-perfection (vv. 3-14). In addition, the verb “we should think” (φρονωμεν) occurs in the *present tense* and *subjunctive mode* indicating we *should routinely choose* to consider how we can adopt this divine procedure. For, this technique can motivate us until He “will transform the body of our humility conformed to the body of His glory” – when our perfection is completed at His coming (vv. 20-21; Col. 3:3-4).

Concluding this passage, Paul spotlights *the example of spiritual leaders* as a vital resource which can help believers reach the goal of a hopeful outlook on life. For he says, “Become fellow imitators of me, brethren, and watch those who walk in like manner, according as you have us as a type” (Phil. 3:17). The actions of established Christians can inspire us because they demonstrate how to *successfully navigate life’s challenges without losing heart*. Granting this, it is important to realize a mature status comes about over a great deal of time. The advancement of the mature proves two things; they understand how to effectively apply Scripture and for that reason are qualified to train others in the steps needed for growth. Prudent believers will take advantage of learning how to live by coming to *know* and *imitate* them (1 Cor. 11:1; 16:15-16; 1 Thess. 5:12-13).

Prayer is Essential for Enjoying Peace

Let us now reflect on how “peace” comes about by committing cares to God in prayer. Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And, the peace of God which exceeds every mind will guard your hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus.” Here, we are told to “be anxious for nothing”. The verb “be anxious” (μεριμνατε) at its core means *to divide* in the sense of *having more than one part*. So, if we concentrate on earthly circumstances or the emotions related to these events instead of resting in what God says, our *confidence will be divided* and we will be burdened with *concerns* (Matt. 6:25-

34; 1 Cor. 7:32-34). Since this word occurs in the *imperative mode* and *present tense*, it *commands* us to *persevere* in the activity of prayer so influences from the world, our flesh and the Devil will not unnecessarily contribute to an escalation in anxiety (Eph. 2:2-3).

Paul records a second *command* in this verse containing another ingredient which assures we need not be encumbered with the cares of this life, “let your requests be made known to God”. The verb rendered “let . . . be made known” (γνωριζεσθω), like the first command, occurs in the *present tense* signifying we are to *persistently* express our concerns to God in order to experience ongoing peace. This is accomplished as we approach God “in everything by prayer and petition”. The word “prayer” (προσευχη) most basically signifies a *wish toward* or a *positive desire directed to* the Father. As the most common word used for “prayer”, it implies we seek Him because we believe He is the One who can satisfy our needs.

Our “prayer” is to be accompanied by “petition” (δεησει), meaning a *tie* or a *bind*. This word refers to how answers for our troubles can only be *tied to* a reliance on God who faithfully continues the relationship He initiates with His children (Phil. 1:6). For, Christians have the choice to *depend on* ourselves and reap a tumultuous life or *rely on* God with the promised outcome of “peace”. As we make “requests” (αιτηματα), *things we ask for*, by submitting our wishes to the Father, we are also instructed to include “thanksgiving” (ευχαριστιας). This noun means *good grace* emphasizing how we are to be *grateful* and *appreciative* for His wonderful provisions since they have delivered us from wrath and enable us to be conformed to His image.

After presenting the operational essence of prayer, verse 7 specifies how a dependence upon God for answers to worry will allow us to have “the peace of God”. How extensive is this *tranquility*? Paul says, it “exceeds every mind”. The *present* participle “exceeds” (υπερεχουσα) graphically means this “peace” *constantly holds above* every mind; it *regularly surpasses* or *outperforms* any method our human “mind” (νουν) can formulate to solve problems.

Now, Paul expresses the value of possessing “peace” by stating its *superior therapy* “will guard your hearts and thoughts in Christ Jesus.” The verb “will guard” (φρουρησει) means God’s peace will *keep watch over* and *protect* our “hearts and thoughts”. Our “hearts” (καρδιας), the center of *feeling, emotion* and *conscience*, together with our “thoughts” (νοηματα), *what we think* or *our rational*, will be safeguarded by guaranteed peace when we commit our concerns to Him. This passage does not say God’s peace *might* rest upon us, for it declares He “will” *mentally and emotionally protect* us when we seek Him

in prayer. This *inner peace and protection* amidst the trials of life is available only for believers.

In conclusion, prayer yields “the peace of God” to those who *genuinely and persistently expect* He is faithful to provide everything we need for success in our spiritual walk. God wants believers to fully depend on Him. So, whether we approach Him with specific prayers and requests or whether we do not actually know what to ask for, He wants us to experience peace by trusting His ways to cope with the concerns of life (Rom. 8:26-27). Thus, prayer is crucial in aiding our race to victory as we successfully overcome every trial (1 Cor. 10:13).

Find Stress Relief by Applying the Word:

Having covered various biblical truths which articulate how “peace” can enter our lives, let us now consider passages highlighting specific attitudes and actions Christians need in order to maneuver through circumstances that normally cause stress. The focus of this section will be on Scriptural teaching intended to produce *godly character* while at the same time avoid conduct which culminates in unhappiness. For, the twofold value of God’s Word is its ability to stimulate positive change while it helps us eliminate tension-causing actions.

. . . To Avoid Discouragement and Depression

After Paul instructs the Galatian believers about obeying God’s standards, he says, “We should not be discouraged while doing good, for in His own time we will reap while not giving up” (6:9). The word “we should . . . be discouraged” (εγκακωμεν) combines the preposition “εκ”, meaning *out*, with the verb “κακωω”, which speaks of *thinking about or acting out* something involving *evil intent*. When Christians *act out malice*, we place ourselves in a moral domain controlled by our flesh which launches us into a state of *weariness and depression*. However, when we “sow in the direction of the Spirit”, God’s promise is we will “reap” the qualities of “eternal life” (Gal. 6:8-9). This *reaping* could refer to the spiritual/psychological benefits of implementing His character now and/or to rewards received at the judgement seat of Christ. (1 Cor. 3:12-14; Gal. 5:22-23).

In this course of reaping, beneficial outcomes will not happen “while . . . giving up” (εκλυομενοι – Gal. 6:9). This participle is built from the preposition “εκ”, meaning *out*, affixed to the verb “λυω”, which signifies *to loose or release*. The picture conveyed is of a believer in *psychological collapse* who *falls apart* during everyday circumstances as an outgrowth of *giving up* or *checking out*. It is often translated with the idea of *fainting* which metaphorically describes a state

lacking moral consciousness. In this condition, we are ineffective for the Lord in addition to being very weak when it comes to resisting temptation.

Paul's response to insure this does not happen is, "Consequently therefore, as we have time, let us work good toward all men and especially to the household members of the faith" (Gal. 6:10). Christians should always take advantage of *opportunities to put exhortations from His Word into action*, which will benefit our relations with "all men" and "especially" other believers. Again, verse 9 promises obedience "will reap" positive results such as *confidence* and *contentment* now as well as *future praise from God*, realities which help us avoid emotional collapse.

In another passage, Paul shows the Corinthian Christians how to circumvent despair by using one of the verbs already covered to emphasize they should not "be discouraged" (εγκακουμεν). Instead, they should be optimistic because the message they received from Paul, described as "this ministry", empowers believers to be "transformed . . . into the glory" of God (2 Cor. 3:17 – 4:1). Therefore, as we come to realize we are not "sufficient" in ourselves for ministry but our *adequacy* is from the Spirit of God, and *when we function under this divine power, we can keep from falling apart* when most people reject our Gospel message. In addition, as we comprehend how *God is the one who enlightens* those trapped in satanic blindness to receive Christ, this truth also *assists in not taking rejection personally* (2 Cor. 2:14-17; 3:4-6; 4:2-6; Eph. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:25-26).

Later in this same chapter, Christians are exhorted not to "be discouraged" (εγκακουμεν) as "our outer man" – our human body – "is becoming disabled" (2 Cor. 4:16). For, the next phrase is intended to motivate us against *emotional collapse* since it says, ". . . but our inner (man) is being renewed day by day". The verb translated "is being renewed" (ανακαινουργειται) appears in the *present tense* and *passive voice* indicating our "inner man" – the regenerated part of our person – is *constantly* renovated by the Word through the *integrating force of the Spirit*. So, we should not conclude that illness or old age provide reasons for *giving up*. Rather, we should be invigorated as these weaknesses redirect our focus toward the "exceeding eternal weight of glory", which when conceptualized and applied can help us handle any temporal affliction (2 Cor. 4:17-18; Rom. 8:18-30).

Finally, Paul uses this Greek verb to address Thessalonian believers who are shirking their responsibility to work, "But you, brethren, do not be discouraged (εγκακησητε) while doing good" (2 Thess. 3:13). When Christians obey God's directive to be self-supporting, the Spirit can empower us with an attitude of joy

and contentment, plus the hope of future rewards (2 Cor. 5:9-10; Gal. 6:9; 2 Thess. 3:7-12). These incentives protect us from becoming *disheartened*.

... To Benefit from God's Discipline

The same verb already detailed, “εκλυομαι”, also appears in Hebrews 12:3 to explain how we can stay the course while suffering trials, “For you consider such a One who has endured the opposition by sinners against Him in order that you might not be weary in your souls while giving up”. The participle “while giving up” (εκλυομενοι) occurs in the *present tense* specifying our *constant need* to avoid the discouragement which comes when we do not use God's power to withstand persecution. Regrettably, the *middle voice form* of this term infers these brothers are *causing themselves* to be overwhelmed. They have placed themselves in a position to become spiritually “weary” (καμητε), *exhausted* or *worn out* because they did not make the proper choices. As a result, they *have given up* (εκκλησησθε) on the encouragement which is available “to” them “as sons” (vv. 5-13). This passage teaches when we do not correctly respond to the discipline offered by our Lord in regard to how we should deal with affliction, we will miss out on Spirit-produced triumph and *suffer absolute defeat* (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Wrapping up this section, the author provides counsel by use of a metaphor warning believers not to allow spiritual injuries to sideline them, for he says, “and make straight paths for your feet in order that lameness might be avoided and, rather, it might be healed” (Heb. 12:13). The word “avoided” (εκτραπη) combines the preposition “εκ”, meaning *out*, with the verb “τρεπομαι”, which expresses the action of *turning*. When we abandon the Father's nurture which He uses to carry His children through trials, we *turn away from* the only reliable resource that can help us *avoid* emotional infirmity. However, when we meet temptation head on with His support, *true inner healing* can take place.

Finally, First Timothy uses this same Greek word three times in connection with how believers can profit by adhering to the message our Lord committed to Paul. As the Book opens, Timothy is directed to tell those who have “turned away (εξετραπησαν) to vain speech” found in the Law that they need to return to the “administration of God which is in faith” (1:4, 6). For, by exploring the “sound teaching . . . entrusted” to him, we can discover solutions for our Christian life and not be frustrated by “questions” raised by the teachings of Moses (Rom. 7:14-25; 1 Tim. 1:5, 10-11). Later, Paul warns those who refuse to comply with the standards of morality he delivered will *turn aside* “after Satan” (5:15). Lastly, he charges Timothy to “guard the deposit while *turning away* from godless empty voices and the opposition of falsely named knowledge” (6:20). Christians can enjoy victory when we guard “the deposit” entrusted to Paul by knowing and

then applying it to every aspect of life (2 Tim. 1:12-14). Those who get *sidetracked* by other “empty” or *false* philosophies will suffer the consequences of forsaking Jesus Christ’s instructions for the Church (Eph. 3:1-13; 1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 4:2-4).

... To Deal with Low Self Esteem

First Thessalonians 5:14 contains numerous commands which we should heed to minimize stress. The first directive is, “Comfort the faint hearted”. The word “faint hearted” (ολιγοψυχους) consists of the nouns “ολιγος”, meaning *little*, and “ψυχη” which refers to *everything connected to our physical life*. It is most commonly translated *soul* and is transliterated into the English word ‘psyche’. Combined, these two nouns indicate when brothers have *limited confidence in the essence of their being*, fellow believers are instructed to “comfort” (παραμυθεισθε) them.

This two-part word rendered “comfort” includes the verb “μυθεομαι”, which signifies *to say* or *to tell*, and we derive the word ‘myth’ from its noun form. Prefixed by the preposition “παρα”, meaning *beside*, this verb describes the *act of telling a fable by someone’s side*. As vulnerable saints are engaged with the same tender spirit used when *inviting children for story time*, this demonstration of concern stimulates an environment where growth can take place. Since this verb also occurs in the *imperative mode* and *present tense*, it *commands* stronger believers to be *habitually* comfort those in need. The mature who answer this call can reap the reward of satisfaction while their beneficial support is gladly received by those who struggle. Consequently, all parties profit as they interact with less friction.

Along this same vein, Paul charges, “Be longsuffering toward all” (1 Thess. 5:14). The verb, “Be longsuffering” (μακροθυμειτε) combines the noun “μακρος”, meaning *long*, to the verb “θυμω”, which represents *having a deep feeling*. This word designates the idea of *taking a long time to show negative passion*, which we can achieve when controlled by the Spirit (Gal. 5:22; Eph. 4:2). It is also used in First Corinthians 13:4 to represent *patient-love-in-action*. Again, in Hebrews 6:15, it describes how “after having suffered long” Abraham “obtained the promise”, which is a reference to his *patience*. Finally, Second Timothy 4:2 urges us to “proclaim the word . . . with all longsuffering”. When *patience*, or any other godly trait, is seen in our lives while we proclaim the Word, our message will *reflect His character* and, thus, help activate the dynamic of the Gospel (1 Tim. 1:16). Each context cited above teaches when led by the Spirit we are able to *persevere through affliction* and in the process to circumvent worry (Gal. 5:16-18).

... To Help the Spiritually Weak

A third directive found in First Thessalonians 5:14 aiding our journey toward stress reduction is, “Help the weak”. The word “weak” (ασθενων) is built from the noun “σθενος”, signifying *strength*, prefixed by “α” (alpha), which *negates* the meaning of the word it precedes. So, this term refers to someone who *lacks strength* in a spiritual sense. Like other passages already covered, this phrase focuses on the more mature believers’ responsibility to help those who are *incapable*, regardless of how these Body members arrived at their condition. Also, the command-verb translated “help” (αντεχεσθε) is noteworthy as it combines the preposition “αντι”, meaning *in the place of*, with the verb “εχω”, which portrays the idea of *having*. This word graphically guides us to charitably *give away* our time and energy in order to “help” others *instead of selfishly retaining* the abilities God gave us for the expressed purpose of benefitting others. Once more, when strong Christians relate with the less mature in a *supportive* way, everyone is mutually encouraged setting the stage for all to advance.

Romans 14:1 further elaborates on the duty mature believers have, “You receive the one who is weak in the faith, not for the criticism of reasonings.” The *present tense* participle rendered “the one who is weak” (ασθενουντα) again speaks of those who *are* emotionally fragile in their *typical condition*. Followed by a *present tense command*, the established are to *habitually* “receive” (προσλαμβανεσθε) the weaker ones. When they obey this order to literally *take* these ill-equipped brothers *toward* themselves, this simple act of acceptance will significantly increase mentoring opportunities.

In this process of receiving the weak, Paul warns “not” to include “criticism of reasonings”, for this *approach destroys potential* to bond with others. Our English word ‘diacritical’ comes from the noun “criticism” (διακρισεις), which most basically means to *thoroughly judge* what a person thinks. Mature believers will *consciously keep from criticizing* the opinions of others because they understand this attitude simply erects relational blockades. Instead, they will develop connections by graciously building bridges to cultivate interactions where constructive guidance can take place. The overall emphasis of this verse infers *stronger Christians* will accept this challenge while realizing *God holds them most accountable* to do so. By owning-up, they will feel energized as the Spirit aids them in helping others escape discouragement and experience the joys of salvation.

This thought is further developed in Romans 15:1, “We, the strong, are obligated to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves”. The following verses show this is God’s purpose for Body members so we can form

an environment conducive for “edification” (v. 2). This point is first illustrated by our Lord’s example since “Christ did not please Himself” (v. 3). In addition to His model, the Bible is filled with examples of those who received “endurance” and “encouragement” through obedience (v. 4). Then, Paul concludes by imploring God to “give” the Roman saints “to think the same thing” – *a Christ-oriented mindset to please others* – “in order that with one accord, in one voice, you might glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vv. 5-6; 1 Cor. 8:7-13). The goal of *glorifying God* “with one accord” comes about when we voluntarily serve others and *consider their needs more important than our own* (Eph. 4:3; Phil. 2:3). When we treat one another this way, relational tension naturally dissipates.

Peter teaches Christian husbands should develop this same kind of favorable connection with their wives “while living together according to knowledge as with the weaker vessel” (1 Pet. 3:7). The adjective “weaker” (ασθενεστερω) appears in a *comparative form* which means, when *likened to* men, wives are *not as strong* in their makeup. This is evident in reference to the woman’s physical and emotional status, which are outgrowths of God’s strategy to fashion them as *helpers* (Gen. 2:18-24). There is absolutely no biblical basis to consider women any less intelligent than men or less equal in the eyes of God; for Peter directs our focus on how we should *value wives* “as also fellow heirs of the grace of life.” Much Scripture speaks to the virtues of the female gender clarifying their importance as wives, mothers and members in the Body of Christ. They are uniquely gifted to benefit the Church in ways men are incapable of and to complement the male counterpart. When husbands conduct their marriage “according to knowledge” by behaving in a manner consistent with the wife’s created nature and purpose, they will build the groundwork needed to foster a peaceful and effective partnership.

Having considered numerous passages showing how stronger believers can help the less mature, *it is essential for all Christians to understand how weak we are* when compared with our Father. For instance, when Paul prayed to find relief from his “thorn in the flesh”, which God allowed to torment him so he would remain humble in the midst of receiving countless revelations, he was told, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:1-9). His appropriate and submissive response was, “Therefore, I will most gladly rather boast in my weaknesses (ασθενειαις) in order that the power of Christ might reside upon me” (v. 9). Then, he concludes, “Wherefore, I am well pleased in *weaknesses* . . . for whenever I am *weak*, then I am strong” (v. 10). This illustration demonstrates how Christians can be truly *gratified* when we depend on His strength while realizing happiness does not originate from within.

Paul exemplifies this same modesty in his fruitful, evangelistic ministry. He took advantage of his *vulnerable state* and “became *weak* to the *weak*, in order that I might gain the *weak*” (1 Cor. 9:22). When he *identified* with oblivious, “weak” (ασθενεσιν) nonbelievers rather than treating them with condescension, he successfully eliminated any attraction they might have for him while pointing them to Christ as the answer for their spiritual predicament. By accentuating his own weakness while sharing the Gospel, many were saved (1 Cor. 2:1-5). Like Paul, we should admit *our inadequacy* and fully rely on divine power so we too can be renovated into effective witnesses to the lost (2 Cor. 2:14 – 3:6).

... To Achieve Victory

When believers utilize God’s *strength*, we can be happy while making a significant impact on this sinful world. Paul has this objective in mind when he says, “But in all these things we more than conquer through the one who has loved us” (Rom. 8:37; Eph. 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:12). This passage indicates as we face the sufferings and persecutions targeting our life, we can be *triumphant* through Christ (Rom. 8:18-36). The word “we more than conquer” (υπερνικωμεν) combines the preposition “υπερ”, meaning *over* or *above*, with the verb “νικαω”, which conveys the act of *prevailing*. The noun form of this word is used to brand the prominent shoe company, *Nike*, suggesting *victory* will come to those who use their product. Also, our prefixes ‘super’ and ‘hyper’ originate from “υπερ” which, when blended with the *present tense* verb, indicates we can *regularly* experience *hyper victory* and *super success* because of what Christ lovingly accomplished for us. The potential to experience *victory* during this life is augmented by the assurance nothing “is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus” (v. 39).

A few chapters later, another way to win in our spiritual race is found in the instruction, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21; 1 Cor. 9:24-27). Surveying the context which leads up to this plea, we see numerous warnings intended to protect us from performing “evil” in our lives. If we congregate with proud people instead of the humble, we will “be overcome (νικω) by evil” (v. 16). If we act in our flesh by repaying evil for evil, *malice will prevail* in our lives (v. 17). When our choices keep us from having peaceful relationships with all men, *our testimony will be vanquished* (v. 18). And, if we retaliate rather than forgive those who wrong us and commit them to the Perfect Avenger, *we will suffer spiritual defeat* (vv.19-20). In contrast to these unpleasant scenarios, when we utilize the power of the Spirit to obey God’s directives, our character will be transformed enabling us to “overcome (νικα) evil with good” (vv. 12:9-15, 21).

Believers who want to partake in this “good” need to learn how to conquer the evil we face in this world. Initially, we should voice, “Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57; 2 Tim. 3:17). This exclamation closing the *Resurrection Chapter* designates *Christ’s resurrection from the dead as the foundation making our “victory” (νικος) possible*. After stating how *grateful* Christians should be for the gifts of salvation and power to thrive during our walk, Paul pens the motivation, “So then, my beloved brethren, be settled, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). This promise assures *our Spirit-empowered choices will result in eternal value*. So, when we practice His Word with a transcendent zeal, which far exceeds any human potential implied by the slogan ‘Just Do It’, we will taste victory now and in the future.

Call to Action

In the last section, many Scriptures were covered which warn how discouragement, giving up, faintheartedness and turning away from proper application of the Word leads believers to a miserable existence. The favorable opposite happens when Christians gain victory by relying on the Grace of God to walk in Spirit-generated character such as patience, consideration for the needs of others, and a humble attitude. This glorious condition enables us to enjoy peace and success beyond our wildest imagination (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 3:20; Phil. 4:6-9).

The biblical passages considered in this composition declare how we can relax in the midst of our Christian experience. Unfortunately, many seek peace by other means including secular therapies, dependence on mood altering drugs, self-improvement methods, multi-step programs, meditation and identifying with celebrities for self-worth. Each of these practices has its place, but we too often settle for the world’s inferior fixes for spiritual struggles. In reality, society offers no significant answers for the eternal issues we face.

So, those who truly desire to reduce stress should resolve to pursue the formula for advancement detailed in His Word. Initially, it is vital we allow the Truth to reprogram our mind and heart with the goal of comprehending how God’s methods can be applied to accomplish real transformation. Then, we must believe and personalize what we learn in order to progress down the road to contentment. This exciting journey includes authentic stress-release resulting from actions such as forgiving ourselves and others, abandoning the habit of blaming other people for our choices, and trying to change those we associate with.

God offers this Bible-based makeover so Christians can be impacted by the Spirit to have a healthy love for Him, others and even ourselves (Eph. 1:19; 5:18, 28). When set in motion, this supernatural course shows us how to live on a more “blessed” plane regulated by “faith” in *revealed truth*, and it helps us escape the feeling of *condemnation* fueled by “sin” (Rom. 14:22-23). By learning to rely on Christ, we can gradually be converted into effective instruments to “work good toward all men, and especially toward household members of the faith” (Gal. 6:9-10). In short, our divine relationship provides the opportunity to help one another flourish at the Lord’s side, appreciate a “good conscience” and not be relegated to a life of frustration and stress (*1 Tim. 1:5; 3:9; Heb. 9:14*). Believers who follow this path will welcome “the peace of God” as it rules their “hearts” (Col. 3:15).

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Old Testament quotes are from the KJV.

New Testament quotes are original translations by the author from the Greek text.

¹ This is a very literal translation. However, only the portions of this verse relating to the subject of this article will be detailed. Those who desire further clarification about how it is rendered should consult literal translations, critical commentaries, or Greek interlinears and lexicons.

² By definition, a *Greek Infinitive* specifies “outcome” or “result”.