

# LAUGH AGAIN: Experience Outrageous Joy

## STUDY ELEVEN

### Defusing Disharmony

*Philippians 4:1–3*

*In the noble pursuit of biblical unity, the Lord becomes our common ground, and His big picture plan becomes more significant than our narrow-minded opinions.*

—Charles R. Swindoll

**O**FTEN, Christians can be like two porcupines trying to live together. The closer we get, the more we tend to prick each other! We profess to need each other, and we do, but we get on each other's nerves or offend one another over often petty opinions. Why? What is it that causes Christ's church to behave more like prickly porcupines than the spotless and holy bride Jesus is preparing for Himself? The study of this brief passage today from Philippians chapter 4 sheds fresh perspective on an age-old problem and offers hope to all of us.



#### PREPARE YOUR HEART

The Lord desires to meet you in His Word. Pause for a few minutes and turn to Him in prayer. Ask Him to clear your thoughts and open your eyes to the truth of His Word. Write out your own prayer of preparation below.

*Open my eyes to see  
the wonderful truths in your instructions. (Psalm 119:18)*



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

## Defusing Disharmony

*Philippians 4:1–3*



### YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

God's vision for His people living in harmony is as ancient as the slopes of Mount Hermon, those towering peaks oft mentioned amid the moving choruses of Hebrew praise. Consider the following psalm of David:

*How wonderful and pleasant it is  
when brothers live together in harmony!  
For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil  
that was poured over Aaron's head,  
that ran down his beard  
and onto the border of his robe.  
Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon  
that falls on the mountains of Zion.  
And there the LORD has pronounced his blessing,  
even life everlasting. (Psalm 133:1–3)*

How does the rich imagery of Psalm 133 convey the cascading effect of relational harmony among God's people?



### Observation: A Glimpse of a Century-One Church—Philippians 4:1–3

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are compared, contrasted, emphasized, repeated, or related. As Paul concluded his letter to the Philippians, he addressed the skirmish between two women in the beloved congregation.



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*Philippians 4:1–3*

### A Primary Principle—Philippians 4:1

Before addressing the specific conflict, Paul called for a return to the primary principle that diffuses disharmony.

*Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stay true to the Lord. I love you and long to see you, dear friends, for you are my joy and the crown I receive for my work. (Philippians 4:1)*

What was the basis of Paul's appeal to the Philippians?

What words did Paul use to describe the Philippian Christians?

This would be a good time to review the significance of the Philippian church. Open a Bible dictionary or find a section on *Philippi* in a Bible atlas and read carefully about the background of this famous New Testament church. Record what you discover below.



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What did Paul urge the believers to do?

This repeated exhortation to “stay true” to the Lord frames the basis of Paul’s appeal that comes in the next two verses.

### **A Relational Need—Philippians 4:2**

In verse 2, Paul moved next from principle to people and named two individuals whose conflict was so well-known that it had even reached the apostle’s ears in distant Rome.

*Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. (Philippians 4:2)*

What did Paul ask the women to do?

What reason did Paul give for exhorting these two women to reconcile?



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Would you characterize Paul's request as urgent or as a mere suggestion? Explain your answer based on what you observe in verse 2.

### **An Affirming Request—Philippians 4:3**

At times, a dispute runs so deep that it takes the help of a third party, an objective mediator, to resolve the matter and restore the relationship. That appears to have been the case with the clash between these two Philippian believers.

*And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life. (Philippians 4:3)*

What request did Paul make of his “true partner”?

What additional information do we discover about these women from verse 4?

Though Paul doesn't reveal the name of the one he referred to as his “true partner,” this person must have been a reliable ministry companion. Take a few minutes to read a commentary on this section of Philippians. See what you learn about who this individual might have been in relation to Paul and the Philippians.



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### Interpretation: The Importance of Standing Firm in the Lord—Philippians 4:1–3

Once you've looked closely at the literary clues in the text through observation, you are now ready for interpretation! Interpretation involves a process that helps answer the question, *What does the text mean?* In his letter, Paul employed an oft-repeated phrase, “stand firm in the Lord,” as the basis of his appeal for diffusing disharmony. Let's take a closer look at what this expression means and its overall importance to Christians today. Notice, Paul used a similar expression early in his letter to the Philippians:

*Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. (Philippians 1:27)*

How does standing together with one spirit and purpose compare to Paul's appeal to “stay true to the Lord” in Philippians 4:1?

How does standing firm foster unity and harmony in the Lord?

*It is not cliché to say to fellow members of the family of God, “Stay true to the Lord.” In other words, be sure your life squares with His will. Be sure you're under the control of His Spirit. Be sure His Word is your guide. Not just the counsel of a friend. Not just some long-standing tradition. Not church polity or policy, but His eternal Word. —Chuck Swindoll*



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To resolve the conflict in the Philippian church, notice Paul didn't spell out a specific process. Instead, he appealed to both women involved as well as others in the congregation to work together to rectify the dispute. Why is it significant that Paul resisted spelling out the process and instead emphasized the basis of his appeal—the unity of the believers?



### **Correlation: Exposing the Basis of Disharmony—James 4:1–3**

Correlation compares passages of Scripture to help interpret the passage in view. A related passage in the New Testament book of James sheds light on how relational conflicts emerge in the first place.

Read James 4:1–3 carefully and reflectively. What insight do you gain from James regarding the reason for relationship troubles?

What sinful emotions are at play when believers collide?

How does Paul's appeal for diffusing disharmony in Philippians 4 relate to James' insights on the causes of relational conflict?



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### Application: Finding Truth a Home in Our Hearts

Application moves us from maintaining a mere intellectual understanding of a passage to allowing truth to penetrate our hearts. Often, such application is less personal and more general in nature, helping us understand the reality of the situation we face. Chuck offered three helpful insights as he closed his study of Philippians 4:1–3:

1. *Clashes will continue to occur in the body of Christ.* Disagreements are to be expected so long as selfish individuals are compelled to live and serve alongside each other in the church. It's helpful to have our eyes open to the reality of the stubborn nature of the human heart.
2. *Not all conflicts are wrong.* Some conflicts are necessary, even required to bring about a declaration of truth and righteousness. We need the Lord's help to discern the difference between healthy conflict and conflict caused by selfish emotions.
3. *If the disagreement should be and can be resolved but it is not, then stubbornness and selfishness are at the core.* Prayerfully seeking a resolve is always the best approach.
4. *Should you be the "companion" needed to assist in the reconciliation, remember this threefold objective:*
  - The goal is restoration, not discipline.
  - The right attitude is grace, not force.
  - The common ground is Christ, not logic nor church tradition nor personal will.

If you're crossing swords with someone over an issue or disagreement, how can you put the weapons down and follow Chuck's steps toward reconciliation? How can you apply the peacemaking principles from this study today?

Christians can stop being like porcupines with one another when they emulate the Lamb of God, caring for and forgiving each other just as our Savior loves and forgives us.



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### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, I'm challenged today to reflect on my own readiness to stand firm in the faith, especially when I'm tempted to remain in a state of conflict with a brother or sister in Christ. Thank You for reminding me that such a sinful attitude is contrary to Your gospel and impedes the mission of Christ. May You be gracious to me as I seek to restore my fellowship with You and others. In Jesus' name, amen.*



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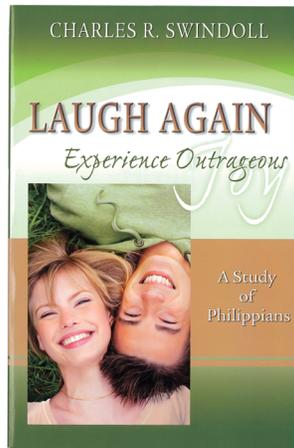
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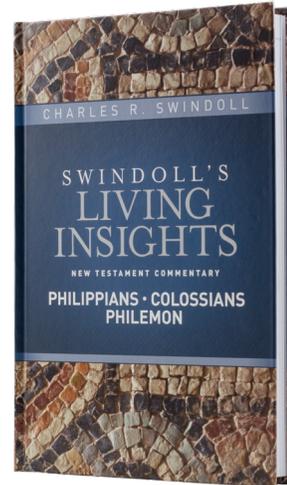
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