

Sermon
Lanier Christian Church
July 16, 2017 (Revision of February 26, 2012)

How to Have Joy - Even In Stressful Situations SL#1

Philippians 4:4-8

***4** Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. **6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

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

It is not hard to be stressed out in this world of ours. Stressful situations seem to find us all. The world is at war against terrorism. Our communities are fighting drug abuse and crime. Car accidents occur everyday. Health scares rear their ugly head. There are personality conflicts at work and at home. Our calendars and schedules are filled with activities. Finances are tight and often challenging. We seem to be running non-stop – until we drop. Stress has become a normal factor in life for many.

In Philippians chapter four – Paul is teaching about being joyful in life. In verse four he says:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" -
Philippians 4:4 (NIV)

Is it possible to be continually joyful? Can you "always" be joyful? So many people really don't enjoy life, they endure it.

Their lives are filled with stress and there's very little room for joy.

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 and still maintain joy:

1. STEP ONE: Worry About NOTHING SL#2

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6: "Do not be anxious about anything."

The Message Bible says: "Don't fret or worry." Philippians 4:6 (MSG)

Without a doubt – Paul is saying that worry should not be a part of our lives. Worry kills joy and is a major source of stress in our lives. Smithsonian magazine calls the time we are living in: "The Age of Anxiety".

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

Worry is worthless. It cannot change the past or control the future – all it does is mess up the "right now". It uses up an incredible amount of energy and places a tremendous amount of stress on an individual. When we worry about

things – they seem to get bigger and bigger. Some of us are very creative about worry. But the Bible says:

“Don’t be anxious – don’t worry about anything.” -Philippians 4:6

This may be one of the hardest commands to obey. It was such an important subject that Jesus even taught about worry when He said: SL#3 *Matthew 6:26-34*

26 *Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27* *Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?*

28 *"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29* *Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30* *If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31* *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* **32** *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33* *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34* *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Jesus tells us we are to rely on God and approach life one day at a time. Worry is to have no place in our lives. In fact, he commands us: Do not worry!

2. STEP TWO: Pray About EVERYTHING SL#4

Whenever God tells you to eliminate something He always has something greater for us. He always replaces a negative with a positive. He is the Father who always gives good gifts to His children. Paul says in verse six:

...in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. – Phil. 4:6

Paul is saying – don't worry – pray. In other words – don't panic – praise and pray. When you stop worrying – you free up a lot of time. What can you do with all that free time? Praise and Pray. When you get rid of something you create a vacuum – a void. Fill that void with prayer.

I have heard people say: "I don't have time to pray." My question would be: "Do you have time to worry? If you do – you have time to pray." You know – if we filled our worry time with prayer – we would have a lot less to worry about.

Some people ask: "What should I pray about?" Look at verse six again and notice the word "everything". Some people think that God is only interested in the "spiritual" stuff. But the truth is – God is interested in everything in your life. He cares about what you are thinking. He cares about what you are feeling. Why? Because He cares about you! Your cares and concerns – He cares about. The New Living Translation says:

"Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done." Philippians 4:6 (NLT)

When you are thanking God for what He has done – you are praising God. When I pray: "God you are mighty – you are

majestic. You have pulled me up out of the pit and set my feet on solid ground. You have forgiven me of my sin. Thank you Lord for being my salvation. Continue, Lord, to rescue me.” – In this prayer I am praising God.

Prayers don't have to be long – or elaborate. Someone has told me that the greatest prayer that they ever prayed was – “God help me.” First Peter says:

6 *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. 7* *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.* - 1 Peter 5:6-7

Let's take our problems to the Lord – pray instead of worry. Prayer is a tremendous way to release pressure.

A life insurance company did a study. They learned that people who attend church once a week live an average of 5.7 years longer than the general public. Why? Perhaps, people who attend church every week are more likely to pray than to worry. Worry destroys your health.

Folks here is a fact: There is no problem too big for God's power or too small for God's concern.

3. STEP THREE: Be THANKFUL – SL#5

Look again at verse six.

...but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. - Philippians 4:6

Note the key word “thanksgiving”. God wants us to be thankful. He wants us to have an attitude of gratitude. God's Word translation says:

“In every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests while giving thanks.” -Philippians 4:6 (GW)

If you're down and discouraged – here is a suggestion of something that may help – make a list of a dozen things you are thankful for. When you start making your list you quickly find that you have stopped focusing on your problems and now you are focusing on how God has blessed you. We have so much to be thankful for – but often we take those things for granted.

The healthiest human emotion is the attitude of gratitude. Each of us needs to have a grateful heart – a thankful spirit. Ungrateful people tend to be unhappy people. Proverbs tells us:

A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones. - Proverbs 17:22

Develop the attitude of gratitude and see how it affects your stress level. A joyful heart is good medicine for the soul. First Thessalonians tells us:

give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. - 1 Thessalonians 5:18

God's will for your life is for you to be thankful. If you realize all the blessings that God has given you – how can you not be thankful?

4. STEP FOUR: Change Your Way Of THINKING SL#6

Paul tells us in Philippians 4:8:

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

“THINK about such things.” God tells us to fill our minds with good things - things which will give Him glory and honor. The idea here that the Bible talks about is “focused thinking.” It is taking a thought – or a passage of scripture and focusing in on it.

The word in the Greek – means “to attend to carefully.” In other words – to look it over in every aspect – to examine it from one direction, turn it, and examine it again. That way you get to know it completely.

That is what we are to do with God’s word – and anything that is praiseworthy. We are to focus our thinking – spend time on it – and get to know it completely.

How many of you are good worriers? If you are good at worry – you can be good at meditation and thinking on good things. Worry is just negative thinking. When you’re worrying about something, what are you doing? You’re thinking about it over and over again. You lay in bed and think and think – and go over it in every way you can.

But if you think positive about the Word of God and those things that honor God - you are involved in the kind of meditation that scripture commends.

To reduce stress in your life you must change the way you think. You CAN choose what you think and you CAN think

about the right things. That is why the scripture tells us to spend time thinking on things that are: *true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy.*

What dominates your thinking? What does your mind think about the most? Is it negative or positive? The Bible tells us to think on those things which give God honor.

What happens if I **DO** change my way of thinking in order to be more praiseworthy? Here is what the Bible says will happen: **SL#7**

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Phil. 4:7

There is a promise in this verse that you will be given peace – “which transcends all understanding” – and it will guard your heart and mind. Today, there are all types of remedies to offer someone peace of mind.... pills, saunas, spas, retreats, therapy, self help books, stress reduction techniques – and more – just to help someone have a little peace of mind. But, Paul says: “The peace that God wants to give you – is above your understanding.” It is a gift that cannot be explained, duplicated, or fabricated. It is a peace which only God can give.

How do you gain that kind of peace? Only through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Paul has not been talking about religion – he has been talking about a relationship with Jesus Christ. You were made with a God-shaped vacuum in your life and when you try to fill it with anything other than Jesus Christ – you will

be highly disappointed.

We try to fill our lives with pleasure, popularity, power or possessions. But God says that the void needs to be filled with a person – Jesus Christ. God made you for a purpose and that purpose is to have a relationship with Him. God loves you and sent His Son to earth so that you can become part of God's family.

One great truth we often overlook in dealing with the stresses of life and seeking joy is this one found in Philippians 4:5

So...What's got you worried? What's got you stressed out? Finances? Your health? Your marriage? Your kids? Your career? Your family? Sin? The Bible says: **SL#8**

***6** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything (or every situation), by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 4:6-7*

Rick Warren, Tom Shepard, David Simpson