

Philippians

by Peter Steinke

Part One: An Introduction to Philippians

Introduction

Philippians is a personal letter. Paul is writing to a group of friends; he loves and respects them deeply. He addresses the letter to "my brethren" and "my beloved." Over and over again Paul uses the first person pronoun—"I thank..." "I know..." "I yearn..." "I hope..." And personal matters are addressed, especially the key themes of joy, care for others and humility.

Even though the apostle writes his letter from prison, he knows that he and his friends live under God's umbrella. As for himself, Paul says, "Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (3:8), and "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (4:13).

With regard to his Philippian friends in Christ, he says, "for God is at work in you" (2:3), "and the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (4:7).

In these four studies, we discover in Philippians what it means to live under God's umbrella of grace. Now, let us turn to God's care and our stress.

Shelter from the Storm

1. Fold a sheet of paper to make four columns. From left to right, label the columns SYNONYMS, ADJECTIVES, CAUSES, CHANGES. Ask the group to list synonyms for the word "stress," adjectives that describe stress, causes of stress, and ways we can change stress to states of lightness, energy and freedom. An example is noted below.

Instead of separate sheets of paper, the leaders could make four columns on a chalkboard or tape four pieces of newsprint to a wall and solicit responses from the group.

SYNONYMS	ADJECTIVES	CAUSES	CHANGES
tension	hard	the unknown	sleep
headaches	anxious	sickness	prayers
uptight	nervous	feelings of rejection	relaxation
strain	painful	argument	friends

2. Come to some conclusion about stress: what it is, how it begins, what happens because of its presence and what changes it.
3. Read the following verses from Philippians 1:17, 1:18, 4:6-7, 2:25-30.
4. Paul mentions four kinds of stress: imprisonment (1:17), fear (1:18), anxiety (4:6) and illness (2:25-30). Discuss what happens to you, to your relationships and to your faith in God when you experience these or other forms of stress.
5. In chapter four, Paul lists a number of ways in which faith in God's redeeming love helps during stressful times. Select those which you would find helpful when distressed.
6. Sprinkled throughout Paul's letter to the church at Philippi are words of joy: "Yes, and I shall rejoice..." (1:19), "complete my joy..." (2:2), "rejoice in the Lord..." (3:1), "rejoice in the Lord greatly..." (4:10). Laughter is one of the best therapies we could ever find for stress. And joyous laughter is healing—seeing our inconsistencies, yet forgiving ourselves. For a brief devotion, read the "joy" and "rejoice" passages of Philippians. Alternate them with verses from hymns with the theme of joy. Follow the verses with some "Ha-Ha's."
7. Here is a teenager's response to the verses from Philippians. Use it for your devotion or for discussion.

"What are some of the ways teenagers deal with stress? Drugs, alcohol, violence, exercise, work, hobbies? There is much unnecessary stress in our lives. How can it be lessened or omitted?"

“Sometimes what we think is causing stress is not really the immediate problem. Example: John plays football and works hard to excel. Feeling stress, he blames his coach. But John is trying desperately to please his father—the real source of his stress.

“What are some creative ways to deal with stress? Which way is best for you? Jesus went to the Mount to escape stress, but He did not try to escape God. He prayed and received strength.

“How can we deal with our stress constructively and find solace knowing we are under the shelter of God’s umbrella? We turn to God in times of stress for strength, renewal and help.

“‘I can do all things in Him...’ With God’s help, I can get through anything.

“‘For the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord...’ Nothing in this world is worth being concerned about as much as your knowledge that you are Christ’s child.

“‘For God is at work in you.’ Through the events, traumas and jubilations you experience, God is making you into the person He wants you to be. He is forming you by your past.

“‘And the peace...’ It is through the hardest times in our lives that Christ carries and strengthens us. Sometimes we don’t realize it.”

(by Rene Steinke)

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