

November 7, 2004
A.M. Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“I’m Stressed Out! What Should I Do?” (Part 4)

Phil 4:1-9 NLT

Dear brothers and sisters, I love you and long to see you, for you are my joy and the reward for my work. So please stay true to the Lord, my dear friends.

2 And now I want to plead with those two women, Euodia and Syntyche. 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.

(Henry Neils is President and Founder of Assessment.com, the leading online career assessment company. He lists 13 signs of Burnout):

1. Chronic fatigue - exhaustion, tiredness, a sense of being physically run down
2. Anger at those making demands
3. Self-criticism for putting up with the demands
4. Cynicism, negativity, and irritability
5. A sense of being besieged (overwhelmed)
6. Exploding easily at seemingly inconsequential things
7. Frequent headaches and gastrointestinal disturbances
8. Weight loss or gain
9. Sleeplessness and depression
10. Shortness of breath
11. Suspiciousness
12. Feelings of helplessness
13. Increased degree of risk taking

Stress (from seminar by Tom Barnard)

Characterized by over-engagement

Emotions become over-reactive

Exhaustion taps physical energy

Produces disintegration

Loss of fuel and energy

Depression of stress is produced by the body's need to protect itself and conserve energy

Produces a sense of urgency and hyperactivity

Produces panic, phobic, and anxiety-type disorders

May kill you prematurely

Signs that You're Burned Out

Your friends call to ask how you've been, and you immediately scream, "Get off my back!"

Your trash can IS your "in" box.

You wake up to discover your bed is on fire, but go back to sleep because you just don't care.

Visions of the upcoming weekend help you make it through Monday.

You sleep more at work than you do at home.

You leave for a party and instinctively bring your briefcase.

Your day-timer exploded a week ago.

You think about how relaxing it would be if you were in jail right now.

(Speaking of which...)

Paul wasn't writing the words of this letter to the Philippians from a hotel room with deluxe accommodations, but from a prison. He had been unjustly accused and was awaiting trial and possible execution. Yet throughout the letter he uses phrases like; (4:6) "Don't worry about anything"; (4:4) "Always be full of joy in the Lord"; (4:19) "I hope in the Lord"; (4:13) "I can do all things through Christ"; (4:7) "...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"; (4:11) "I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little"; (4:12) "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation"; (4:19-20) "this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus. Now glory be to God our Father forever and ever. Amen."

Wow! Saying these things while in jail. We get stressed over many pressures and circumstances in our life, but Paul had learned that when you live in a manner that pleases God (especially in your response to pressure), as a by-product, this will relieve stress and give you peace. We have been looking at Biblical ways to handle pressure:

1. Peacemaker

Unresolved conflict causes stress. Don't start conflict, but don't avoid making an effort to bring reconciliation, rather work for peace. God wants you to settle *your* disagreements and He wants you to help others settle *their* disagreements.

2. Praise

Paul says, "Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again--rejoice!" In another place he wrote, "Be joyful always; ...give thanks in all circumstances ..."
Notice Paul not say "for" everything give thanks, but in everything.

- a.) We can rejoice –even in times of pressure – because we know that God is in control and will use all situations for the good.
- b.) We can rejoice because we can *chose* to be joyful
- c.) We can rejoice because we know Lord is near

3. Prayer

(v6-7) "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 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."

Don't worry about anything (command and when we believe "a," "b" & "c" above, then these should dispel worry. Christians are to be responsible for their needs and the needs of their families and to care about others, and take all their responsibilities seriously, but they are not to worry, or have undue stress.

Matt 6:25-34 NLT

25 "So I tell you, don't worry about everyday life--whether you have enough food, drink, and clothes. Doesn't life consist of more than food and clothing? 26 Look at the birds. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than they are. 27 Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not.

28 "And why worry about your clothes? Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, 29 yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. 30 And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith!

31 "So don't worry about having enough food or drink or clothing. 32 Why be like the pagans who are so deeply concerned about these things? Your heavenly Father already knows all your needs, 33 and he will give you all you need from day to day if you live for him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.

34 "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.

Worry is bad because it shows a distrust for God. If we are in His care we need not worry. So Paul says...

Instead pray about everything (turn anxiety into prayer. Whenever you feel anxiety it is to be a reminder to pray. Prayer allows us to unload our stress onto God. Take the energy used in worrying and put it into prayer. "Pray about everything." Nothing is too big or too small or too difficult to God. We have to give our cares over to God through prayer. Worry and prayer cannot coexist.

Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. (NIV- "by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.")

The word for *prayer* is a general term meaning worshipful conversation with God, while *petition* refers to a prayer with a sense of need. These two words often appear together in Paul's writings. *Thanksgiving* focuses on the attitude of one's heart in approaching God. Prayer combats worry by creating in us a thankful heart. Believers should come to God in prayer, thankful for the opportunity to even approach him, for his tremendous blessings already bestowed, and for the certainty that he will answer his children. When believers focus on God's great love for them and the many prayers he has already answered, they will have no room for worry about whether he will continue to answer. *Requests* refers to directly asking God's help regarding specific needs. Prayer combats worry by building trust.

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What an awesome privilege is given to those who have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord to be able to pray and trust God for answers. While God knows our thoughts, needs and feelings sharing these in prayer builds our relationship with Him. It allows us to rely on God rather than our own power. In prayer we are not demanding God does what we want, we are discussing with Him what He wants for us. He may not answer our prayers in ways we expect or want, in prayer we focus on God's will not ours.

Imagine never worrying about anything! That seems like an impossibility -- everyone has worries on the job, at home, or at school. But Paul's advice is to turn our worries into prayers. Do you want to worry less? Then pray more! Whenever you start to worry, stop and pray.

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I have done this at times of great pressure in my life. When I felt anxiety well up inside of me I used it as a reminder to pray and prayer helped to calm my anxieties.

I remember when Ann was pregnant and how she got up in the middle of the night (early, early, morning) came back from the bathroom and said, "I think my water just broke." I said, "You *think* your water just broke!" Now, you have to understand that when it comes to medical matters my wife's theory is: "if I don't talk about it, if I ignore it and certainly if I never call a doctor about it then somehow the problem *will* go away and no one will have to do any medical procedures to me." I convince my wife that night to call the doctor. The doctor said, "as long as you don't have any contractions don't worry about it, just come in to see me, at the hospital, in the morning. *But* if you do start to have contractions get to the hospital immediately because the baby is going to come fast." My wife hung up the phone and 5 minutes later started to have contractions and they were pretty close a part. So I said, "let's go, get dressed!" And she says. "Okay, but I have to clean the house and take a shower first." I said, "What are you crazy? You heard what the doctor said." I convinced her to leave an already clean house as is, but she insisted on taking a shower. Keep in mind that the hospital was about 10 miles away so by the time I finally got her in the car I was driving like a mad man. I stop at the front of the hospital they took Ann ...someplace. I parked the car. I went up to where Ann was taken and a nurse gave me her clothes and told me to bring them back to the car. And I'm thinking, "That nurse thinks we have plenty of time, but I know what the doctor said and now I'm going to miss the birth of my baby." The birth of my "baby." You see, back in "those days" we didn't know the sex of the baby until he or she was actually born. So, I'm running through the halls of the hospital, impatiently waiting for elevators, rushing to my car and rushing back. And the nurse tells me to wait in this waiting room and she will come and get me when they are ready for me. Now, I'm pacing back and forth until suddenly I think to myself, "What in the world am I doing? I'm anxious and all stressed out ..." and I started to pray, "Lord, what am I so anxious about? You are here, you're in control, and everything is in your hands..." And a peace came over me and I relaxed and for the first time I looked around and noticed that there was another person in that waiting room, a woman who had brought her sister there who might be loosing her baby. I prayed for her. Many other times in my life I have found this Scripture to be true, when I felt anxious I prayed instead. And just as the Scripture promises...

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."

Turn from anxiety to prayer and be filled with the peace of God. This peace is different from the world's peace. It is peace that Jesus promised his disciples and all those who would follow him: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27 NIV). True peace is not found in positive thinking, in absence of conflict, or in good feelings; it comes from knowing that God is in control. Believers are given peace with God when they believe (Rom 5:1), and they have the inner quiet of the peace of God as they daily walk with him.

God's peace surpasses all understanding. We simply cannot comprehend such peace. It is not a natural reaction in calamity, sorrow, or pain. Such peace cannot be self-generated; it comes from God alone; it is his gift to us in a difficult world. As with so much of God's dealings with humanity, we cannot understand it, but we can accept and experience God's peace because of his great love for us.

Why does God give his people peace? Because it will guard their hearts and minds. The Greek word for "guard" is a military term that means to surround and protect a garrison (fort) or city. (When I was in the service we took turns being on guard duty. And it was a major offense if anyone was ever caught sleeping on guard duty. Guards maintained watch, guarding the fort, barracks and in some cases a city from any outside attack). God's peace is like soldiers surrounding believers' hearts and minds (that is, emotions and thoughts), securing them against threatening and harmful outside forces.

Some realities cannot be fully conveyed by dictionary definition -- the peace of God, for instance. We could never totally understand it. Paul knew the shortcomings of words to describe God's peace, so he just admitted that it transcends our human knowledge ("[it] is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand.).

How do you find this peace?

First, it is found only in Jesus Christ. Trust Him as your Savior and Lord.

Second, God's peace is attained only by practice. Trust Jesus daily in the small worries of your life so that you're ready to trust him when big problems strike. Tell him your needs and anxieties.

Third, you can have peace only through prayer and meditation on God's promises. Have you discovered God's Word? Have you prayed through the promises? There is no better time to start than today.

When we trust God, he gives us peace in a traffic jam, peace in a phone call, peace in a relationship, peace in a hospital, and peace when death draws near.

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