



# TENSION

## for twenty-twenty-four

**Some people make it their goal to live life without tension, and that's a mistake.**

**Tension is an opportunity to be transformed.**

As the Lord leads us all into a fresh year there is a rich tapestry of spiritual activity, prophetic messages and a tension that will either help us or hinder us, depending on our response.

When you resist tension it can often cause a negative outcome, while flowing with the resistance Jesus initiates will lead us through the transformation process He knows is good for us. The process of progress will make us stronger and able to carry the fullness of the potential the Lord has for us.

If you think about the nature of all physical exercise, its purpose is to make you stronger, and healthier, and the process of progress is always through tension. When you exercise with weights or resistance, you put the muscle under tension to the point that the muscle tears, and then as it heals it naturally forms as a stronger muscle. If you're mad enough to embrace aerobic exercise, your lungs will struggle to serve the demand of your blood system at first, and then your body will increase capacity and performance as you continue to put the system under the tension of pressure.

**Your spiritual walk with Jesus is a journey of apprehending tension to find personal, spiritual transformation.**



## Jesus loves using tension to transform us.

Look at the bold statement Jesus makes to listeners, found in Matthew 16.

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? Is anything worth more than your soul?"*

Jesus is not trying to lead you into something horrible. He knows life with Him will far outweigh any good you think you can have without Him.

There are many other statements Jesus makes that cause tension.... if we allow it.

What about when Jesus says, "Give first and make it your highest priority. Give sacrificially, and with the measure you choose to give, it will be measured back to you." (Paraphrased by me.)

I believe this is going to be a moment of financial tension for some of us in 2024.

What about when Jesus says "The first shall be last and the last shall be first"? Are we willing to appear as the least important in this world to embrace the future Jesus has prepared for us?

And what about the woman who asked Jesus for help, to which Jesus replied, "It is not good to take the children's bread from the table and throw it to the dogs." Here we find Jesus calling this woman a dog!

Is Jesus calling you a dog — I do not know.

But, here's my point; **if the tension of God's Word repels you then you'll miss your moment of transformation.**

It is often a lack of explanation that robs people of their salvation moment. Because they can't explain or understand what God is doing inside them, they avoid the tension and therefore miss the transformation.

**When you avoid tension, you avoid transformation.**

# TENSION for twenty-twenty-four

As is often the case with Kingdom Truth, there are some situations where there is more than one correct answer. There is often tension where there are TWO very good options, and we live in the misbelief that we should choose one of them when the tension is HOW can we live with both in our lives?

In this short publication I want to outline three of these areas of our lives that I believe are important for us to wrestle with in 2024. This is a prophetic message that I fully expect will birth something in you... even if it begins with a tension you're uncomfortable with!

Today I want to briefly point you to three areas of our life together:

- **Our Posture**

How we present ourselves before Jesus..

- **Our Place**

How we are connected with others..

- **Our Purpose**

How we function as part of a bigger picture..

The objective here for me is clear — and that is to create moments of tension through scripture that will cause us to turn to Jesus and allow Him to do His work in our lives. As always, we all must consider if we are willing to forsake our lives for what Jesus is calling us into.

**The Bible is the unchanging, all-powerful Word of God and it brings tension into our world.**

Here's the thing, if you read it, study it and apply it in the wrong way, it will break you. Look at the Pharisees. They read the Law, studied the Law, were experts in the Law and applied the Word of God down to the details of their herbs and trinkets! This literal application caused them to be judged by Jesus as "white-washed tombs."

Let us be like Nicodemus, who sought Jesus out to discover more, to challenge his paradigm and to find the fullness of life that Jesus was offering to all who would follow Him.

# OUR POSTURE

There are two elements of this, operating in tension. How can we embrace both?

## a) ADVANCE AND OCCUPY

This is a key prophetic mandate for us at ZION and we've been speaking about it for over a year now. The [first message](#) I shared on this was last summer. I also wrote about it and spoke about it in [episode 34 of my podcast](#), *Coffee with Phil*.



This is clearly articulated in the story of the people of God, led out of bondage and captivity, into the liberty and prosperity of the Promised Land.

*"Look, I am giving all this land to you! Go in and occupy it, for it is the land the Lord swore to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and to all their descendants." (Deut 1: 8)*

I would highly recommend a full read of Deuteronomy chapter 11 also as it contains some wonderful insights into the heart of God for His people — which includes you and me!

*"... the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them... **'Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you... no one will be able to stand against you as long as you live... I will not fail you or abandon you.'**" (Josh 1: 3—6)*

This is, in my opinion, also anchored in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission that we have as the church. As the Ecclesia, we are given the mission by God to go into all the world and advance the Kingdom of God. You can hear more about this in our series called ['We Are Apostolic.'](#)

**We don't live a passive life of faith, rather a life that demands that we demonstrate God's love and goodness to all who we encounter.**

But, and here's the big but — we can be so fixated with plans for advancement that we miss the moment of tension where the Lord is also calling us to a second posture.

And this is the tension I want to present here. Often we get so fixated in one area that we completely disregard — or write off — the alternate posture that Jesus is also inviting us into.





# OUR POSTURE

In addition to embracing the posture of “advance and occupy,” there is a second posture that is important.

## **b) SLOWED-DOWN SPIRITUALITY**

The flip-side for our posture is the call of Jesus for us all to seek a life that embraces a slowed-down spirituality.

Jesus shows us in His lifestyle as recorded in the Gospels that less is more — we can accomplish outcomes while we prioritise being with Him instead of just doing for Him. This invitation is most beautifully captured in His words in Matthew’s gospel.

*“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”* (Matt 11: 28—30)

I personally enjoy the poetic language used in the Passion rendition of this passage. Here are some of those phrases for you to meditate on. Jesus says to you;

*“Come to me. I will refresh your life, for I am your oasis. Simply join your life with mine. You will find refreshment and rest in me. For all that I require of you will be pleasant and easy to bear.”*

Slowing down is not natural for some of us, especially someone like me, yet I am learning that is essential for me to be able to do the journey well.

## **What does slowed-down spirituality look like?**

It looks like contemplative prayer, it looks like extended periods of solitude and silence, it looks like pausing to allow Jesus to heal the past instead of burying your pain in the busyness of life.

What this does not look like is stepping into the shadows or out of the door of the church permanently. It does not look like hiding your hurt or offence away from others. It does not mean resting so much that you appear to others as if you are dead!

Seriously though, we could all learn from the life of Jesus and His posture.

(As a church, we highly endorse Peter Scazzero’s program, [Emotionally Healthy Spirituality](#).)

# OUR PLACE

There are two elements of this, operating in tension. How can we embrace both?

## a) HONOUR YOUR FAMILY

There is strong evidence in the Bible that God honours family, and so should we.



God created family to mirror the other-centred love that motivates and mobilises the love of the Trinity — God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God birthed you inside a family. God commands us to honour our father and mother so that our lives would go well for us. God entrusts us with children so that we might raise them to love and fear the Lord.

Here at ZION, we honour Family. But perhaps not the way you might expect.

We might do well to consider the teaching of Jesus so that we do not place too much emphasis on our family. Why do I say this? **Some people choose to follow family activities instead of coming to worship as the church.**

*“If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.” (Matt 10: 37–39)*

Yikes, those are some harsh words from Jesus!

Plus, I suggest, we would feel the full weight of the tension of the Truth of Jesus if we read these additional passages on the subject.

Matthew 19: 29–30.     Luke 12: 49–53.     Mark 3: 33–35.

Why do I share these verses with you?

As much as it pains me to say this,

**I believe this year the Lord is going to ask some of you to put your family in their right place... and it's not on the throne.**

And that will, no doubt, cause tension!



# OUR PLACE

Where we fit has two parts, both important but it is essential they maintain the correct balance.

## b) COVENANT CONNECTION

The flip-side of our place in God's plan is that we have been born again into a new family.

Let us get God's perspective on family and how important it is to Him. Look at the story of the Bible:

- When God made a covenant with Abram, he promised him a family.
- When God initiated His plan for salvation, He birthed it through family, but not in the normal way we might expect.
- The tribe of Judah is recorded by Matthew as coming through Tamar, the daughter in law of Judah who he thought was a prostitute!
- The mother of Solomon was David's wife Bathsheba who he stole from Uriah the Hittite.
- Jesus, the Son of God became the son of man through a young girl who was not yet married.

*"God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ." (Eph 1:5a)*

## Perhaps God's perspective of family is full of tension and requires us to rethink ours?

There's a well-known saying that you may have heard; "blood is thicker than water."

Did you know that this saying came from a battle-cry that soldiers used to shout as they ran toward the enemy firing at them? The full saying is this; **"the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb."** What this means for us is the covenant connection (bond) we have with the family God grafted us into is stronger than the one we were born into!

This, I believe, describes family as the way that God has formed it, through the binding of us to each other through the shared faith we have in the blood of the new covenant that was formed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. That's the tension of how we should live together.

# OUR PURPOSE

There are two elements of this, operating in tension. How can we embrace both?

## a) YOU WERE CREATED FOR PURPOSE

You were born into the family of God for the purposes of God. You have a role to play.



*For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Eph 2: 10)*

And I love the way Paul represents our unity and cooperation here:

*He [Jesus] makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. (Eph 4: 16)*

This verse is so powerful we developed an entire series, [Connection](#), around this one verse! Again, we spoke about this last year in the series, '[We Are Apostolic](#).' In that series I shared how **the church is supposed to be like a battleship advancing the kingdom of God**. We are all on that battleship. I said last year, 'a battleship is not a cruise ship!'

**Please, do not think like you are a passenger on a cruise ship simply waiting for heaven.**

Get busy, get training, get activated, be a part of the mission of the church!

Think of Moses, who led the people of God to the Promised Land. Once he got to the edge of the land, God took him home. There was no retirement! Elijah was doing miracles on his last day on earth, and then the Lord took him home in a chariot of fire. Jesus fulfilled His mission in His death, and then came back for a second wave so that his disciples got the full message!

There is no retirement in the Bible! There may be a season of rest, but this is only a season! God has a role for every person to play in the mission of the church!





# OUR PURPOSE

Our purpose in God's Kingdom will be limited by how we embrace this second aspect.

## **b) YOU WERE CREATED FOR SUBMISSION**

God is a God of order and structure, and He does not set people up to be independent. The body is the body, joined together (connected) so that it can work effectively together.

Jesus highlighted a conversation that has significant meaning in this area, and it would do us well to read, meditate and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal His Truth to us. This conversation Jesus had with a Roman Centurion can help us to connect in relationship and power to do the work of Jesus.

*But the officer said, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my home. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, 'Go,' and they go, or 'Come,' and they come. And if I say to my slaves, 'Do this,' they do it." (Matthew 8: 8—9)*

The Centurion shows us what powerful faith looks like, (check out Jesus' response!) and this is a very important aspect of our working together as the family of God. But, unfortunately, many in the modern church do not want to live in Godly submission. To that, I would say this:

**Your ability to move in the anointing God has prepared for you in your assignment will be limited to the level of your willingness to be submitted to the structure God has established around you.**

This is not easy for a church leader to say because it sounds like I am saying, "you must all be submitted to me." Well, I am not saying that... the Bible is.

**We are all on mission, but it is a unified mission that we get the privilege of doing together!**

Seriously, take this passage (Matthew 8: 5—13) and ask Jesus what it looks like for you to be in a healthy relationship with your church.

# NEXT STEPS

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## **Remember, Jesus loves to use tension to help transform us.**

Life with Jesus is about learning to live in the tension, confident that our closeness to Him will help us overcome our anxiety of not knowing or not being in control.

Here are some questions you can meditate on prayerfully. Writing down your thoughts and/or discussing them with someone else will be helpful.

- How can I be actively involved in the mission of my church, connecting with others to add my gifts to theirs?
- What aspects of my current life could be 'pruned away' to make life slower, thereby making room for a contemplative spiritual walk with Jesus?
- Would you be willing to participate in the program 'Emotionally Healthy Spirituality' this year as part of ZION's discipleship offering? If not, why not?
- Are there any aspects of my family life that inhibit my connection with my church family? (Ask Jesus what He thinks, and if He says Yes, ask Him what He wants you to do about it.)
- Am I clear on my spiritual gifts? If not, how can I become clear? If so, how can I connect my gifting to my personal assignment for the Kingdom of God?



## **ABOUT PHIL STRONG**

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You can connect with more content here:

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