

October 3, 2004
A.M. Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“I’m Stressed Out, What Should I Do?”
Philippians 4: 2-9 NLT

2 And now I want to plead with those two women, Eu-o-di-a [you OH dih uh] and Syn-ty-che [SIN tih keh]. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. 3 And I ask you, my true teammate, to help these women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. And they worked with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.

4 Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again--rejoice! 5 Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, let me say one more thing as I close this letter. Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. 9 Keep putting into practice all you learned from me and heard from me and saw me doing, and the God of peace will be with you.

I begin today by “showing” you a definition of stress: [A definition of stress photo.] Ever feel that way, anxious that your whole world is about to collapse in on you at any moment? So many people in our society are under stress (just like this dog). Stress is mental or physical tension or strain. To be stressed-out is to be tired, nervous or depressed as a result of over work, mental pressure etc. I think many feel like that dog...under pressure causing them stress.

A web site for Focus on the Family says, “...stress robs us of good health in mind, body and spirit. Sleepless nights are the rule and well-balanced meals a thing of the past. Family time just seems to disappear. Pressures at work overwhelm. Tasks on the to-do list multiply. And worse, an impending sense of doom and depression gnaws at the soul. As the pace of life accelerates at breakneck speed, how and where can you find balance?”

STRESS / BALANCE

Balance is an interesting word to use. I think what it means is: what do we need on the other side of the scale to keep us from going over “the deep end?” When I was a kid the playgrounds at the parks had seesaws. Seesaws were not too much fun when I had someone on the opposite end who was bigger and heavier than I was. One time a young boy was on a picnic at a park with some friends and relatives. He wandered off by

himself and went over to the playground area. There a bigger kid convinced him he could be trusted on the seesaw. So they both climbed on. But then the bigger boy got on he propelled the seesaw up so fast without breaking his fall with his feet so the bottom of his side of the seesaw hit the ground with such force that the smaller boy had to hang on or go flying off. Then the bigger boy kept the smaller boy up in the air and wouldn't let him down, which was pretty stressful. After awhile a friend came looking for the smaller boy. When he found him and saw his predicament he reached up and started to pull his friend down. He was able to balance the seesaw to the center ...until the kid on the other side jumped off and caused them to both go crashing to the ground. But the point is that before he jumped off the friend was keeping the seesaw balanced and kept his friend from being thrown off the deep end. But realize this, until that kid jumped off, the friend didn't eliminate the stress (the other kid) but he helped his friend deal with it.

PRESSURE / STRESS

The bad news about stress is that we will never eliminate it in this world. But maybe that is also good news. Perhaps at this point I should change my wording. Let me make a distinction between pressures and stress. There is a difference between pressure and stress. There will always be pressures in this world (key words: "*this World*"). It is the wrong response to pressures that lead to stress. But the pressures of this life can be use by God for a good purpose.

BAD NEWS / GOOD NEWS

The purpose of the pressures that come upon our lives is to push us out of our love affair with comfort and this is good news. Pressure brings discomfort in all areas of our life: physical, emotional, social, or spiritual. Our human souls demand comfort. The simple truth is that our souls are not designed for a world full of evil people, or disease, or natural disasters or other troubles. We long for what we *were* designed for, a paradise (where these troubles / pressures do not exist). The predicament we find ourselves in is that this paradise has been offered but not yet delivered. So we will not find the comfort we crave now but it will be ours in Heaven. The discomfort we have is because we are not home with God yet. And God uses the ache we experience within to tell us that, if we will listen. He wants us to know that not only are we far from home but also that He has come looking for us and will help us if we will respond to the pressures of life in accordance with His will.

WRONG WAY / RIGHT WAY

Proverbs 14:12 (NIV) says, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." There are two things that leap out to me from this verse. First, the wrong way or false way of handling things is overwhelmingly persuasive. It just *seems* so right! And second, the wrong or false way leads to exhaustion (death). When we cause our own stress or when we handle pressure in a wrong way it quickly leads to stress and stress brings exhaustion. When God allows pressures to come into our lives He can use it to mature our faith. In other words, He can transform exhaustion into endurance. Burnout is ultimately rooted in a resistance to trusting God. We see this fact right at the beginning as recorded in Gen 3:1-5 (NLT): Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the creatures

the LORD God had made. "Really?" he asked the woman. "Did God really say you must not eat any of the fruit in the garden?"

2 "Of course we may eat it," the woman told him. 3 "It's only the fruit from the tree at the center of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God says we must not eat it or even touch it, or we will die."

4 "You won't die!" the serpent hissed. 5 "God knows that your eyes will be opened when you eat it. You will become just like God, knowing everything, both good and evil."

The basic lie here is that God can be replaced! *We* are tempted with the same delusion of self-sufficiency: pressures come into our lives, we replace God with our own resourcefulness and that lie produces stress that leads to exhaustion and burnout. But God is good. He wants to teach us through the pressures of life that we can't always have it easy in this life but if we trust Him He will transform the exhaustion of stress into the endurance of faith, for the goal is not comfort but maturity.

Pressure is not stress. Stress is caused by the presence of a strong emotional state that is maintained for a longer time than is justifiable. Add to this that many of these states of stress are caused by our own wrong or sinful behavior and /or attitudes and you have a situation in which the body is subjected to much more than it ought to bear. The wrong response to pressures leads to stress. When we responded to pressure in a way that please God the by-product is that it will relieve stress.

Philippians 4:2-9 gives us some practical ways to deal with the pressures that cause stress. But you will have to come back next week to hear what they are...hope that doesn't stress you out!

If it does, I can tell you what they are and perhaps you can find them as you re-read the passage. Ready? They are:

PRESSURES / PHILIPPIANS 4:2-9

Peace (peace with people. Do all you can to reconcile relationships it will reduce stress)

Praise (The joy of the Lord is our strength)

Prayer (instead of anxiety)

Ponderings (think the right thoughts)

Practice (what the Bible teaches)