

# Outline\_Pray for me, I'm stressed

Thursday, September 06, 2012  
12:57 PM

Biblical Case Studies on Fear, worry, anxiety, depression and stress.

Title: Pray for me, I'm stressed.

Scripture Php. 4:4-19, misc Scriptures

Sermon Audio Blurb: Everyone is stressed from time to time. Stress is a frequent prayer request. But how do we handle stress biblically. The Apostle Paul shows us how he handled a very stressful situation.

Reading: Php. 4:4-9

## I. The Problem of Stress

A. The ten most stressful jobs of 2012 according to Consumer News and Business Channel were:

1. Frontline Soldier
2. Firefighter
3. Airline Pilot
4. Military General
5. Police Officer
6. Event Coordinator
7. Public Relations Officer
8. Sr. Corporate Executive
9. Photojournalist
10. Taxi cab driver

B. Here are the 10 least stressful jobs for 2012 according to CareerCast:

1. Medical Records Technician
2. Jeweler
3. Hair Stylist
4. Dressmaker-Tailor
5. Medical Laboratory Technician
6. Audiologist
7. Precision Assembler
8. Dietician
9. Furniture Upholsterer
10. Electrical Technician

C. Other Sources of Stress

1. Your health, especially if you have a chronic illness such as heart disease, diabetes, or arthritis.
2. Emotional problems, such as anger you can't express, depression, grief, guilt, or low self-esteem.
3. Your relationships, such as having problems with your relationships or feeling a lack of friendships or support in your life.
4. Major life changes, such as dealing with the death of a parent or spouse, losing your job, getting married, getting divorced, or moving to a new city
5. Stress in your family, such as having a child, teen, or other family member who is under stress, or being a caregiver to a family member who is elderly or who has health problems. Stress of Caregiving.
6. Conflicts with your beliefs and values. For example, you may value family life, but you may not be able to spend as much time with your family as you want. (politics, religion can be sources of stress)
7. Your surroundings. Living in an area where overcrowding, crime, pollution, or noise is a problem can create chronic stress .
8. Your social situation: Being poor, feeling lonely, or facing discrimination based on your race, gender, age, or sexual orientation can add stress to your life. Christian ministry can be stressful and often times is.

#### D. How Stress is Calculated

1. Do you tire more easily? Feel fatigued rather than energetic?
2. Are people annoying you by telling you "you don't look so good lately"?
3. Are you working harder and harder and accomplishing less and less?
4. Are you increasingly cynical and disenchanted?
5. Are you often invaded by a sadness you can't explain?
6. Are you forgetting? (appointments, deadlines, personal possessions)
7. Are you increasingly irritable? More short-tempered? More disappointed in the people around you?
8. Are you seeing close friends and family member less frequently?
9. Are you too busy to do even routine things like make phone calls or read reports or memos?
10. Are you suffering from physical complaints (aches, pains, headaches, a lingering cold or illness)?
11. Do you feel disoriented when the activity of the day comes to a halt?
12. Is joy elusive?
13. Are you unable to laugh at a joke about yourself?
14. Does sex seem like more trouble than it's worth?
15. Do you have very little to say to people?

#### E. Stress Defined

1. Stress as nervous tension (anxiety of the mind)
2. Stressors are [any] events, situations, stimuli, etc. that can cause people to perceive threat (thus fear), thus they experience anxiety, overwhelmed-ness, or other negative emotions.
  - a) In fact it is not these events, these traumas, conversations, etc. that "stress" us out, but instead our perception of how we will be able to cope with these stimuli.
  - b) In other words our choice of response to stressful situations results in the negative emotions or nervous tension is key. Lots of nervous tension can = a panic attack.

### 3. Eustress and Distress

- a) Someone named Selye published in 1975 a model dividing stress into eustress and distress.
  - 1) Where stress enhances function (physical or mental, such as through strength training or challenging work), it may be considered eustress. {good example of this is P. Matt. He enjoys stress, being under the gun, the challenge of it all.}
  - 1) It's why different people react differently to the same stressful situations. Some people thrive on much challenge, others, not so much. It's why a soldier may be just as stressed as the dressmaker.
  - 2) How a person responds to a given situation, whether it be real or imagined is tied to the person's expectations and their perceived ability to cope [control] with the situation.

### F. How Psychology Manages Stress

1. Psychology's Responses to stress include adaptation techniques and anti-anxiety meds.
2. Adaptation means adapting to a circumstance so it is no longer stressful in the sense the person does not feel anxious or discouraged in the circumstance. (Note that some of these ideas are more biblical than others.)
  - a) Training,
  - b) confidence building
  - c) getting help
  - d) Learning to say no,
  - e) Avoid people who stress you out
  - f) Take control of your environment
  - g) Avoid hot button topics
  - h) Prioritize or par-down your to do list
  - i) Divorce
  - j) job change
  - k) Moving
  - l) Express your feelings
  - m) Be willing to compromise (give up control)
  - n) Be more assertive (boundaries)
  - o) Mental escape, a two-minute vacation
  - p) Look at the big picture (is it worth it)
  - q) Adjust your standards (perfectionism not helpful)
  - r) Focus on the positive (appreciative)
  - s) Hobby
  - t) Going for a walk
  - u) Listening to music
  - v) Accept things you cannot change
  - w) Don't try to control the uncontrollable (esp. other people)
  - x) Look for the upside (opportunity to grow)
  - y) Learn to forgive
  - z) Diet and Exercise (Vitamins)Zzzzz. sleep

### 3. Meds

- a. Psychology in general, approaches human beings as if we were simply a bag of chemicals.
- a. And created with many chemicals we are (but that's not all we are) so the medical profession, meaning psychiatry believes that by adjusting the chemicals you can adjust how you feel or reduce distress.
  - 1) Becoming sedated would decrease stress.
  - 2) 160+ anti-anxiety meds or anti-depressants.
    - a) Meds, when they work are designed to maintain or regain "X" function
    - a) Meds do not deal with the underlying issues (when they do work and their success rate is highly debatable)
    - a) Meds simply designed to get you to feel better and therefore, function better.

### 4. Unhelpful ways to manage stress

- a. Smoking
- b. Drinking too much
- c. Overeating or under eating
- d. Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer
- e. Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- f. Addictive behaviors of any sort
- g. Using pills or drugs to relax
- h. Sleeping too much
- i. Procrastinating
- j. Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
- k. Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence)

### 5. Psychology/adaptation, meds, these are the best things the world has to offer to reduce distress.

- a. Certainly common sense is in order. If you can manage some circumstances then do so.
- b. The problem is we often cannot, nor will ever escape stress.

### G. The Root of the Problem

- 1. Understand that saying I'm stressed is a nice way of saying I'm worried, I'm fearful, or I'm anxious.
- 2. There are circumstances beyond my control and I want to control them.
- 3. The more stressed I am, the more I demand control.

4. Control is an idol and the source of much trouble. (root sin)
5. The trouble manifests itself via anger, depression, critical spirit, perfectionism, addictive behaviors (and another idol, the idol of comfort/pleasure), laziness, giving up on responsibilities, ignoring God, etc. (fruit sins)

"When we are aware that anxiety has registered at a physical level we call it stress. Stress usually means that there is too much to do in too little time of the things we have to do are beyond our competencies...Stress is saying that life is teetering on the brink, right at the farthest reaches of your ability to maintain control. What would happen if you really lost control? You don't know, and you don't want to know..." pg.31 Ed Welch, Running Scared

## II. How did Paul "Manage" Stress

(Personal Application: How can I stand firm and grow into maturity in this stressful situation rather than merely cope or escape?)

Where your pleasure is, there is your treasure; Where your treasure is, there is your heart; Where your heart is, there is your happiness.—Augustine

### A. Treasure and Jail

1. The apostle Paul was in Rome, under house arrest.
  - a. Romans had rescued Paul from the Jews since they had threatened to kill him for preaching the gospel
  - b. As a Roman citizen he had the right to appeal directly to Caesar.
  - c. Paul's Roman citizenship had saved him from an angry mob...
    - 1) And now he was taking his case all the way to the supreme court-Caesar-Nero, last of the line of Julius Caesar.
    - 2) This time Paul would be acquitted (62 a.d.)
    - 3) Used his time under house arrest to write Philippians, Colossians and Ephesians
    - 4) The key word in Philippians is joy. It is why, that as a book, it is used especially for those who are stressed, anxious and/or depressed.
2. The next time he would be arrested he would not be acquitted. Nero...
  - a. Blames the Christians for the fire that swept Rome...
  - b. The apostles Paul and Peter both die along with many other martyrs.
  - c. But this time, Paul spends about 4 years entangled in the Roman justice system.
    - 1) His freedom is greatly restricted and when he does go out...
    - 2) Chained to a member of the Praetorian Guard, hard bitten Roman soldiers.

- 3) Unsure of an outcome that he has no control over
  - a) If he loses the appeal to Caesar he'll be punished for wasting Caesar's time
  - b) Roman citizen or not, he'll be declared a public nuisance (esp., from Judea)
  - c) End up in the Mamertine prison for political prisoners or dead or both
- 4) Yet the theme is joy as he writes his church in Philippi
  - a) How odd, since this is an occasion to stress out.
  - b) Yet, he will makes clear that his joy is not tied to his circumstances.
  - c) His joy is tied to his treasure
  - d) Thus, our joy, is tied to what we truly treasure.

3. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, Php. 3:8-9a, ESV

4. Without this foundational understanding of knowing Christ as the kingdom treasure, Paul's involvement in the earthly kingdom of Rome must indeed been one of worry and depression. Let's look at his teaching in that context:

#### B. Rising Above the Circumstances (Php. 4:4)

1. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved...Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. (Philippians 4:1, 4 ESV)
2. Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. (relates back to verse one, "stand firm in the Lord, thus rejoice in the Lord)
  - a. Does not mean he is thrilled with his circumstances, but is still joyful because he is in the Lord
  - b. This is that critical doctrine that Paul teaches over and over again, our union with Christ. (From P. Matt's sermon, 9/2/12)
    - 1) We, through the saving work of God, come into a sphere of relationship with Jesus. We become "in Christ." And with it comes all of the blessings attached to Jesus.
    - 2) This is why Paul says in Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."
    - 3) Listen to Ephesians 1:13, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit

of promise.”

- 4) And the one he is focusing on here is “life.” Like Colossians 3:4, “Christ who is our life.”
- 5) In other words, the reality of true life is not hindered by specifics of our current situation. If we are “in Christ Jesus” then we are participants of truth, eternal life. The life that is Jesus.

3. Is joy primarily a feeling?

- a. How can you be commanded to manufacture an emotion in unpleasant circumstances?
- b. Joy is not a feeling; it is the deep down confidence that God is in control of everything for the believer’s good and His glory, and thus all is well no matter what the consequences.
- c. Rejoice is a present imperative. It means to have a continual practice of rejoicing (in the Lord).
  - 1) Neither Paul’s imprisonment nor the Philippians various trials should eclipse their joy.
  - 2) Paul is not living in some protective bubble where life can’t touch him.
  - 3) He is perfectly aware that circumstances are often sorrowful, worrisome or just stressful.
  - 4) He is aware that circumstances cannot be a reliable source of joy...
    - a) Sin cursed world and sinful people are not reliable sources of joy.
    - b) Therefore, we are to carefully evaluate the circumstances God has sovereignly arranged

4. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. Ja. 1:2-4, ESV

- a. The word “count” means to consider or to evaluate.
- b. The natural response to trials is not to rejoice, but to react (naturally emotive)
  - 1) But James says consider it all joy, evaluate the trials- that since it is your faith being tested—
  - 2) Faith in God, through Jesus Christ.
  - 3) Joy in the circumstances is always traced back to Christ.
  - 4) Paul expresses in Php. 3:8-9a there is a source of joy that is reliable.

- a) Only true source of joy is Christ, our salvation in Him...(control is not the savior, Jesus is)

## 5. Emotional Stability and God

- a. Spiritual\emotional stability is directly related to how we think about God.
- b. Applied knowledge of God is the key to rejoicing.
  - 1) Those that know the great truths about God find it easier to rejoice than those that do not.
  - 2) That's because they have that deep down confidence God is control of everything and the trial is being used by Him for his glory and the benefit of the saints.
  - 3) If knowledge of God remains an abstraction then worry, fear and anxiety will dominate.
  - 4) Willing to preach to yourself and fight the battle of "anxiety of the mind)

## C. Let your Reasonableness be known (Php. 4:5a)

- 1. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. (Php. 4:5a)
  - a. How big-hearted are you?
  - b. The Greek word for reasonableness is not easy to translate into English..
  - c. We tend to think of reasonableness as someone who can be reasoned with...
  - d. Better meaning: "Let your big-heartedness be known to everybody."
- 2. The verse indicates that the rejoicing person is a blessing to others...
  - a. Counter-intuitive thought if you are stressed (at work for example)
  - b. Preoccupied with self, problem relationships, conflict, disagreeable people
  - c. Hard to be a blessing to others when focused on self
- 3. Focus on self does not alleviate stress
  - a. Makes it worse (downward spiral)
  - b. Serves as an indication of where the real treasure is
- 4. The reasonable person whose treasure is Christ, does not insist on rights...
  - a. Tends to over look offenses by rising above them...
  - b. Is patient when others are impatient (fruit of the spirit)



- c. Tends to be content when others are discontent
5. Ever wonder how Paul won over those Roman guards?
- a. Was not in panic/stressed mode, they would have expected that!
  - b. Reasonableness, big-heartedness
    - 1) You can just see him sharing the food packages he received with the guards.
    - 2) You can see him talking with them, asking them about their families.
    - 3) Reaching out, not retreating inward, preoccupied with his own problems.
  - c. Hard-bitten, no nonsense Roman Guards of the type that crucified Christ...
    - 1) Won to Christ, by the big-hearted apostle..
    - 2) Who treasured his Savior.
    - 3) If the focus is on others and Christ it is a lot harder to knocked off balance by life's circumstances.
6. Remembering we are at war
- a. There is little doubt that fear, worry and anxiousness are paralyzing...
    - 1) I have often said to the people who I disciple who struggle...
    - 2) If the devil cannot have your soul, he will settle for an ineffective, paralyzed Christian.
    - 3) Like a soldier who cannot fight, because he's laid up in the MASH unit.
  - b. As a rule it does not seem we realize we are in a war...
    - 1) we really do not see ourselves as soldiers of the king...
    - 2) And while biblical counseling does seek to minister to the wounded soldiers..
    - 3) It also seeks to return them to the fight.

The main trouble with the Christian Church today is that she is too much like a clinic, too much like a hospital; that is why the great world is going to hell outside!... Look at the great campaign, look at it objectively, look at it from God's standpoint. Forget yourself and your temporary troubles and ills for the moment; fight in the army. It is not a clinic you need; you must realize that we are in a barracks, and that we are involved in a mighty campaign. --Martyn Lloyd-Jones

D. The Nearness of God (Php. 4:5b, 6a)

- 1. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, (Php. 4:5b, 6a)

a. God is near by His presence

- 1) The stressed, the fearful, the worried, the anxious tend to forget that
- 2) God is far-away, disconnected, an abstraction, not a practical help in time of trouble

2. The Psalms remind us of God's nearness

- 1) God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Psa. 46:1, ESV
- 2) But I am poor and needy; hasten to me, O God! You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay! Psa. 70:5
- 3) We may not feel like He is present, but is this not the time to ask ourselves about what we believe, rather than what we may be feeling?

3. Be anxious for nothing (Php. 4:6a)

- a. Since God is at hand, therefore do not be anxious about anything.
- b. Since nothing is outside God's sovereign control.
- c. (Stop trying to control what you cannot control. Yield.

Confidence in the sovereignty of God in all that affects us is crucial to our trusting Him. If there is a single event in all of the universe that can occur outside of God's sovereign control then we cannot trust Him. His love may be infinite, but if His power is limited and His purpose can be thwarted, we cannot trust Him. (Jerry Bridges)

d. If God is sovereign then anxiousness is folly.

- 1) And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. (Luke 12:22-23 ESV)
- 2) When you stop to think about it, stressing is folly, for it solves nothing. Each day had enough trouble of it's own.

E. Antidote to Stress\worry\fear is Thanksgiving (Php. 4:6)

1. but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Php. 4:6)
  - a. Remember that a heart of ingratitude is typical of those who do not know God (Rom. 1:21)
    - 1) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Rom. 1:21, ESV
    - 2) But ingratitude can be an ugliness found in the heart of a Christian

- 3) I remember a Christian telling me, "but what has God done for me lately?"
- b. Ingratitude is rebellion. It is rebellion against what God has chosen to allow.
- 1) This is why Peter says: "casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. (1 Pe. 5:7, ESV)
  - 2) The issue of doubting God's care for us. Peter must remind us.
    - a) Cast your anxieties on God, He cares and understands
    - b) He is not sitting up in heaven uninvolved..
    - c) Note further promises
      - i) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:15-16 ESV)
      - ii) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (2 Corinthians 12:9 ESV)
2. God is not surprised by whatever you are worrying, stressed about, fearful about or anxious over.
- a. Turn it all over to Him in thankful prayer believing He cares for you, sympathizes you and will give you grace to endure.
  - b. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Rom. 8:28-29, ESV)

When we face difficulties, we sometimes forget God's past faithfulness. We see only the detours and the dangerous path. But look back and you will also see the joy of victory, the challenge of the climb, and the presence of your Traveling Companion who has promised never to leave you nor forsake you.--Author Unknown

- c. Thankful prayer brings release from worry, stress and fear.
  - 1) Because God is using the circumstance for His glory and our good
  - 2) And that good is all about becoming like our Savior and the surpassing value of knowing him.
  - 3) God's question to us in all of our circumstances is simple: "Do you trust me now?"

F. The Result of Trusting God (Php. 4:7)

1. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
  - a. "You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." (Isa. 26:3, ESV)
2. The result of trusting in God's sovereignty is peace.
  - a. It cannot be fully comprehended because it is a supernatural peace
  - b. That comes from not getting rid of everything unpleasant...
  - c. But instead of trusting in God in the middle of it.

The real challenge in the Christian life is not to eliminate every unpleasant circumstance; it is to trust in the good purpose of our infinite, holy, sovereign, powerful God in every difficulty.

3. Where your heart is, that is where your treasure is.
  - a. Guarding your heart is to guard your mind with a military like diligence.
  - b. The Roman guards guarding Paul were not casual about guarding Paul, hence the chain.
    - 1) If Paul were to escape, they would die for neglect of duty.
    - 2) We are to guard our minds in like manner and experience peace.

G. What is Honorable (Php. 4:8-9)

1. Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. Php. 4:4-9, ESV
  - a. Think about These Things (dwell on these things, NASB)
  - b. Pro. 23:7 says "so a man calculates in his soul, so is he."
  - c. What you think about, you are?
2. The fundamental issue of the heart.
  - 1) "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." Mark 7:20-23, ESV
  - 2) Calculate what is coming out of you, for it comes from within.
  - 3) Paul says think on truth instead and truth will come out of you.

- a) Our culture is utterly obsessed with two things—emotions and pragmatism. And that’s why Paul’s simple instructions seem like reading Martian.
- b) Think about truth
- c) We do not as a habit, ask if something is true. We ask “does it work” and/or “will it make me feel better.”
- d) Truth is whatever works and produces positive emotions, sadly, such pragmatism and emotionalism has crept even into theology. The church is often more concerned about whether something will be divisive or offensive than whether it is biblically true.
- e) Think upon biblical truth and get a biblical grip.

You must keep all earthy treasures out of your heart, and let Christ be your treasure, and let Him have your heart.--C.H. Spurgeon

#### H. Practice and the Result (Php. 4:9)

##### 1. Practice, practice, practice

- a. We do not good at anything unless we practice what we’ve supposedly learned.
  - 1) If our thoughts do not police our flesh...
  - 2) The flesh will win out with alarming regularity.
  - 3) Every fleshy failure can be traced back to a failure to police our own thoughts.
- b. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you. (Php. 4:9)
  - 1) Learning to preach truth to self
  - 2) Fight doubt with faith
  - 3) Find your joy in the gospel, preach it to yourself.
- c. Your thoughts are responsible for your emotions
  - 1) Feelings cannot be trusted, but they can be manipulated

There is nothing so deluding as feelings. Christians cannot live by feelings. Let me further tell you that these feelings are the work of Satan, for they are not right feelings. What right have you to set up your feelings against the Word of Christ.--C.H. Spurgeon

- 2) Practice instead what is true. Cast your anxiety on God because he cares for you. If you put this into practice you will have peace. It’s a conditional promise dependent on us doing our part.

- 3) So instead of praying for a change of circumstances at the first sign of stress or praying to feel better ask yourself how can I stand firm and grow in maturity in Christ in this situation?

For Community Groups.

- 1) At what point do you think "stress" becomes sinful stress.
- 2) If someone in your CG asked for prayer for stress, what questions might you ask them?
- 3) How might you pray for them in light of Php. 4:4-9
- 4) Try to write out some Scripture based prayers for stress.