

“A Strategy for Reducing Stress”

Text: Philippians 4:4-8

March 2, 2008

Park Boulevard Presbyterian Church (www.pbpc.org)

Oakland, California

Rev. Chris Gelini

Continuing our study of the Book of Philippians, this morning in Philippians 4, Paul comes back to his theme about being happy in life.

- Vs. 4, “*May you always be joyful in your life in the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!*”
- Is it possible to be continually joyful? Most people really don’t enjoy life; they endure it. Their lives are filled with anxiety, stress, pressure and there’s very little joy.

Let me give you some statistics on stress from the **American Psychological Association, 2005.**

- Forty-three percent of adults suffer adverse health effects from stress.
- Two-thirds of all office visits to family physicians are due to stress-related symptoms.
- Sixty-four percent of Americans say they are taking steps to reduce stress in their lives.
- Stress is linked to the six leading causes of death—heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.

This morning I want us to look at a strategy for dealing with stress. Paul gives us four very simple and profound statements on how to manage stress in your life from Philippians 4:4-8.

Read Philippians 4:4-8 and Pray!

FOUR STRESS RELIEVERS

I. STEP ONE: WORRY ABOUT NOTHING

- A. Worry is a kill joy and source of stress. We tend to expect the worst in life. *Smithsonian Magazine* calls this the “Age of Anxiety.” There are macro worries that everybody on the planet worries about. There are also micro worries that are personal, that you have everyday.
- B. Worry is assuming responsibility that God never intended for me to have. It’s playing God, trying to control the uncontrollable. Dr. Walter Cavert has done studies on our worries. He has discovered that:
 - 40% of our worries never happen
 - 30% of our worries concern the past
 - 12% of our worries are needless worries about your health
 - 10% of our worries are insignificant or petty concerns
 - 8% of our worries are really legitimate concerns

- C. Worry is worthless. It cannot change the past or control the future. It only messes up right now. Worry is a waste of creativity. The Bible says, *“Do not worry about anything.”* This is probably the hardest command to obey. Worry is not natural, Jesus said, in Matthew 6:6. It is something you learn; you have to practice to get good at it. If it is learned, it can also be unlearned.
- D. Jesus said in Matthew 6:34, *“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own.”*
- E. Insight: In order to relieve stress, live one day at a time.**
 - 1. This is what Jesus and Paul were saying. When Paul wrote Philippians he was in prison waiting to be executed by Nero.

II. STEP TWO: PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING

- A. Whenever God tells you to eliminate something, he always has something superior. He always replaces a negative with a positive. Vs. 6b, *“But in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”*
 - 1. Paul is saying, don’t panic – pray. If you stopped worrying, think about how much free time you’d have. It would create a void in your life to stop worrying. Pray during that time. If those people who say “I don’t have time to pray” would spend their time praying instead of worrying, they’d have a whole lot less to worry about.
- B. *“In everything...”* some people think that God is only interested in your praying about “religious” matters. God is interested in everything in your life.
- C. A *“petition”* is a specific, detailed request. Get specific with God. Tell Him exactly what you want and what you need. Don’t pray general, vague prayers, but be specific. “God, I’m under stress. I’m tense; I’m nervous.” Be specific about it.
 - 1. Rebekah
- D. 1 Peter 5:7, *“Unload all your worries on Him since He is looking after you!”* Take our problems to the Lord, pray about everything instead of worrying. Unload them! God can handle anything you give Him.
 - 1. A life insurance company did a study and learned that people, who attend church once a week, live on the average, 5.7 years longer than the general public. Why? Perhaps, people who attend church every week are more likely to pray than worry. Worry destroys your system.
- E. Insight: There is no problem that is too big for God’s power or too small for God’s concern.**

III. STEP THREE: THANK GOD FOR ALL THINGS

- A. Vs. 6, *“... in everything ... with thanksgiving...”* The Good News Bible says, *“...always asking Him with a thankful heart.”*

- B. The attitude of gratitude. The healthiest human emotion is the attitude of gratitude, having a grateful heart, being thankful. It actually enhances your immune system. It is a physical benefit to express the attitude of gratitude.
1. Ungrateful people tend to also be unhappy people. Nothing ever satisfies them; it's never good enough. They are "when... and then" people – "when such and such happens, then I'll be happy".
- C. If you're depressed, make a list of fifty things you can be grateful for. When you're grateful, it gets the focus off your problems and gets the focus on the benefits in your life. We have so much that we take for granted.
- D. Develop the attitude of gratitude and watch the stress level in your lives go down. It gets your eyes off the problem and on to the many things we do have to be grateful for.
- E. Insight: There is always something to be thankful for.**

IV. STEP FOUR: THINK ABOUT THE RIGHT THINGS

- A. To reduce stress in your life you must change the way you think. The stress is in you, not outside. Your mind is a special gift from God. Your mind is capable of storing over 100 trillion thoughts. It can handle enormous things. You have been given by God the freedom to choose what you think about.
- B. Vs. 8, "*finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true... noble ...right ... pure ... lovely ... admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.*" You need to choose what you think about and think about the right things. What we put into our minds affects our lives.
- C. From what I see that some people allowing to enter their minds, it's no wonder they are under stress. Many people, even Christians, are totally indiscriminate about what they allow to enter their minds. They are allowing all kinds of trashy garbage, reading materials, movies and songs that are downers. Then they wonder why they are depressed. What you think affects the way you feel: the way you feel affects the way you act. Guard your mind. Keep your mind on the right things.
1. Mass murderer in Fla.
- D. These eight words are eight filters. If the thoughts are not right, true, pure, lovely etc... don't think about them. Don't allow them to get into your mind, because it's going to create stress.
1. Proverbs 23:7 in the King James Versions says, "*As a man thinks in his heart, so he is.*" What dominates your mind? What do you think about the most? The root cause of stress is the way I choose to think.
- E. Insight: Whatever I think about is what I am becoming.**

THE RESULT

Vs. 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 keep your thoughts and your heart quiet and at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus."

- A. This is a promise of guaranteed peace of mind. People are looking everywhere for peace of mind. They try pills, fads, therapy, rock crystals, stress reduction seminars and listen to tapes, books – anything to get just a little peace of mind. Paul says God's peace is a gift to you. It is a gift that cannot be explained, duplicated, fabricated or understood. It is the sense of peace that comes over your life.
- B. How do I maintain that kind of peace? *"...as you trust in Christ Jesus."* Paul is not talking about a religion; he's talking about a relationship with God's Son, Jesus Christ. You need to understand that God made you for a relationship. He wants you to know Him. And when you know Him there is a sense of peace that comes into your life.

What's got you worried this morning? Finances? The economy? Your health? Your marriage relationship? Your kids? Your career? What makes you anxious, that raises the stress level in your life?

This is God's alternative to dealing with stress: 1 Peter 5:7, *"Throw the whole weight of your concern on God because He considers you His personal concern."* He carried your sins on the cross. He will carry your stress in the present. Give it to Him.

PRAY!