



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Stressed Out / Week 3

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

BOTTOM LINE

Choose joy now.

GOAL OF SMALL GROUP

To help students understand that they can't control the future, but they CAN control how they choose to respond to stress today!

SCRIPTURE

She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities (Acts 16:18-19 NIV).

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:22-25 NIV).

CONTEXT OF SCRIPTURE

Paul and Silas were restrained, flogged, and thrown into prison. In this moment, Paul and Silas likely had no idea what their future held. In all likelihood, "What if" questions flooded their minds—question like, "What if we're in their prison forever?" and, "What if we're executed?" In the midst of their situation—and probable stress—Paul and Silas prayed, sang, and trusted God. In other words, they chose their response to the situation instead of letting the situation trigger a stress-filled reaction. Today, when we're faced with stressful, unpredictable situations, we can do the same.

TEACHING OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION

Let me start with a very important question: How do you sleep at night?

Have you ever had a persistent pain that mysteriously attacked some part of your body, and you started drawing

some dire conclusions about the future of your health?

In this series, *Stressed Out*, we're talking about healthy ways to work through the things that freak us out. And the big stress question we want to address today is this: WHAT IF?



COMMUNICATOR GUIDE

Stressed Out / Week 3

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

TEACHING OUTLINE

TENSION

There are a lot of events that happen in life that make us ask, "What if?" questions in other areas.

"What if?" is a question that can wreak havoc on your mind, heart, emotions, peace, and even your health.

The truth is, the future can stress out all of us.

Even if they have good intentions, we are surrounded by people who motivate us by creating stress about our future.

Stressing about your future doesn't *actually* improve your future.

TRUTH

In the New Testament, the book of Acts describes the spread and growth of the early church.

But let me make one thing clear: It wasn't easy.

Paul and Silas were friends who were in the city of Philippi. They weren't bothering anyone.

One minute Paul's just annoyed by a heckler. The next minute, he and his friend are beaten, chained, and dungeon-ed. Now they sit in the inner cell with their feet fastened in stocks.

Paul and Silas had no idea what the future looked like for them. But none of their potential outcomes looked *good*.

In the middle of some of their most stressful moments, they prayed, they sang, and they influenced.

There was a happy ending to this story. *But Paul and Silas didn't know that when they were praying and singing in that inner cell!*

Good and bad things will happen in our future, but circumstances and outcomes don't decide how we react. We do!

APPLICATION

Listen, you have NO CHOICE about what happens in your life NEXT. But you DO have a choice about how you react to it NOW.

You can pray, you can trust, and you can choose how you're going to react.

Choose joy *now*.

LANDING

As you head out, I want you to know you'll have all kinds of situations in life, good and bad.

But you can choose how you react. The power is in your hands.



TEACHING SCRIPT

Stressed Out / Week 3

PRELUDE

SOCIAL

WORSHIP

STORY

GROUPS

HOME

BOTTOM LINE

CHOOSE JOY NOW.

INTRODUCTION

2 MINUTES

Let me start with a very important question:

How do you sleep at night?

Before you answer, let me clarify. I DON'T mean how *well* do you sleep at night, how many hours of sleep do you average, or how quickly you fall asleep. What I mean is, what's your bed, mattress, pillow, and sleeping arrangement of choice?

- Some of you fall asleep with no pillows under your head, and you barely move.
- Some of you have been known to fall asleep on your bed and wake up ten feet away!
- Some of you fall asleep with seven pillows and lay under four blankets.

Whether you sleep on your side, your back, or your face, have you ever woken up with a strange, mysterious pain in your back, neck, or shoulder? And five hours later, when you walk into your school cafeteria at lunch, you notice that it is still just as painful?

Maybe it's just me, but I sometimes wonder how we humans can fall asleep—something that's very good for our health—and wake up with pain that came from us sleeping! I simply don't understand it.

Here's another related question:

Have you ever had a persistent pain that mysteriously attacked some part of your body, and you started drawing some dire conclusions about the future of your health? Maybe you've had thoughts like this:

- What if this shoulder pain never goes away?
- What if there's something chronically wrong with me?
- What if I have to have surgery if I want to ever use my arm properly again?
- What if my arm needs to be amputated to save my life?



Extreme, I know. But all it takes is one Google search on *any* ailment you feel, and you're bound to come across some pretty catastrophic stories. Plus, you probably know at least one person who had a nagging pain that led to a MAJOR problem. Or you know someone who was a little bit sick, and that led to them being A LOT sick.

In this series, *Stressed Out*, we're talking about healthy ways to work through the things that freak us out. And the big stress question we want to address today is this:

WHAT IF?

TENSION

3 MINUTES

Just like a nagging pain could lead us to wonder if our arm will need to be amputated in the future, there are a lot of events that happen in life that make us ask, "What if?" questions in other areas. And how does this stress us out? Well, it kind of works like this:

1. **Something happens.**
2. **It leads us to worry about the future.**
3. **We start asking WHAT IF?**

Yep, it's as simple as that. And before you know it, we're all worked up and stressed out!

"What if?" is a question that can wreak havoc on your mind, heart, emotions, peace, and even your health.

For example, maybe you ask yourself . . .

- What if I don't make the team?
- What if I don't have a date to prom?
- What if my parents split up or we have to move?
- What if I don't have the grades I need to get into the right college? Or *any* college?
- What if I don't fit in?
- What if I hate the job I choose?
- What if I never get married?
- What if everything I'm doing right now *isn't* enough to get me where I want to go later?

Stressed out yet? Sorry to do that to you. **The truth is, the future can stress out all of us.** Even if we think things are going to go well *right now*, it's no guarantee that they'll go well IN THE FUTURE, is it?

And even if they have good intentions, we are surrounded by people who motivate us by creating stress about our future. Think about it . . .



- Teachers will tell you that colleges are more likely to accept people with a lot of extracurricular involvement. And you may think, *What if I don't have enough?*
- Your parents will tell you that you need to do certain things to be successful or popular.
- Advertisers will tell you that your life won't turn out as well if you DON'T have their product.

No matter how a worry about the future enters your mind, the end result is the same: anxiety. In fact, for some of you, "What if?" is the reason why you . . .

- Don't sleep well.
- Can't relax.
- Have an addiction that helps you escape.
- Have an addiction that helps you succeed.
- Snap or yell at your parents or siblings.

We can all point to ways that stressing out isn't great for us. And here's what's crazy about it:

Stressing about your future doesn't *actually* improve your future.

Working hard can improve your future.

Planning can improve your future.

Making wise choices now can improve your future.

But worrying or stressing doesn't actually *do* anything to make your future better. Worry is like a mental fidget spinner. It gives you something to do, but it doesn't actually accomplish anything.

So let's look for some other options.

TRUTH

5 MINUTES

In the New Testament, the book of Acts describes the spread and growth of the early church.

A lot of people found out about Jesus because of the work of a small handful of people. In fact, the reason you and I are gathering in a church today is because of the work of these people who were committed to telling as many people as possible about Jesus and what He did for us.

But let me make one thing clear: It wasn't easy.

- Traveling *anywhere* was a difficult task back in the day.
- There was NO such thing as "freedom of speech."



- People did **NOT** like it (and I cannot emphasize this enough) when you proposed a religious viewpoint that opposed theirs. When I think about it, people don't like it these days either. But today, reactions are far less drastic than the one we're going to look at from back then.

Paul and Silas were friends who were in the city of Philippi (which is located in what we now call Greece). They weren't bothering anyone. They were praying together and talking about Jesus with small groups of people. Everything was fine . . .

Until they got a heckler.

A lady who made a lot of money as a fortuneteller started following them and yelling at them. Check out what happens:

She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her. When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities (Acts 16:18-19 NIV).

In other words, the tattletales told the civil officers and judges that Paul and Silas were advocating for customs that were unlawful for Romans to practice.

You'd think the punishment would be a fine, a slap on the hand, or a night in jail.

Nope.

The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks (Acts 16:22-24 NIV).

Uhhh, what? Sounds like this town needed to relax a little bit!

One minute Paul's just annoyed by a heckler. The next minute, he and his friend are beaten, chained, and dungeon-ed. Now they sit in the inner cell with their feet fastened in stocks.

Talk about stressed out!

Paul and Silas had no idea what the future looked like for them. But none of their potential outcomes looked good.

They didn't know for sure what would happen. But because they were mortal human beings, it's hard for me to imagine that "What if?" questions didn't enter their minds. Questions like . . .

- What if we're in this prison forever?
- What if we're executed?
- What if no one fights for us, looks for us, or vouches for us?



I bet this list could go on for days!

So with all the stress, worry about the future, and “What if?” questions, what did Paul and Silas do?

First, I have to ask: What would *you* do? What would *you* do in their situation? Well, here’s what they did:

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25 NIV).

Let’s break this down, just to make sure we don’t miss the significance of it. In the middle of some of their most stressful moments . . .

- **They prayed.** They asked for God’s help, presence, grace, and comfort.
- **They sang.** They sang songs that reminded them of what was true about God. Or, they sang just to cheer themselves up and bring some joy to a bad situation!
- **They influenced.** I love this: “Other prisoners were listening to them.” Their response to a situation that would stress out *anyone else* allowed them to impact others who were also likely worried about their futures.

So, the end of Paul and Silas’ situation is pretty dramatic to say the least. God caused a violent earthquake to shake the prison so hard that their chains came loose and the prison doors opened. In that moment, the jailer decided to trust in Jesus and got baptized, and Paul and Silas walked out as free men. You should read this incredible story for yourself!

There was a happy ending to this story. **But Paul and Silas didn’t know that when they were praying and singing in that inner cell!** They didn’t know if their circumstances would get better or worse. And here’s what they taught us in that moment:

Good and bad things will happen in our future, but circumstances and outcomes don’t decide how we react. We do!

When we feel a sense of worry and “What if?” about the future, we get to decide: Do we stress out or cry out to God? Stress out or sing out?

APPLICATION

2 MINUTES

Here are some truths I think we’d all agree on:

- There are people with bad circumstances who have deep joy.
- There are people with awesome circumstances who have intense stress.
- There are people who have awesome, virtually unlimited future opportunities who are crushed by worry.
- There are people who have very few future opportunities who are full of happiness.



It's about a choice. It's about you. It's about what you do when you're unsure about what may happen in the future.

Listen, you have NO CHOICE about what happens in your life NEXT. But you DO have a choice about how you react to it NOW.

1. **You can pray.** Sounds like a cliché church answer, I get it. But that's what Paul and Silas did.
2. **You can trust.** When you start stressing about the future and what you DON'T know about what will happen next, you can choose something that you DO know is true—God's love for you. No matter what happens, He loves you deeply and is always with you! That doesn't change. And that is a relief in the most stressful circumstances.
3. **You can choose how you're going to react.** When you're anxious about things you can't control, think about what you can control now—your attitude. No matter what happens, you have the power to make the choice that reflects the attitude you want.

The bottom line is this:

Choose joy now.

Don't wait until you find out what happens in the future. Like Paul and Silas in the inner cell, choose a God-honoring better attitude and outlook on life in the present!

LANDING

1 MINUTE

As you head out, I want you to know you'll have all kinds of situations in life, good and bad. And there will be so many times when you DON'T know the answer to "What if?"

But you can choose how you react. The power is in your hands. **Choose joy now.** It won't make your "What ifs" go away, but it will certainly put them in their proper place—the place where they stress you out less.



TRANSITION INTO SMALL GROUPS