

## **OUR CHRISTIAN LIVES: Reducing Stress and Enhancing Joy**

**Outlines prepared by Doug Yopp**

### **Introduction to the Study**

When things in life do not turn out the way we want, we have certain ways that we react to them. Disappointment, bad news, and difficult people all cause us to act or overreact, blow up or focus on the negative aspects of the situation. Many times this not only immobilizes us, but also can cause frustration, overreaction and sometimes abuse of others or ourselves.

As we do these things, we lose sight of the big picture: our goal of getting ourselves and our family and friends to heaven. Many times we alienate or annoy people around us who are really trying to help us.

To live our lives as if it were one big emergency, rushing around, looking busy, trying to solve every problem, often compounds the problems we are dealing with.

Many of the things that I will be suggesting are from the book *"DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF...and it's all small stuff"*, by Dr. Richard Carlson. However, as with any book or publication, anything we look at or try to do must be taken only in the light of God's Word. The author is not a Christian, so what I have done is to take many of his ideas and see what the Word says about them and see if we can apply them scripturally in our lives. We all want to please God, and we know that we can do this by following his word, but it is sometimes difficult to see the practical applications to our daily lives. A while back we did the same thing with books by Gary Smalley, concerning our relationships as men and women.

This study will try to help us to first examine the problems that come our way in light of the Word of God, and then to focus on strategies that, hopefully, will help to turn stress and unhappiness into joy and exhortation of ourselves and others.

## **Lesson 1**

### **I. Introduction**

When things in life do not turn out the way we want, we have certain ways that we react to them. Disappointment, bad news, and difficult people all cause us to act or overreact, blow up or focus on the negative aspects of the situation. Many times this not only immobilizes us, but also can cause frustration, overreaction and sometimes abuse of others or ourselves.

As we do these things, we lose sight of the big picture: our goal of getting ourselves and our family and friends to heaven. Many times we alienate or annoy people around us who are really trying to help us.

To live our lives as if it were one big emergency, rushing around, looking busy, trying to solve every problem, often compounds the problems we are dealing with.

Many of the things that I will be suggesting are from the book "DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF...and it's all small stuff", by Dr. Richard Carlson. However, as with any book or publication, anything we look at or try to do must be taken only in the light of God's Word. The author is not a Christian, so what I have done is to take many of his ideas and see what the Word says about them and see if we can apply them scripturally in our lives. We all want to please God, and we know that we can do this by following his word, but it is sometimes difficult to see the practical applications to our daily lives. A while back we did the same thing with books by Gary Smalley, concerning our relationships as men and women.

This study will try to help us to first examine the problems that come our way in light of the Word of God, and then to focus on strategies that, hopefully, will help to turn stress and unhappiness into joy and exhortation of ourselves and others.

### **II. Peter**

If we are looking for some one as an example of a person who overreacted to situations, Peter seems to be a good choice. Many of us can easily identify with Peter's often quick and impulsive reactions. An example of this can be seen in the following passage:

John 18:10 -As the soldiers of the chief priests and Pharisees, are taking Jesus in the garden, Peter impetuously cuts off the servant's ear. Jesus tells Peter to put his sword into its sheath. Later on, as he stands in front of Pilate, he says in verse 36, "My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight." Peter reacts as many of us would. When he sees the Lord being arrested by these soldiers for no justifiable cause, he takes the course of physically defending Jesus. However, had he thought about and understood many of the things that Christ had taught him and the others concerning his kingdom and his mission on this earth, he may have reacted in a different manner. As is the manner of every human being, we often swing to the opposite end of the reaction mode. In this case, Peter then denies that he even knows Christ (vs. 25-27).

### III. Some strategies to help us to be less impetuous.

#### A. Breathe, and say a short prayer to God before you speak.

Short prayers, such as "Help me Lord", "Be with me Lord", "Give me patience, Lord", can give us the little time and focus that we need to be able to handle a situation in a Christ-like manner. The immediate results that we will see include increased patience, added perspective, and, as a side benefit, more gratitude and respect from others. This strategy is not only helpful in stressful situations but also in every day conversation with one another. At first this time gap that you experience may seem like it lasts forever-but in reality, it amounts to only a fraction of actual time. It will bring you closer to and earn you respect from virtually everyone you meet. You will find that being listened to is a great gift that you offer to someone else.

Have you ever noticed that in conversations with others many times all we are doing is waiting for our chance to speak. We do not really listen to what the other person is saying. We teachers are some of the worst. We often complete sentences for others or say things like, "Yeah, yeah," or "I know," trying to get them to finish their sentence so it is our turn.

When we are trying to teach the gospel to someone, it is important that we listen intently to what they say. This not only will give them a sense of added respect for what we say but will also cause them to listen more intently to what God says. Our goal in teaching others should be to get them to listen and obey the Word of God, but if we are not good listeners ourselves we will miss many opportunities to teach that come from the conversation of the person we are teaching.

This will also help you individually to eliminate the stress that you bring on yourself when you are constantly trying to get in your two cents and manage the conversation. Read Rom. 8:26, I Cor. 14:15, I Thess. 5:17, 1 Tim. 2:8, James 5:13-16.

#### B. Do one thing at a time.

As a middle school Band Director, I have seen myself transformed into the kind of person that can handle many different things at once. I can read a 32 line conductor's score, deal with misbehavior, fix a broken clarinet, explain what dynamics are, and drink a cup of coffee all at the same time. This is not necessarily good! This ability to do many things at once has also carried over into my personal life. Have you ever caught yourself talking to a person and find your mind drifting to somewhere else or to the next thing that you want to accomplish? When we do many things at once, it is impossible to be present-moment oriented. We miss much of the potential enjoyment of what we are doing, and become less focused and effective. Remember, our goal for eternal life for our family, our friends, and ourselves. Matt. 28:19-20

#### C. Count to Ten

Have you known anyone who, when they became angry, counted to ten? This is a strategy that some use to cool down before deciding what to do next. This can be helpful, but I would like to suggest maybe reciting in your mind one of your favorite verses from the bible or maybe a verse of one of your favorite hymns. When you finish, take a long breath and then deal with the situation. Read Proverbs 14:17, 21:19, 22:24, 25:23, 29:22, Eph. 4:26, Matt. 5:22.

**Happy verses:** Job 5:17, Psalms 127:4-5, 128:2, 144:15, Psa146:5, Proverbs 3:13, 14:21, 16:20, 28:14, 29:18, John 13:17, Acts 26:2, Romans 14:22, James 5:11, I Peter 3:14.

## **Lesson 2**

### **I. Introduction**

Have you ever done something for someone else, and immediately find yourself telling another person about what you did? This shows a desire on your part to obtain approval by others. We want others to make us feel that we are thoughtful, caring people, through their approval of what we have done. Millions of dollars are donated to charitable institutions each year, some donations are anonymous, others are not. Why do men seek this approval or praise for what they have done? We as Christians need to seek God's approval by helping our fellow man. Today's lesson is about doing for others to enhance our own personal joy!

### **II. The Good Samaritan Luke 10:24-37**

One of the greatest examples of helping others in the New Testament, besides the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, is the Good Samaritan. The Samaritans were hated by the Jews because of their Heritage. Yet we are told that this man had compassion on this victim of thieves. He did not bind up his wounds and then parade him in front of family and friends showing off his compassion to others. Instead he left him in the care of the Innkeeper, paid for his lodging and told him he would recompense him for any other expenses. What can we see about his motive? Was it selfish or was it true compassion for another human being? Jesus final question for the Lawyer, gives us an insight into what Jesus wants from us. Do likewise.

### **III. Do something nice for someone else, and do not tell anyone about it.**

While doing something for someone else is a wonderful experience, doing it and not mentioning it to anyone else will not dilute the positive feeling that you have about your own kindness. By keeping it to yourself and God, you can retain all the positive feelings. When we do some kindness and do not expect anything in return, because we have not told anyone else, the warm feelings and the abundant joy of giving, will be dramatically increased.

### **IV. Spend a moment each day thinking of someone to thank. Luke 17:12-19**

Gratitude and inner peace go hand in hand. However, more than that, look at the last statement of Jesus, your faith has made you whole. We all have people in our lives that we feel grateful to: friends, family, people from our past, teachers, people from work, etc... We thank God for the gift of life itself and for the beauty of the earth.

Sometimes we forget to be grateful for the little things, like someone who allowed you to merge into traffic, someone who held the door open for you, or a doctor or nurse who helped you when you were sick. When we get up in the morning, let us try to immediately think of someone to thank for whatever kindness has been shown us. It seems that when we allow ourselves to slip into a negative attitude, the first thing to go is our sense of gratitude. What you will find is that when you make a conscious effort to thank one person, your mind will think of another, and then another We can also be thankful for: good health, children, homes, careers,

freedom, other Christians, the word of God, etc.... Phil. 4:6-7

**V. Practice random acts of kindness.**

Practicing random acts of kindness, is an effective way to get in touch with the joy of giving without expecting anything in return. The story is told of some people in San Francisco, paying the tolls of other cars immediately behind at toll bridges. Drivers would drive to the toll window, take out their money and then be told that it had been paid by the car in front of them. Can you imagine the impact that this tiny anonymous gift had on the driver of the next car? Perhaps it encouraged him to have a better day, or caused a series of kind acts to be put in motion. These random acts of kindness must come from the heart for them to help you with stress and to enhance joy. You will bring to your life contentment, positive feelings, service, kindness, love and joy!!! Is not this the way a Christian should live? Remember the ultimate example that we have of giving to others-Jesus Christ. Gal. 1:3-4, 2:20, I Tim. 2:5-6, Titus 2:14.

This week's assignment: Do something for someone and let it be a secret between you and God!

**Happy verses:** Proverbs 3:13, 14:21, 16:20, 28:14, Psa146:5, , 29:18, John 13:17, Acts 26:2, Romans 14:22, James 5:11, I Peter 3:14.

## **Lesson 3**

### **I. Introduction**

It is important to our stress levels that we build our perspective concerning the things around us, especially the people that we encounter the most. One very important thing that we can do in this regard is to develop our compassion for these people. Compassion is a sympathetic feeling,. It involves the willingness to put yourself in someone else's predicament, and simultaneously, to feel love for that person.

### **II. Develop Your Compassion**

- A. Compassion is the ability to recognize people's problems, their pain and frustrations, and act in a way to offer assistance. In opening our hearts to others, we are able to become more Christ-like and to enhance our sense of love for each other and for ourselves.
- B. Compassion involves two main things: intention and action. 1. Intention simply means you remember to open your heart. You expand what matters from yourself to others. Action is what you do about your intentions. The things that you can do in exercising your compassion involve donating time, money, offering a beautiful smile, or even just listening. If we take time to reflect on God's glorious creation; the miracle of life, the gift of sight, of love, and all other gifts that we sometimes take for granted, many of the things that we see as important fade and our relationships with God, Christ and our fellow man become more important. Only then will we be able to focus and act on our compassion for others.  
See the following passages: Ex. 2:6, Mt. 9:35, 18:23-27, Heb 10:34-35, I Pet. 3:8,9, I John 3:17.

### **III. Be the First One to Act Loving or Reach Out.**

- A. Many of us hold on to little resentments that may have stemmed from an argument, a misunderstanding, or some other painful event. Stubbornly, we wait for someone else to reach out to us-believing this is the only way we can forgive or rekindle a relationship. How many people have we known that have carried this kind of emotional baggage to their grave? When we hold onto these kinds of things, the small things in life suddenly become big stuff. We start believing that our position in these conflicts is more important than our relationship with that person.
- B. Go to the other person first. See Matt. 18:15, and the example of the Good Samaritan from Lesson 2. The experience of doing this will bring inner peace and satisfaction in knowing that you did the right thing, even if the conflict is not resolved. See also I John 4:19-20.

### **IV. Once a week send a heartfelt card or letter to someone.**

- A. This exercise will help us become more caring and loving. It is important to open our feelings to others. If we do not reach out to others, they may never reach out to us.

Picking up a pen or typing on a keyboard slows you down long enough to remember the beautiful people in your life.

- B. The purpose of this is very simple: to express love and gratitude. If you are awkward at first this will pass as you do this more and more. Also this is not a contest to see how much you can write, just express two or three things that you admire and love about this person. Here is an example of what you might do:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I woke up this morning thinking of how lucky I am to have people in my life like you. Thank you for your warmness to those about you and for the caring attitude that you always show. Thank you so much for being a friend to me and to God and his people. I wish for you happiness and joy.

In Christian Love, Doug

A note like this will not only help you to focus your attention on what's right in your life but also what is right in the life of the other person. Hopefully this act will inspire them to reach out and feel more loving to others. Let us all take time right now to write a short letter on our postcards to someone, and then address and send it when you can. See II Thess 1:3-8

**Happy verses:** Psalms 146:5, John 13:5-17, Acts 26:2f, Romans 14:22, James 5:11, I Peter 3:14.

## **Lesson 4**

### **I. Introduction**

Read Gen. 1:1, 1:27, Psalms 148:5, Isaiah 41:20, Ephesians 2:10, Colossians 1:16. God created not only everything around us but he created us also. It is easy to see God's handiwork in a beautiful sunrise, a snow-capped mountain, the smile of a healthy child, or in ocean waves crashing on a sandy beach. Nevertheless, can we learn to find his handiwork in the seemingly ugly circumstances---difficult life lessons, a family tragedy, or a struggle for life?

### **II. Remember that everything has God's fingerprints on it!**

When our life is filled with the desire to see God's handiwork in everyday things, something great begins to happen. A feeling of peace emerges. We begin to see the nurturing aspects of daily living that were previously hidden to us. When we remember that everything has God's fingerprints on it; that alone makes it special. If we remember this fact while we are dealing with a difficult person or struggling to pay our bills, it broadens our perspective. It helps us to remember that God created the person that you are dealing with and that that person has a soul that we need to be concerned about. We need to understand that despite the struggle to pay the bills, we are truly blessed to have all that we have.

Somewhere, in the back of your mind, try to remember that everything has God's fingerprints on it. The fact that we cannot see the beauty in something does not suggest that it is not there. Rather, it suggests that we are not looking carefully enough or with a broad enough perspective to see it.

### **III. Resist the urge to criticize.**

Proverbs 9:8, 13:1, 13:6-8, Psalms 141:5, 10:4-7, 12:3, 15:1-3, 36:1-4, Titus 3:1-7

There is a distinct difference between constructive criticism and destructive criticism. We are going to address criticism that has as its motive something other than concern for the soul of the other individual. When we destructively criticize another person, it says nothing about that person; it merely says something about our own need to be critical.

If you attend a gathering and listen to all the criticism that is typically levied against others, and then go home and consider how much good all that criticism actually does, you will probably come up with the same answer that most people do: zero! It does no good. In fact, it contributes to the anger and distrust that we see around us. A person's reaction to criticism, is usually to become defensive and/or withdrawn. A person who feels attacked is likely to do one of two things: either he will retreat in fear and shame, or he will attack or lash out in anger.

How many times have you criticized someone and had him or her respond by saying, "Thank you so much for pointing out my flaws. I really appreciate it?"

Obviously, as Christians, when our spiritual well-being is in jeopardy this should be our attitude. Nevertheless, when it comes to things not easily connected to our spiritual lives are we so willing to accept it?

Destructive criticism, like swearing, is actually nothing more than a bad habit that we develop. It is something we get used to doing: we are familiar with how it feels. It keeps us busy and gives us something to talk about.

If, however, you take a moment to observe how you actually feel immediately after you criticize someone, you will notice that you will feel a little deflated and ashamed, almost like you are the one who has been attacked.

The solution is to catch yourself in the act of being critical. Notice how often you do it and how badly it makes you feel.

#### **IV. Just for fun, agree with criticism directed toward you.**

So often we are immobilized by the slightest criticism. We treat it like an emergency, and defend ourselves as if we were in battle. In truth, however, criticism is nothing more than an observation by another person about us, our actions, or the way we think about something, which does not match the vision we have of ourselves. Again, let me tack on the disclaimer that if we are being criticized for being Christians and following God's word carefully, our recourse is to defend this with the written word, and not to agree in this manner.

When we react to criticism with an unthinking, defensive response, it hurts. We feel attacked, and we have a need to defend or to offer counter criticism. We fill our minds with angry or hurtful thoughts directed at ourselves or at the person who is being critical. All this reaction takes an enormous amount of mental energy.

An incredibly useful exercise is to agree with criticism directed toward you. This is not to say that we turn ourselves into doormats or ruin our self-esteem by believing all the negativity that comes our way. There are many times when simply agreeing with criticism defuses the situation, offers you a chance to learn something about yourself by seeing a grain of truth in another position, and, most importantly, provides you an opportunity to remain calm.

What would your reaction be to someone who told you that you talk too much? At first, you probably would be hurt. But what if you then agreed and said, "You're right, I do talk too much sometimes." In agreeing with this person, you may be able to see the truth in what they have said, and be easier to talk to.

**Happy Verses:** Romans 14:22, James 5:11, I Peter 3:14-17.

## **Lesson 5**

### **I. Introduction**

Proverbs 31:10-31, Col. 3:12-16, 2 Pet. 1:5-8, Luke 6:35-36, Eph. 4:23.

Kindness is defined as a friendly feeling, benevolence, humanity, generosity, charity. Being kind is defined as of a good nature or disposition, loving, tender and compassionate. When you show kindness to others, the joy that we feel toward others and ourselves will increase.

### **II. Smile at strangers, look into their eyes and say hello.**

Have you ever noticed or thought about how little eye contact most of us have with strangers? Why? Are we afraid of them? What keeps us from opening our hearts to people we do not know? I do not know all the answers to these questions, but there is virtually always a parallel between our attitudes toward strangers and our overall level of happiness. In other words, it is unusual to find a person who walks around with their head down, frowning and looking away from people, who is secretly a peaceful, joyful person.

It is suggested that if we think of strangers as being a little more like ourselves and treat them not only with kindness and respect, but with smiles and eye contact as well, you will probably notice some nice changes in yourself. You may begin to see that most people are just like us. Most of them have families, people that they love, troubles, concerns, likes, dislikes, fears, and so forth. You may also notice how nice and grateful people can be when you are the first to reach out!

### **III. Set aside quiet time, every day**

I Thess. 4:11, I Tim. 2:3, I Pet. 3:4, Psa. 22:26, 25:9, 37:11, 147:6, Matt. 5:5, 11:29. One of my favorite times of the day is in the early morning. It is quiet and solitude is rejuvenating and peaceful. It can be a time to reflect, work or simply enjoy the quiet. We must, in these busy times, carve out time in our day for a little quiet. In my job, there comes a time toward the end of the school year that I become so overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of sound that I have endured that I must have quiet time. There are times that I find myself in the car on the way somewhere, turning off the radio, and enjoying the silence. Spending a little time in nature, reflecting on God's creation, locking the bathroom door and taking a ten-minute bath, or spending time alone helps to balance the noise and confusion that infiltrate much of the day.

### **IV. Become a better listener**

Psa. 39:1-2, Ecc. 12:11. Many of us grow up believing that we are good listeners. However, if we examine ourselves, we may find that we are only adequate listeners. Effective listening is more than simply avoiding the bad habit of interrupting others (we will talk about this later). Effective listening is being content to listen to the entire thought of someone rather than waiting impatiently for your chance to respond.

In some ways, the way we fail to listen is symbolic of the way we live. We treat communication as if it were a race. It is almost as if our goal is to have no time gaps between the conclusion of the sentence of the person we are speaking with and the beginning of our own.

Have you ever listened as a group of people were speaking and noticed that no one is really listening to one another; instead, they are taking turns not listening to one another. Slowing down your responses (see lesson 1) and becoming a better listener aids you in becoming a more peaceful person. It takes the pressure from you. If you think about it, you will notice that it takes an enormous amount of energy and is very stressful to be sitting at the edge of your seat trying to guess what the person is going to say, so that you can fire back your response. If you will wait for the people you are communicating with to finish, as you listen more intently to what they are saying, you will notice the pressure you had felt is diminished. You will feel more relaxed, and so will the people that you are talking to. They will feel safe in slowing down their own responses because they will not feel in competition with you for "air time"! Not only will becoming a better listener make you a more patient person but also others will listen more intently to what you say. This might help in your sharing the gospel with others and eventually cause them to listen more intently to what God says. Everyone loves to talk to someone who truly listens to what they are saying.

**Happy Verses:** Psalms 4:8, 29:11, 34:14, 37:37.

## **Lesson 6**

### **I. Introduction**

Gal. 5:22,23, Eph. 4:1-3, Col. 1:9-14, I Tim. 1:15-17, II Tim. 4:2.

God has told us to be longsuffering and patient. How do we achieve this? Many times it seems the cares of the world are overwhelming us, because we allow them too. We must take control of these situations and turn them around. We must let God control our lives. Sometimes controlling the situation involves leaving the situation. We as Christians must walk away from some situations in order to maintain our Christian walk. However, when we find that is not possible we must take control of ourselves and approach a solution as Christ would.

### **II. Lower Your Tolerance to Stress**

It seems that we have it backward in our society. We tend to look up to people who are under a great deal of stress, who can handle loads of stress, and those who are under a great deal of pressure to perform. When someone says, "I've been really working hard," or "I'm really stressed out," we are taught to admire, even emulate his or her behavior. In my job as a teacher, I hear other teachers and even myself at times, bragging, "I have a very high tolerance to stress."

Fortunately, there is an inviolable law in our emotional environment that goes something like this: Our current level of stress will be exactly that of our tolerance to stress. Have you ever noticed that the people who say, "I can handle lots of stress" will always be under a great deal of it!!! Therefore, if we teach ourselves to raise our tolerance to stress, that is exactly what will happen. We accept more confusion and responsibility until again, our external level of stress matches that of our tolerance. Usually it takes a crisis of some kind to wake us up to our own craziness--we lose a spouse, bad health overwhelms us, a serious addiction takes over our lives--something jolts us into a search for a new strategy. For me it is health problems. The reason for my beginning this study, is the recommendation by my doctor to reduce stress. At first I thought there was no way to do this, but when I examine my relationship to, and lack of control of, stress in my life, I decided I had no choice but to search for answers. The answers are in the word of God. (John 5:39) A careful study and understanding of, and implementation of those things found within God's Word, will reduce our stress.

What we need to do is to recognize those things that bring us the most stress early, before it gets out of hand. When you feel your mind moving too fast, it is time to back off and regain your bearings. When your schedule is out of hand, it is a signal that it's time to slow down and reevaluate what is important rather than power through everything on the list. When you are feeling out of control and resentful of all you have to do, rather than roll up your sleeves and get to it, a better strategy is to relax, take a few breaths, pray, study God's Word, and maybe take a walk through the wonderful world the God has created. Prov. 15:8, 28.

There is no need to worry that you will not get it all done. When your mind is clear and the peace of God is within you, and your stress level is reduced, you will be more effective and you will have more joy in doing the things that you do.

(II Cor. 13:11, Phil. 4:7) As you lower your tolerance to stress, you will find that you will have far less to handle, as well as creative ideas for handling the stress that is left over.

**III. Below is a short test to see how we are doing in lowering our tolerance to stress:**

Circle 0 for **never** , 1 for **sometimes**, 2 for **often**, and 3 for **always**

1. I wish I could get more work done than I do now. 0 1 2 3
2. I wish I could get by on less sleep. 0 1 2 3
3. Having to stop work for meals is a drag. 0 1 2 3
4. I do not have time for everything I want to do. 0 1 2 3
5. I have so many things to do, I do not know what to do first. 0 1 2 3
6. Finding time for family and friends gets harder all the time. 0 1 2 3
7. When I have free time, all I can think of is work. 0 1 2 3
8. I cannot relax. 0 1 2 3
9. I must find a way to make more money--soon. 0 1 2 3
10. People expect too much of me. 0 1 2 3
11. I do not know how I will measure up. 0 1 2 3
12. I wish I could do better than I am doing. 0 1 2 3
13. I am worried about my future. 0 1 2 3
14. I have so many problems that I do not know what to do. 0 1 2 3
15. I wish I could solve all my problems. 0 1 2 3
16. I wish I knew what I was meant to do with my life. 0 1 2 3
17. If I could just get through this problem things would be better. 0 1 2 3

**Happy Verses:** I Sam. 2:1-10, I Chron. 16:29-36

## Lesson 7

### I. Introduction.

Have you noticed that it seems within the last 40 years that our society has become increasingly more egocentric. Especially in the 70's, the idea of self-indulgence and self-destruction became a growing force in the lives of everyone, especially young people. A need for glory and attention seems to have replaced humility and hard work. I think that the question we often ask when we approach something in our lives is, "What will this do for me?" The strain that this brings on our personal lives of constantly seeking physical things and worrying if they will help satisfy our need for glory and attention, must increase our stress. Gen. 4:2-16, 13:5-13, Acts 8:9-24

### II. Let others have the glory.

Something truly great happens to us, a sense of calm that comes over us, when we cease needing all the attention directed toward ourselves and instead allow others to have the glory. Our need for excessive attention is that ego-centered part of us that says, "Look at me. My story is more interesting than yours." It is the need we find within us that says, "my accomplishments are slightly more important than anyone else. The ego is that part of us that wants to be seen, heard, respected, and considered special, often at the expense of someone else. It is the part of us that interrupts someone else's story, or impatiently waits his turn to speak so that he can bring the conversation and attention back to himself. To varying degrees, most of us engage in this bad habit, much to our own detriment. When you immediately dive in and bring the conversation back toward you, you can subtly minimize the joy that that person has in sharing, and in doing so, create distance between yourself and others. Everyone loses.

The next time someone tells you a story or shares an accomplishment with you, notice your tendency to say something about yourself in response. Although it's a difficult habit to break, it's not only enjoyable, but actually peaceful to have the quiet confidence to be able to surrender your need for attention and instead share in the joy of someone else's glory rather than jumping right in and saying, "Once I did the same thing" or "Guess what I did today," bite your tongue and notice what happens. Just say, "That's wonderful," or "Please tell me more."

Obviously, there are many times when it's absolutely appropriate to exchange experience back and forth, and to share in the glory and attention rather than giving it all away. What we are talking about here is the compulsive need to grab it from others.

### III. Become more Patient Ecc. 7:8, Rom 2:7-8, 12:10-13, I Thess. 5:14

The quality of patience goes a long way toward our goal of creating a more peaceful and loving self. Without patience, life is extremely frustrating. You are easily annoyed, bothered, and irritated. Patience adds a dimension of ease and acceptance to your life.

Becoming more patient involves opening your heart to the present moment, even if you do not like it. If you were stuck in a traffic jam, late for an appointment, opening to the moment would mean catching yourself building a mental snowball before your thinking got out of hand and

gently reminding yourself to relax. This is also a good time to remember to take a big breath, pray, and thank God for what we have.

It is especially difficult to develop patience with children. How many times has a child wanting your attention interrupted you in work or conversation? One of my most trying times at school is just before the last bell rings to begin class: all my 6th graders have a problem that they want me to solve. They want it solved now! Reminding them calmly that we will solve all problems eventually and they need to take their seats and be recognized first, was a lesson that I had to learn in the beginning. To them their problem is the only one that counts at that moment, and it needs to be solved immediately. Then I must also remember that they depend on me to help them and trust me to do the right thing in solving their problems. Granted there are times that it is difficult to see this when you have 20-25 twelve-year old students vying for your attention. I think, however, if we look deeply enough, we can usually see the innocence in other people as well as in frustrating situations.

We, as God's people, must always work for patience in dealing with others. We may be their only hope for finding the will of God, and turning their lives to Christ.

**Happy Verses:** Gen. 1:4, Joshua 24:15, Psalms 34:8, Acts 9:36-42

## Lesson 8

### I. Introduction.

Ask yourself this question. Given all that Jesus has done for us, all that other Christians have done for us, and given the hope that is to be within us, should the Christian be an optimist or a pessimist? An optimist is defined as one who takes a favorable view of happenings or possibilities. It is a disposition or tendency to look on the more favorable side of happenings or possibilities. In addition, it is the belief that good ultimately predominates over evil in the world. I John 5:4-5. The pessimist, on the other hand, is the one who habitually sees or anticipates the worst, or is disposed to be gloomy. He holds to the doctrine that the existing world and all things in it naturally tend to evil and unhappiness.

We as Christians may often find ourselves feeling that the bad things or evil in the world has overcome us. This is the time that we need to use our faith to overcome and look to and share the happiness that should be ours as children of God. It has been said that this life is no cakewalk, and there may be times when this is true, but the only way that we can overcome feelings of inadequacy, remorse, unhappiness, doom, gloom, and despair is to look for and see the good in a person or situation through our hope that is within us coming from Jesus Christ. Phil. 4:13. How many people have you come across that never seem to find the good in a situation, or never seem happy, or never are able to say anything without giving it a negative connotation? Have you ever seen this within Christians? Have you ever listened to a speaker take a very happy and pleasant subject and cause the audience to feel bad about themselves and others? On the other hand, have ever known someone that made you feel good whenever you were around them, no matter what.....?

One of the things that I concentrate on in teaching is to make the situation a pleasant and happy one for my students. This is not to say that I do not maintain discipline or fail to teach my subject matter. However, there is true joy in being able to convey information and experiences that make people motivated and happy about themselves and the goals that are before them. Is not this the best way to teach others? When we can show God's love for us and others, are they not more likely to respond than by trying to intimidate or browbeat them into a negative feeling of submission? I am not saying that there are not negative lessons or feelings conveyed in the scriptures. However, the general focus of the scriptures is on love and peace that is found by being a follower of God.

If we as Christians cannot find happiness in this life and be positive in our dealings with others, and ourselves I would suggest that an examination of faith is in order.

### II. Be grateful when you are feeling good and graceful when you are feeling bad.

The happiest person on earth is not always happy. In fact, the happiest people all have their fair share of low moods, problems, disappointments and heartaches. Often the difference between a person who is happy and someone who is unhappy isn't how often they get low, or even how low they drop, but instead, it's what they do with their low moods. How do they relate to their changing feeling?

Most people have it backwards. When they are feeling down, they roll up their sleeves and get to work. They take their low moods very seriously and try to figure out and analyze what is wrong. They try to force themselves out of their low state, which tends to compound the problem rather than solve it.

When you observe peaceful relaxed people, you find that when they are feeling good, they are grateful. They understand that both positive and negative feelings come and go, and that there will come a time when they will not be feeling so good. To happy people, this is okay. They accept the inevitability of passing feelings. So, when they are feeling depressed, angry, or stressed out, they relate to these feelings with the same openness and wisdom. Rather than fight their feelings and panic simply because they are feeling bad, they accept their feeling, knowing that this too shall pass. This allows them to come gently and gracefully out of negative feeling states and into more positive states of mind.

The next time you are feeling bad, rather than fight it, try to relax. See if, instead of panicking, you can be graceful and calm. Know that if you do not fight your negative feelings, if you are graceful, they will pass away. Acts 16:19-40

### **III. Become a less aggressive driver**

Where do you get the most uptight? If you are like most people, driving in traffic is probably high on your list. To look at most major freeways these days, you would think you were on a racetrack instead of a roadway.

There are three excellent reasons for becoming a less aggressive driver. First, when you are aggressive, you put yourself and everyone around you in extreme danger. Second, driving aggressively is extremely stressful. Your blood pressure goes up, your grip on the wheel tightens, your eyes are strained and your thoughts are spinning out of control. Finally, you end up saving no time in getting where you want to go. Have you ever been passed by a very aggressive driver, only to find that when you arrive at your destination you're either ahead of this person or right there with them at the same time?

The same principle applies when you see drivers speeding past you so that they can beat you to the next stoplight. It simply does not pay to speed. This is especially true if you get a ticket and have to spend eight hours in traffic school. It will take you years of driving dangerously to make up this time alone.

Try to use the time driving instead to relax. During the course of your lifetime, you are probably going to spend a great deal of time driving. You can spend these moments being frustrated, or you can use them wisely. If you do the latter, you will be a more relaxed person.

**Happy Verses:** I Tim. 6:17-19, Hebrews 11

## Lesson 9

### I. Introduction.

Matthew 5:43-45 The author of "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff," in one of the chapters in his book discusses a conversation that he had with a friend. He was asked by this friend, "Who said life was going to be fair, or that it was even meant to be fair?" I think that we, as Christians, sometimes get the idea that because we are God's Children, life is suddenly going to be a bed of roses. I have heard many Christians state that they expected things would be very different after they were baptized. However, when problems and cares remained, their faith, which had been so zealous, was shaken.

### II. Surrender to the Fact that Life is not Fair.

One of the mistakes many of us make is that we feel sorry for ourselves or for others, thinking that life *should* be fair, or that someday it will be fair here on this earth. It is not and it will not. When we make this mistake, we tend to spend a lot of time wallowing in self-pity and/or complaining about what is wrong with life. We commiserate with others, discussing the injustices of life. "It's not fair," we complain, not realizing that, perhaps, it was never intended to be.

One of the *nice* things about surrendering to the fact that life isn't fair is that it keeps us from feeling sorry for ourselves by encouraging us to do the very best we can with what we have. Phil. 4:11-13. We know it's not God's job to make everything perfect, it is our own challenge. This insight will help us to deal with the problems of raising children, the difficult decisions we have to make about who to help and who I can't help (II Thess. 3:10-13), as well as our own personal struggles during those times that we have felt victimized or unfairly treated. It usually wakes us up to reality and puts us on the right track.

The fact that life is not fair does not mean we should not do everything in our power to improve our Christian lives of the world around us. To the contrary, it suggests that we should. When we do recognize that life is not fair, we feel compassion for others and for ourselves. Compassion is a heartfelt emotion that delivers loving-kindness to everyone it touches. The next time you find yourself thinking about the injustices of the world, try to focus on compassion for others, love for God and others, and the good things that have happened to you. You may be surprised that it can nudge you out of self-pity and into helpful action.

### III. Choose Your Battles Wisely. Ecc. 9:11.

Choose your battles wisely is a popular phrase in parenting, but is equally important in living a contented life. It suggests that life is filled with opportunities to choose between making a big deal out of something or simply letting it go, realizing it really does not mater. If you choose your battles wisely, you will be far more effective in winning those that are truly important.

Certainly there will be times when you will want or need to argue, confront, or even fight for something you believe in. Many people, however, argue confront, and fight over practically

anything, turning their lives into a series of battles over relatively "small stuff." There is so much frustration in living this type of life that you lose track of what is truly relevant.

The tiniest disagreement or glitch in your plans can be made into a big deal if your goal (conscious or unconscious) is to have everything work out in your favor.

The truth of the matter is, life is rarely exactly the way we want it to be, and other people often do not act as we would like them to. Moment to moment, there are aspects of life that we like and others that we do not; "life isn't fair." If you fight against this principle of life, you will spend most of your life fighting battles.

A more peaceful way to live is to decide consciously which battles are worth fighting and which are better left alone. If your primary goal is not to have everything work out perfectly, but instead, to live a relatively stress-free life, you will find that most battles pull you *away from* your most tranquil feelings. Is it important that you prove to your spouse that you are right and he or she is wrong, or that you confront someone simply because it appears as though he or she has made a minor mistake? Does your preference of which restaurant or movie to go to matter enough to argue over it? Does a small scratch on your car really warrant a suit in small claims court? Does the fact that your neighbor will not park his car on a different part of the street have to be discussed at your family dinner table? These and thousands of other small things are what many people spend their lives fighting about. Look at your own list. You might want to reevaluate your priorities.

If you do not want to "sweat the small stuff," it is critical that you choose your battles wisely. If you do, there will come a day when you will rarely feel the need to do battle.

Of course, we, as Christians, need to battle Satan and the things of the world. However, there are times that, even in dealing with others concerning Christ, we may need to choose our battles wisely. Matt. 7:6.

**Happy Verses:** Ecc. 3:1-7, II Tim. 4:7-8.

## Lesson 10

### I. Introduction.

Often in life we tend to think that because we have uncompleted tasks or dreams that we have not fulfilled, that we are a failure, we are inept, or we are weak because we cannot get everything done. We also find ourselves with our priorities turned around in trying to accomplish everything that we want to do. The Christian must constantly be examining his/her priorities in light of God's Word, and adjusting the things that they commit their efforts to. We are going to try to address these two concerns today.

### II. Repeat to yourself, "Life Isn't a Constant Emergency" John 11:1-45

In some ways, this strategy epitomizes the essential message of "Don't Sweat the Small Stuff". Although most people believe otherwise, the truth of the matter is most of life is not an emergency. Hundreds of thousands of people have neglected their families, their dreams, and their God because of their propensity to believe that life is one big emergency. They justify their neurotic behavior by believing that if they do not work eighty hours a week, they will not get everything done.

A homemaker and mother of three children once said, "I just can't get the house cleaned up the way I like it before everyone leaves in the morning." She was so upset over her inability to be perfect that her doctor had prescribed her anti-anxiety medicine. She was acting (and feeling) like there was a gun pointed at her head and the sniper was demanding that every dish be put away and every towel folded-or else! Again, the silent assumption was, *this is an emergency!* The truth was, no one other than she had created the pressure she was experiencing. We probably all have pressures in our workplace that we have either imagined or brought on ourselves.

Very few people have not turned little things into great big emergencies. We take our own goals so seriously that we forget to have joy along the way, and we become too hard on ourselves. We take simple preferences and turn them into conditions for our own happiness. On the other hand, we beat ourselves up if we cannot meet our self-created deadlines. The first step in becoming a more peaceful person is to have the humility to admit that, in most cases, you are creating your own emergencies. Life will go on if things do not always go according to plans, and if it does not, we will have God to judge the things that we have done. I hope that we will have prioritized and done the things that matter to our eternal life. Luke 12:16-21

### III. Keep Asking Yourself, "What's Really Important?"

Matt. 19:16-26 It is easy to be lost and overwhelmed in the chaos, responsibilities, and goals of life. Once overwhelmed, it is tempting to forget about and postpone that which is most near and dear to your heart. We can help ourselves by constantly asking, "What's really important?"

As part of our early morning routine, we could take a few seconds to ask ourselves this question. It reminds us of what is important in keeping our priorities straight. It reminds us that, despite the multitude of responsibilities, we have a choice of what is most important in our lives and where we need to put our greatest amount of energy--being available for God's work, for husband or wife, for family, and so forth. When we take a few moments to remind ourselves of what's really important, we find ourselves to be more present-moment oriented, and in less of a hurry.

Conversely, when we forget to remind ourselves of what's important, we tend to lose sight of priorities and, once again, get lost in our own busyness. We rush out the door, work late, lose patience, skip praying and studying, and do other things that are in conflict with our goals in life.

#### **IV. Live This Day as if It Were Your Last, It Might Be!**

Remember Luke 12:20? When are we going to die? In fifty years, twenty, ten, five, today? Last time I checked, no one on earth could tell us for sure. Have you often wondered, when listening to the news, did the person who died in the auto accident on his way home from work remember to tell his family how much he loved? And more importantly, was he right with God?

The truth is, none of us has any idea how long we have to live, sadly, however, we act as if we are going to live forever. We postpone important things that, deep down, we know we want to and need to do--telling the people we love how much we care, spending time alone, visiting others, writing a letter to someone, going fishing with our son/daughter, becoming a better listener, obeying God, or following his word more closely in our lives. We come up with elaborate and sophisticated rationales to justify our actions, and end up spending most of our time and energy doing the things that are not very important. We argue for our limitations, and they become our limitations.

We should live our lives as if each day were the last. This is not to say that we abandon our responsibilities, but to remind us of how precious each day is concerning our God, our Family and our fellow Christians.

**Happy Verses:** Joshua 24:15, Hebrews 9:27-28.

## Lesson 11

### I. Introduction.

Have you ever found yourself waiting for someone else to do a job or task that needed done at home or at work? It is easy for us to make a list in our minds about how much we have done or accomplished concerning things that need to be done. Often we use this list to justify not doing something ourselves--*we have done our part of the work* ! In the work of the Lord, many use this to put the blame for things not done on someone else. Often we find members who have not only retired from their secular job but also from the work of the Lord. Let someone who has not done as much as I have over the years do it! None of these attitudes were exhibited by Jesus Christ or condoned in others by him. Esther 4:10-14, 5.

### II. When in Doubt about Whose Turn It Is to Take Out the Trash, Go Ahead and Take It Out.

If we are not careful, it is easy to become resentful about all the responsibilities of daily living. If you think about it, it is astonishing how easy it is for us to remember all the chores that we do, as well as all the other responsibilities that we take care of. However, at the same time, it is easy for us to forget all the things that our spouse does on a daily basis. How convenient!

It is difficult to become a contented person if you are keeping score of all you do. Keeping track only discourages you by cluttering your mind with whose doing what, who is doing more, and so forth. If you want to know the truth about it, this is the epitome of "small stuff." It will bring you far more joy to your life to know that you have done your part and someone else has one less thing to do, than it will to worry and fret over whose turn it is to take out the trash.

The strongest argument against this strategy is the concern that you will be taken advantage of. This mistake is similar to believing it is important that you are always right. It is not important if you take out the trash a few more times than your spouse does. Making things like garbage less relevant in your life will undoubtedly free up more time and energy for truly important things.

We are never taught in the Bible to keep a tally sheet on the things that we have done. If we are instead focusing on helping ourselves and others get to heaven, we can let God keep the tally books for us!

### III. Be Aware of the Snowball Effect of Your Thinking

A powerful technique for becoming more peaceful is to be aware of how quickly your negative and insecure thought can spiral out of control. Remember how Peter swore to the Lord that he would not deny him, and even defended him physically in the Garden, but then after some time and thought he chose to deny that he even knew him. Have you ever noticed how uptight you feel when you are caught up in your thinking? Moreover, to top it off, the more absorbed you get in the details of whatever is upsetting you, the worse you feel. One thought leads to another and yet another, until at some point, you become incredibly agitated.

For example, you might wake up in the middle of the night and remember a phone call that needs to be made the following day. Then, rather than feeling relieved that you remembered such an important call, you start thinking about everything else you have to do tomorrow. You start rehearsing a probable conversation with your boss, getting yourself even more upset. Soon you think to yourself, "I can't believe how busy I am. I must make fifty phone calls a day. Whose life is this anyway?" and on and on it goes until you are felling sorry for yourself. For many people, there is no limit to how long this type of "thought attack" can go on. In fact, it is impossible to feel peaceful with your head full of concerns and annoyances.

The answer to this problem is to nip it in the bud before it goes too far. If you are aware of the problem, then the next time you start making a list of the things you need to do tomorrow, stop yourself. Instead, think about how grateful you are that God gave you the ability to do the things you do. Think about the wonderful things that God has done for us. Write down the things you remembered that you need to do on a piece of paper and put it where you will see it the next morning, or make a list of the great things that we have because we are Children of God!

#### **IV. Think of What You Have Instead of What You Want**

One of the most pervasive and destructive mental tendencies that we have is to focus on what we *want* instead of what we *have* . It does not seem to make any difference how much we have; we just keep expanding our list of desires, which guarantees we sill remain dissatisfied. (Remember the Rich man and his Bigger Barns). The mind-set that says, "I'll be happy when this desire is fulfilled" is the same mind-set that will repeat itself once that desire is met. Often if we do not get what we want, we keep thinking about all that we do not have--and remain dissatisfied. If we do get what we want, we simply re-create the same thinking in our new circumstances. Therefore, despite getting what we want, we remain unhappy. Happiness cannot be found when we are yearning for new desires. There is a way to be happy. It involves changing the emphasis of our thinking from what we want to what we have. Rather than wishing that your spouse were different, try thinking about the wonderful qualities that they possess. Instead of complaining about your salary, be grateful that you have a job. Rather than wishing you were able to take a vacation to Hawaii, think of how much fun you have had close to home. The list of possibilities is endless! Each time that you find yourself falling into the "I wish life were different" trap, back off and start over. Take a breath and say a short prayer of thanks to God! If you focus on the good qualities of your spouse, they will be more loving. If you are grateful for your job, you will do a better job. If you focus on enjoying the time that you have at home, you will end up having more fun. Sit down tonight and make a list of the things you have and think about how grateful you are to have them, thank God for them and you will be happier. Luke 16:19-31

**Happy Verses:** Deut. 33:29, I Kings 10:4-9.

## **Lesson 12**

### **I. Introduction.**

For this lesson and for many of the lessons that follow, we are going to look at how we can reduce stress and enhance joy at work.

### **II. Dare to be Happy**

Many people do not allow themselves the luxury of being enthusiastic, light hearted, inspired, relaxed, or happy--especially at work. It seems that a great number of people are frightened at what a happy demeanor would look like to other people, including co-workers, clients, and employers. After all, they assume, "Someone who is relaxed (or happy) must not be a hard worker." The logic goes that: If they looked happy, others might assume they were satisfied with the status quo and therefore lacking the necessary motivation to excel in a competitive environment. Many people even believe that if you are too happy you will loose your edge.

In reality, it is the other way around. It is nonsense to believe that a relaxed, happy person necessarily lacks motivation. On the contrary, happy people are usually the ones who love what they are doing. It has been shown repeatedly that people who love what they do are highly motivated by their own enthusiasm to continually better themselves and their performance. They are good listeners and have a sharp learning curve. In addition, happy workers are highly creative, easy to be around, and good team players. Genesis 39-41, tells us of the rise, fall and rise again of Joseph in terms of power in Egypt. One thing that is a common thread throughout Joseph's life, is that he was a good worker, who went about his business with a great attitude, no matter what the circumstances were. In the end, his reward for a job well done and happily done, was to be put over all the land of Egypt. Genesis 41:41

Unhappy people, on the other hand, are often held back by their own misery or stress, which distracts them from success. Rigid, stressed-out people are a drag to be around and difficult to work with. They are the ones who lack motivation because they are so consumed with their own problems, lack of time, and stress. Unhappy people often feel victimized by others and their working conditions. It is difficult for them to be solution-oriented because everything is seen as someone else's fault. In addition, they are usually poor team players because they are often self-centered and preoccupied with their own issues. How effective do you think Joseph would have been if he had blamed everyone else for his situation, and let the hate that would result control him? It is okay to be happy, kind, relaxed, patient and forgiving in the work place. You will feel more inspired, creative, and driven to make an even greater contribution than you do right now. You will see solutions and opportunities where others see problems. You will not be so discouraged by setbacks or failures: you will bounce back quickly and resiliently.

If you dare to be happy, your life will begin to change immediately. Your life and your work will take on greater significance, and you will be a better Christian example to your employer, coworkers, and customers.

### **III. Remember to Acknowledge**

Most people love and appreciate being acknowledged. On the other side, most people either resent, or at least feel slighted by not being acknowledged.

You can acknowledge others in many ways. When someone calls you, acknowledge the call. When they send you something, remember to say thank you.. or take the time to write a note. When someone does a good job, say so. When they apologize, acknowledge that too. It is especially important to acknowledge acts of kindness--doing so reinforces that act and encourages more of the same. We all benefit.

Almost everyone loves to be acknowledged. We love to have our phone calls returned, to be told we are doing a great job, to be thanked for working so hard, to have our creativity appreciated, and to be reminded that we are special. Philippians 1:3-7, Rom. 16:1-16. Approximately 50 people reported to a man who ran a large department in an insurance company. He was in the habit of taking everyone for granted. His words were, "My philosophy used to be that people were lucky to have a job. I felt that if someone was doing a good job, their reward was one more paycheck." With some encouragement to become more loving, generous, and expand his definition of acknowledgement, his whole attitude changed. As he looked back, he could hardly believe how he used to behave. People that worked for him were frightened and insecure and did not feel appreciated. By his acknowledging people, they have become happier, less defensive and more loyal than before.

We should acknowledge people, not simply to get something in return, but because it is the right thing to do. When I took the Oak Park Middle School Jazz Band to New York last fall, one of the things that we made it a point of doing was to acknowledge all the people who had contributed to our trip. We did this by purchasing postcards and having the students hand write a thank you on the back. I must have had 5 or 6 individuals and groups say to me later that of all the money and support that they had given school groups, ours was the only one to acknowledge their help. The result has been more money contributed to the group, and more opportunities for success for us. People remember acknowledgement and they appreciate it.

We, as Christians, are to be known as a kind, loving, concerned, forgiving people. We can accomplish this goal by trying to remember to acknowledge the good in other people.

**Happy Verses:** Psalms 67, 85.

## Lesson 13

### I. Introduction.

Many Christians think that there should be a separation between their attitudes and actions at work from the rest of their lives. In other words, it is OK to practice your Christianity at home or at church, but at work it is different. We have different responsibilities at work and must be seen as someone else in order to be successful.

### II. Create a Bridge between your Spirituality and your Work Acts 8:9-13, 17-25

The bridge that Simon tried to make between his work and his spirituality was the wrong one. Instead of letting his spirituality influence his work, the work that he did influenced him to desire the gifts in an inappropriate manner. To his credit, when he was rebuked, he repented and asked for forgiveness.

Many people who have thought that their spirituality should become a more integral part of their life have replied, "I'd love for that to happen but I'm just too busy. I have to go to work." If that sounds familiar, then maybe some of the things we say in this lesson will be helpful.

To create a bridge between your spirituality and your work means that you take the essence of what you believe into your daily work life. You dismantle the dichotomy that so often exists between your spiritual life and that which you do for a living. It means that kindness, patience, honesty, and generosity are made qualities that you practice at work also. If someone is late or makes a mistake, you try to be patient. Even if it is your job or appropriate to reprimand someone, you do so out of love and respect. You are as generous as you can be--with your time, money, ideas and love.

In a way, work is a perfect environment to practice your spirituality. In a given day, you have so many opportunities to practice patience, acts of kindness and forgiveness. You have time to think loving thoughts, smile, embrace others, and practice gratitude. You can practice being non-defensive and a better listener. You can try to be compassionate, particularly with difficult or abrasive people. You can practice your spirituality in virtually everything that you do. It can be found in the way you greet people and deal with conflict. You can exhibit it in the way you sell a product or service--or the way you balance ethics with profit. It is literally everywhere.

As difficult as it may be, we need to turn away projects that conflict with God's word, even if it means a potential loss of profit. If questionable ethics are involved, we need to make the right choice. We need to be able to look at ourselves in the mirror and proudly know that we are the kind of person that can be trusted to do the right thing. People should admire us and love to be around us.

There is something comforting about creating this spiritual bridge. It reminds you of a higher purpose. It puts your problems and concerns into a broader context. It helps you grow from your difficult experiences rather than become hopeless or overwhelmed by them. Even if you have to do something terribly difficult such as firing someone, for example, you do so while

remembering your spirituality. On the other hand, even if you are fired or have to deal with some other tremendous hardship, a part of you knows there is a reason. Having faith in God helps you get through the difficult times. It gives you confidence in a bigger picture. It does not mean that difficult times become easy--just a little more manageable. When we can do this the small stuff that we deal with really does become small stuff. Our perspective on the situations we encounter takes on a spiritual view rather than a worldly one.

### **III. Ask yourself the question, "Am I making the absolute best of this moment?"**

A very important question that we need to ask ourselves is "Am I making the absolute best of this moment?" Think about it. If we make the most of each moment, life has a way of working itself out.

So often, we spend our moments wishing they were different, complaining, whining, commiserating, or feeling sorry for ourselves. However, when we get right down to it, spending our moments in this manner is not only a waste of time, it is counterproductive. One thing that could be helpful is to question yourself in times of stress with, "What am I doing with this moment? Am I focusing on negative, stressful thoughts, or am I spending this moment doing the best I can to come up with the best plan of attack?"

When we do not spend our time thinking about all the things that bug us, and what is wrong with our lives, we can *make the best of the moment* and focus on solutions. Acts 8:27-38, II Cor. 11:23-31, 12:7-10

**Happy Verses:** Psalms 1, 4.

## Lesson 14

### I. Introduction.

Often we fail to look at how we are taking care of ourselves, especially at work. We are so involved in the task of accomplishing our job that we take no time to consider our bodies and how we are treating them.

### II. Remember the Phrase: "Being Dead is Bad for Business"

Remembering this really helps to keep things in perspective. For example, when you find yourself saying things like, "I don't have time to exercise," what you really should be saying is, "I don't have time *not* to exercise." If you lose your health and sense of well-being, you will not make it to work at all. In the end, it takes far less time to take care of yourself than it does to lose your ability to function well.

There was a man who was a partner for a large New York law firm. Although he loved his family as much as anyone could, he was working late. He left early and came home late. He traveled a great deal and was under constant stress. His children were growing up and he was missing most of it. He lacked sleep and exercise. He said, "This pace is going to kill me." To make matters worse, there did not seem to be any light at the end of the tunnel. The more valuable he became to the firm, the more demands were made of his time.

At some point, it all became too much. After a great deal of personal reflection, he came to the conclusion that, as important as his work was to him, it wasn't worth dying for, nor was it worth missing the opportunity to watch his own children grow up. He decided a change was in order. He quit the firm and opened his own practice. Although he still works hard, he has created a sense of balance that works well for him. Had he continued on the same path, his health and happiness would have continued to deteriorate. It seems that he literally decided that being dead would be bad for business.

Obviously, not everyone can make such a dramatic and risky change, but does not it make sense to eat well, exercise, get plenty of rest, think positively, and have regular physical checkups? The major consideration in this regard for the Christian also is "Am I treating my body the way God would have me?" If we do not treat our bodies as the temples that they should be, we cannot be the spiritual factor in the lives of others that we should be. 1 Cor. 6:19-20, 9:22-27 Until it is time for us to leave this body that God provided for us we have responsibilities to ourselves, others and to God to take care and do the best we can do in all things. One caution should be noted. Many people in our society have chosen to pursue the path of concentrating on this earthly body to the point of neglect of the soul. All things must be kept in priority order, with spiritual responsibilities always coming first.

### **III. When You Solicit Advice, Consider Taking It** 1 Kings 12:6-19

It has been observed that people will share something that is bothering them or solicit advice for a problem that they have, and completely ignore the advice given to them. Obviously, there are times when we share a concern simply because we want to vent or because we want someone to listen to us. However, there are other times when we are genuinely confused about what to do and actively seek advice. Yet when a friend, spouse, coworker, or someone else offers a suggestion, our immediate response is to tune it out, or in some way dismiss it.

How many times have you observed someone else being given advice that they either ignored or made light of, that you took or found some portion of the advice to use in your own life?

I am not sure we can know exactly why many of us tend to dismiss the advice we receive. Perhaps we are embarrassed that we need help or we hear things we do not want to hear. Maybe we are too proud to admit that a friend or family member knows something we do not. Sometimes the advice requires a change in lifestyle or requires extra effort.

We need to be able to admit that we do not have all the answers to all the problems in life. It is important that we be able to listen to, examine and, if it is appropriate, to take advice from others. We need always, however, to look at advice that we are given in light of God's word.

It is important to be willing to admit that other people can see things about us (or our circumstances) that we may be too close to or too personally involved with to see ourselves. Therefore, while you probably will not want to accept all the advice that comes your way, you may need to become a little more open to some of it.

**Happy Verses:** Luke 2:1-14

## Lesson 15

### I. **Introduction.** Prov. 20:19, I Tim. 3:11, Prov. 10:18, Rom. 3:7-9.

If you are like most of us, there are times when you make innocent, benign comments to others about a variety of things. You will say things like, "Did you hear about so and so?", "Did you know that so and so did this or that?" sometimes you initiate the conversation. Other times you keep a conversation going without realizing that you are doing so. You'll embellish someone else's comments, share a story or example, get into too much detail, or ask one too many questions. Then, if you're like me, you'll wonder why you spend so much time on the phone and why you can't seem to get enough work done, or why your influence on others is not as great, or why people do not like to talk to you.

### II. **Avoid comments that are likely to lead to gossip or unwanted chatter.**

On the surface, this may not seem like a really big deal until you consider how much time and energy you spend engaged in conversations that may not be entirely relevant, or may not be happening at an ideal time. Think about how often you feel stressed for time and energy. How often do you look back at your day and wish you could have had thirty more minutes to get something done or to simply catch up? Alternatively, think about how often you are in a hurry to complete something. However, for the Christian, there is the greater question-Am I doing and saying the things that God would want me to? If our conversation leads to gossip, we are wrong. If our influence or the influence of others suffers because of things I say, I need to change. It is easy to blame the world or people you talk to during the day for this problem, when, in fact, you may have played a significant role in the problem.

Obviously, there are many times when you want to be engaged in conversation with friends or coworkers, and that is perfectly fine. The trick is to become aware of when you are conversing out of habit rather than by choice, and to be aware of the direction that a conversation is heading. This is a very powerful strategy because even if you add only an hour or so a week to your work life by virtue of biting your tongue, or if you stop one slip of the tongue that could cost you dearly, it is worth it. This is not to suggest that you became antisocial or rude, only that you be careful of what and how much you say when what you say is likely to lead to further, perhaps unwanted, conversation or unwanted results.

### III. **Never, ever backstab**

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone and all they did was to moan and complain about their boss and many other people they work with? Within minutes you become an expert on the "dirt" in the company. If you believe their story, the entire company is messed up. Except, of course, for himself.

The sad part of it is that sometimes the person talking is not even aware that they are doing it. It seems to be a part of his or her ordinary conversation. Apparently, backstabbing was something that they were in the habit of doing.

There are three very good reasons never again to backstab. Primarily, it is wrong in God's sight. It stirs up problems between all involved, causes the Christian to lose influence and respect, and can divide brethren in many ways. It has been said many times and many ways: if you do not have anything good to say about someone, say nothing at all. Secondly, it sounds terrible and makes you look bad. When you hear someone slamming someone behind his back, it says nothing about the person they are referring to, but it does say a great deal about their own need to be judgmental. Thirdly, it creates stress, anxiety, and other negative feelings.

The next time you hear someone backstabbing someone else, try to imagine how the offending person actually feels--beneath the confident, secure appearance. How does it feel to say nasty, offensive, and negative things about someone else who is not even there to defend themselves? Have you ever found yourself having just backstabbed someone and been left with an uncomfortable feeling? You may ask yourself the question, "How could I have stooped so low?" You simply cannot win. You may get a moment or two of relief from getting something off your chest, but you will need to repent and apologize to the person you talked about, or live with your words and their consequences for the rest of your life.

Finally, it is predictable that if you backstab someone, you will lose the respect and trust of the people you are sharing with. It is important to realize that, even if they appear to enjoy what you are saying, and even if they, too, are participating in the gossip, there will always be a part of them that knows that you are capable of backstabbing. They have seen it firsthand. There are many of us who would never dream of saying anything unkind to a person's face, but would not hesitate to say it behind their back. Psalms 10:4-11, 36:1-4, 101:6-8, Prov. 12:22, II Kings 2:23-24.

**Happy Verses:** Hebrews 10

## Lesson 16

### I. Introduction.

One of the ways that we, as human beings, tend to get ourselves in trouble is to commit to too many things; we fail to say "No." We say, Sure, I'll do it," or "No problem, I'll take care of it," when deep down, we know we do not really want to, or that we already have too much on our plates. Another way that this can get us into trouble is to be drawn into things that we know are wrong or that it is advisable to stay away from.

### II. Learn to say NO without guilt.

The problem with always saying yes is two-fold. First, the result is usually feeling overwhelmed, stressed and tired. There is simply a point when enough is enough, a point of diminished return when your attitude, spirit, even your productivity begins to suffer. Your work suffers, as does your personal and family life. By saying yes too often, we begin to feel victimized and resentful that we have so much to do. Because we tend to feel guilty, when we say no, it is often difficult to see that we were the ones who got ourselves into this mess by failing to say no more often.

The second major problem with failing to say no when it is appropriate to do so is that you end up with a slightly insincere attitude. In other words, you are doing things you really do not want to be doing or should not be doing--but you are acting, on the surface, as if everything is just fine. For example, you will agree to perform task or switch shifts with a coworker by saying, "Oh, it's all right," when what you really need is a day off yourself. Then, because you do not get your much-needed rest, you feel victimized by your overwhelming schedule or angry that so many people ask favors of you! Again, you played a key role in the creation of your own stress, but you believe outside forces cause the stress, or that it is inevitable.

Saying no without guilt is not selfish--it is a protective necessity. If someone said to you, "Can I have the air you breathe?", you'd probably question their sanity. You certainly would not feel guilty saying no. Yet if someone says, "Can I ask you to do something for me that will push you over the edge and make you feel stressed out and resentful?", there are many times that you'll agree either out of habit, obligation, or simply guilt. Sure, the person probably did not phrase the request like that, but in reality, that is what is being asked of you.

Obviously, there are many times that we can't say no, and many other times when it's in our best interest to say yes or that we simply want to say yes. Terrific! The trick is to use our wisdom, instead of old knee jerk reactions, to decide when to say yes and when to say no. The key is to be reflective, and ask yourself, "All things considered, the feeling and needs of the person making the request, the need to say yes, and your own sanity, is it in my best interest to say yes, or is it okay to refuse? Matt. 25:1-13, Luke 14:16-26, Judges 16:6-21

### **III. Don't let the negative coworkers get you down**

Regardless of where you work or what you do for a living, it is almost inevitable that you are going to have to deal with your share of negative people. Some of these people are going to have bad attitudes, others may be cynical or passive-aggressive, and some are probably going to be downright angry.

Learning to deal with negative people is a real art form, but it is well worth the effort. Consider the options. If you do not learn the secrets of dealing effectively with negativity, then certainly there will times when these people will bring you down with them. Their negativity will rub off on you, and you will end up discouraged, frustrated, or even depressed. If you do not do what is necessary to deal gracefully with people, you may yourself end up cynical and negative.

You can get to a point where negative people rarely, if ever, bring you down. The best place to start is to increase your level of compassion. It is critical to see the innocence, to understand that when someone is negative, they are unfulfilled or in some way unhappy. In most cases, they are not doing it on purpose. Like you, they would prefer to experience contentment and joy. They just do not know how.

Enthusiasm is our most natural state of being. In other words, it is natural to feel inspired, positive, creative, interested and uplifted by the work and the things that we choose to do. When this quality is lacking, something is wrong. Therefore, when someone regularly expresses negativity, there is almost certainly something missing in that person's life. That something is probably the joy and peace found in Jesus Christ. When this is someone that professes to be a Christian, drastic changes need to take place in that person's life. Jesus is a source of comfort, peace, humility, joy, and a positive attitude for the Christian. When two people work together and one has a very negative attitude about everything, one of two things usually happens. Either the negative person will lower the spirits of the more positive person or the positive person will raise the spirits of the negative. Your best chance of stopping the effects of negativity is to remain enthusiastic yourself. Be part of the solution rather than contributing to the problem. Jonah 3:9-4:11, Job 2:7-10, Ephesians 2, 4:23.

**Happy Verses:** I Peter 1:13-23.