

A STRATEGY FOR REDUCING STRESS
How to Enjoy the Rest of Your Life - Part 9 of 12
Philippians 4:4-8
Rick Warren

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-8

"May you always be joyful in your life in the Lord. I say it again: rejoice!" v. 4 (GN)

Four "Stress-Relievers"

1. STEP ONE: _____

"Do not be anxious about anything..." (vs. 6a)

"Do not fret or have any anxiety ..." (Amp)

"Be careful for nothing ..." (KJV)

WORRY: "Assuming _____ that God _____
for me to have."

Research on Worry

_____ % never happen

_____ % concern the past

_____ % needless about health

_____ % insignificant/petty issues

_____ % legitimate concerns

(Jesus) *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own." Matt. 6:34*

Insight:

II. STEP TWO: _____

"...but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." v. 6b

PETITION:

"When you pray, tell God every detail of your needs" (Ph)

"Unload all your worries on Him since He is looking after you!" I Peter 5:7 (JN)

"You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon Him, for you are His personal concern!" I Peter 5:7 (Ph)

Insight:

James 4:2, John 16:23-24

III. STEP THREE: _____

"...in everything... with thanksgiving." v. 6b

"...always asking Him with a thankful heart." ((GN)

"Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." I Thess. 5:18

Insight:

IV. STEP FOUR: _____

"Finally, brothers, whatever is true ... noble ... right... pure ... lovely ... admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things."

"... fill your mind with those things ..." (GN)

"...fix your mind on them ..." (GN)

"As a man thinks in his heart, so he is." Pr. 23:7 (KJV)

INSIGHT:

THE RESULTS

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." vs. 7

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In Philippians 4 Paul comes back to his theme about being happy in life. V. 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.

The Christmas season is the most stressful time of the year. We worry about presents, finances, etc. This morning I want us to look at a strategy for dealing with seasonal stress. Paul gives us four very simple and profound statements on how to manage stress in your life:

I. STEP ONE: WORRY ABOUT NOTHING

V. 6: "Do not be anxious about anything." "Do not fret of have any anxiety." (Amplified) "Be careful for nothing" (KJV)

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 every body on the planet worries about. There are micro worries that are personal, that you have everyday.

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 your 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

Worry is worthless. It cannot change the past or control the future. It only messes you up right now. It is an incredible waste of energy. It is stewing without doing. It is a waste of creativity. When we worry about things, they get bigger and bigger. We are very creative about worry.

The Bible says, "Do not worry about anything." Probably this is the hardest command to obey.

Some people are born worriers; they have the ability to find a problem in every solution. They look at the negative, the bad. 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.

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."

Insight: In order to relieve stress live one day at a time.

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This is what Jesus and Paul was saying. When Paul wrote Philippians he was in prison waiting to be executed by Nero.

II. STEP TWO: PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING

Whenever God tells you to eliminate something He always has something superior. He always replaces a negative with a positive.

V. 6b "In everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Paul is saying, don't panic -- pray. If you stopped worrying, realize how much free time you'd have. It would create a great vacuum, a void in your life to stop worrying. Pray during that time. If those people who say "I don't hve time to pray" would spend their time praying instead of worrying, they'd have a whole lot less to worry about.

"In everything..." Some people think that God is only interested in you praying about "religious" matters. God is interested in everything in your life.

"petition" is a specific, detailed request. Get specific with God. Tell Him exactly what you want and what you need. Most people pray too vague, too general. "God, bless my life." What is a blessing? Sometimes blessings are problems. Don't pray general, vague prayers but be specific. "God, I'm under stress. I'm tense, I'm nervous." Be specific about it.

Phillips: "When you pray tell God every detail of your needs." If it's big enough to worry about, it's big enough to pray about.

I 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! Pray is a tremendous safety valvue release of pressure.

A life insurance company did a study. They learned that people who attend church once a week, they 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.

God says unload all your worries on Him. The God who made every thumbprint in the world different and the God who made every snowflake in the world different and the God who made every voice print in the world different is a big enough God to handle all the details in your life. He is a God of details. He can handle anything you give Him.

Phillips: "You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon Him, for you are His personal concern!"

Insight: There is no problem that is too big for God's power or too small for God's concern.

James 4:2 "You have not because you ask not." Twenty times in the New Testament we are told "ask".

III. STEP THREE: THANK GOD FOR ALL THINGS

v. 6 "... in everything ... with thanksgiving ..."
Good News says, "...always asking Him with a thankful heart."

The attitude of gratitude. The healthiest human emotion is the attitude of gratitude, having a grateful heart, being thankful. It actually increases your immunities. It is a physical benefit to express the attitude of gratitude. Ungrateful people also tend to be unhappy people. Nothing every satisfies them, it's never good enough. They are "when... and then" people -- "when such and such happens then I'll be happy".

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.

Develop the attitude of gratitude and watch the stress level in your life go down. It gets your eyes off the problem and onto the many things we do have to be grateful for.

I Thes. 5:18 "Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." One part of God's will for your life is "in all things give thanks."

Insight: There is always something to be grateful for.

IV. STEP FOUR: THINK ABOUT THE RIGHT THINGS

To reduce stress in your life you must change the way you think. The stress is in yourself 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.

V. 8 "finally brothers, 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.

What I see that some people allow to enter their minds, 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 and reading material and 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.

Jerusalem Bible says, "Fill your mind with those things."
Good News says, "Fix your mind on them..."

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Paul is saying this involves a deliberate, conscious choice. Change the channels of your mind. When a thought comes into your mind, ask "Is this true, noble, right...?" If it's not, reject it.

These eight words are eight filters. If the thoughts is 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.

Proverbs 23:7 "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.

Insight: Whatever I think about is what I am becoming.

If you don't like the way you're headed, change what you think about. Change the direction of your thought life.

THE RESULT

"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." v. 7.

There 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 give 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.

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 were made with a God-shaped vacuum in your life and when you try to fill that with anything else it's like trying to put a square into a round hole -- it doesn't fit. We try to fill our lives with popularity, power, pleasure, possessions or prestige and they don't fit. God made you to know Him. Nobody is here on the earth by accident. He made you for a purpose. The starting point of that purpose is to understand that He 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.

This passage also says, "His peace will keep your thoughts..." The word "keep" in the Greek is a military term. It means a sentry guard, a garrison, or a detachment of soldiers. The book of Philippians was written to a group of people who lived in the city of Philippi in Greece. The city of Philippi was a Roman colony that was protected by the Roman legion. The people knew this word very well for they knew the Roman legion kept the peace in Philippi. Paul used the word that he knew everybody would know and says, that's the way God will guard your mind and heart when you have a relationship with Jesus Christ and trust Him moment by moment. Instead of worrying about everything, you pray about everything. And you thank God for all things and

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keep your mind on the right things. God will put a garrison, a sentry guard, around your heart and when worry comes knocking at the door He will protect you with His peace.

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

How do you normally respond to stress? What is your favorite pattern?

This is God's alternative to dealing with stress. I 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.