

CCC BEING THANKFUL IN TOUGH TIMES

Philippians 4:4-8

I found a can that said, “Warning: Contents Under Pressure.” I thought that should be a warning label I put on people that I meet often now a day. I have never seen as many stressed out people in the last few months as I’ve seen and I want to talk about that to you this morning.

There’s a well known stress scale called the Holmes Stress Scale which lists the 100 most stressful events you can have in life – the death of a spouse, a divorce, death of a loved one, etc. On that scale after much study they have discovered that the single most stressful time of the year is the period we are in today; the Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Years period of time. You start to worry about presents. You start to worry about parties. You start to

worry about all kinds of problems that happen, gifts, finances. Some of you worry about the relatives you’re going to have to see during the holidays. The stress level goes up significantly. Someone has said “This is the season to be uptight.” I was at the mall the other night and it’s already happening. Nothing destroys the Christmas spirit faster than trying to find a parking spot. You start worrying.

We will be celebrating Thanksgiving this Thursday and see we don’t have to allow this time of the year to start stressing us out. But the question is, “How do you be thankful in tough times?” How do you be thankful when the economy is not good? How do you be thankful when things aren’t going your way? How do you be thankful in tough times? In God’s word, the bible, Paul says, “*May you always be joyful in your life in the Lord.*” Is that

possible? Is it possible to always be joyful, is it possible to be joyful no matter what the circumstance? And the answer is = “Yes it is.” (PAUSE)

At Calvary it is our tradition on the Sunday before Thanksgiving at Calvary to share in the Lord’s Supper together. One of the words for the Lord’s Supper in Greek is the word Eucharist or *eucharistos* which means, I receive with Thanksgiving and I think it’s an appropriate time for us to take the Lord’s Supper, during this Thanksgiving season. So that’s what we’re going to do today. But before we do, I felt like I needed to share with you a couple of scriptures on a strategy for surviving seasonal stress. I’d suggest you write these down and then tack them up to your refrigerator wall for the next month to help you make it through the pressured times of the holidays. Philippians 4:6 he says “*Don’t be anxious about anything but in*

everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God and the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Then he says, “*Finally whatever is true and noble and right and pure and lovely and admirable, think about such things and the God of peace will be with you.*” In this very short passage we have the four keys to surviving stress. They’re very simple to say, they’re a lot more difficult to apply.

Step One: Worry about nothing

Step Two: Pray about everything

Step Three: Thank God in all things

Step Four: Think about the right things

1. WORRY ABOUT NOTHING V. 6 “*Don’t be anxious about anything. Do not fret or have any anxiety.*” That’s easier said than done. It’s no sweat to say it but as soon as

you're finished saying it, you start worrying about something. There is a magazine called *The Smithsonian Institute* magazine that says we are in the Golden Age of Anxiety. We get up in the morning to an alarm clock. That sets you off in a negative mood in the first place. It's not a comfort clock, it's an alarm clock. Then the first thing you do is turn on Bad Morning, America. It's not enough to have your own problems, you've got to have the economy, the sock market, the bail outs, Iraq and half a dozen other things happening too. You set down to breakfast to eat your Raisin Brand and you read the newspaper which is always full of great news!?! You get in the car and on the way to work you listen to all-talk radio and that's always divisive and always really bad news. It's no wonder you're stressed out by the time you get to work. But God's word says, you need to "*worry*

about nothing." Let me give you some facts about worry Dr. Walter Calvert did a study and discovered that

- 40% of your worries never happen.
- 30% of your worries concern the past.
- 12% of your worries are needless health concerns.
- 10% of your worries are insignificant, petty issues.

Only 8% of your worries are actual legitimate concerns.

Did you know that, worrying doesn't change anything and did you know that there are no such things as born worriers? See, worry is a learned response. You have learned it from your parents. You have learned it from your peers. You have learned it from experiences. But God's word the bible says there is Good News for you. The fact that worry is learned... means also it can be unlearned and that's good news. How many of you here this morning would love to live a worry free, stress free life. Well it is

available to you and how do you unlearn it? Listen to what Jesus says, *“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own.”* Matthew 6:34. The key to reducing stress in your life is live one day at a time. Don’t worry about tomorrow. Just focus on today. Focus on today’s issues and problems. Worry about nothing and I find it very interesting when Paul wrote this, he was in prison. He was in prison, in a dungeon and he’s saying to you and I, *“Don’t worry about anything.”* And that’s the first step here, the second step is:

2. PRAY ABOUT EVERYTHING. *“In everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”* You say, “I don’t have time to pray.” I have an idea for you, every time you worry, stop and pray about it. If you have time and energy to worry, you need no

more time and energy just take that time you would use to worry and use it to pray. If you do that, God promises if you pray instead of worry, you will have a whole lot less to worry about. He says “in everything.” Not just some things but everything you can pray about it. God’s word says, *“Unload all your worries on Him since He is looking after you.”* 1 Peter 5:7 Circle “all”. We have to learn to unload our problems in prayer to God instead of worrying. See prayer is a tremendous release valve and many of us *“...You have not because you do not ask God.”* James 4:2 No problem is too big or too small to pray about.

Paul says if you want to relieve stress here’s what you do: Worry about nothing and pray about everything and to it everyday of your life. The third step is:

3. THANK GOD IN ALL THINGS God’s word, the Bible says, *“When you pray, pray with thanksgiving.”*

Good News translation says it this way: *“Always asking Him with a thankful heart.”* Whenever you pray, you should always pray with thanksgiving. Be thankful in all things. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 *“Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* I encourage you to circle “in”. That’s one of the most important words to keep you from misinterpreting this verse. It does not say “Give thanks for every circumstance.” You don’t have to give thanks for evil in the world. When my wife came down with cancer, I wasn’t thankful. When Iraq war began I wasn’t thankful. The Bible does not say be thankful for evil. It says *“In every circumstance give thanks.”* Not for every circumstance. What’s the difference? Even out of bad God can bring good. In every circumstance, no matter how bad it is, you can give thanks to God because (a) I know He

has a purpose for my life bigger than the problem (b) He will give me the power to overcome the problem if I keep my eyes on Him and trust Him, (c) I will grow through the experience if I allow it to help me grow. In every circumstance. Bad things are going to happen to us all, evil things are going to happen to each of us. We live in this imperfect world with imperfect people and God promise us, those who have their trust in Him, that even in the evil that happens in the world I can be thankful, why, because I know God is greater than the problem. How can I be grateful when I’ve lost so much? How can I be grateful even when, I’ve lost my job, my home, I’ve lost my health, I’ve lost my husband or wife. How can I be thankful in that situation? You look not at what you’ve lost. You look at what you have left. Okay the first step is: I worry about nothing the second is: I pray about

everything: the third is: I give thanks for all things. The four thing is:

4. I THINK ABOUT THE RIGHT THINGS

“Finally brothers, whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.” The fourth point is this: If you want to reduce the level of stress in your life, you must change the way you think.

Whatever you put in your brain is what’s going to come out, garbage in, garbage out. Whatever you feed into your mind, whatever you think about is what going to come out in your life, is what going to control your life. In other words, the way you think determines the way you feel and the way you feel determines the way you act. So God says if you want to change your life, you need to change what you’re thinking about. If you’re reading the newspapers

more than you’re reading the Bible and you’re watching television instead of being part of one of our small groups and having your mind renewed in that group, the unhealthy things in life are going to come out rather than the healthy. See what God calls you to do in his word, will involve a deliberate conscious choice. Where you choose to think about the right things, focus on the positive and on God’s word. Why, because the root cause of stress **is the way you choose to think.** How you chose to look at problems you’re going through is the source of your stress. Your problem is not your problem. Your problem is how you’re choosing to respond to your problem. You’ve got to think about it in the right way; you have to think about it in a new way and you have the choice to do that today.. Proverbs 23:7 says, *“As a man thinks in his heart, so is he.”* So let me ask you, what do you think about most?

What dominates your mind? Why do I ask this because whatever you think about the most is what you're becoming? We always move towards what we're focusing on. If you want to become like Christ, think about Him, focus on Him, fill your mind with the Bible. Fill your mind with a Daily Devotional and if you do this is what the results will be, V. 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."* What a guarantee! He is guaranteeing peace of mind to you today and that's what everybody seems to be looking for in life?

It's amazing the things people will try to find peace of mind. Yoga, crystals, therapy, fad diets, books, seminars, tapes. They run from one thing to the next, one counselor

to the next, looking for peace of mind. The Bible says that God's peace is a gift to you from Him. And listen, it can't be explained and it can't be duplicated and it can't be fabricated. It's a gift. How do I get that kind of peace of mind that keeps my heart at peace when I'm under pressure, when I am under stress? What keeps me calm in the crisis? What gives me strength in the storm? What helps me be thankful in the tough times? How do I get that kind of peace? The key is the last phrase of that verse. *"As you trust in Christ Jesus."* It's a relationship. It's all about a relationship.

Note: (Be very sensitive here as to God's Leading)

In a minute we're going to take the Lord's Supper together. The Bible says it's only for those who have a relationship with Christ, who put their faith and trust in Him. If you

haven't done that yet, I would encourage you to do so today. Open your heart to Christ and say, "Jesus Christ, come in and give me the peace of mind that comes when I know I'm in the center of Your will."

Look at "*His peace will keep your thoughts.*" Circle "keep". God says when I trust Christ, He puts a guard on my mind. He keeps me at peace when everything else wants to make me stressed out. That's the way you do it. What's got you worried this morning? Your health? Your finances? Your relationships? All that you've got to do in the next couple of weeks? Marriage problems? Your kids? Your career? If you'll take these steps and let Jesus Christ become the guard of your mind and the center of your life, you will find a peace you could not possibly imagine.

Prayer: Jesus Christ, thank You that You do give us peace of mind and I pray that there are those who will today take

these steps. Would you pray this prayer in your heart? "Dear Lord, help me to worry about nothing but to unload my worries on You, cast my cares upon You. Help me to pray about everything, the things that worry me, to discuss them with You rather than worry. To give You the details of my life. Help me to be a more grateful person, to develop the attitude of gratitude and to thank You in every situation, to realize that there's always something to be grateful for. Help me to think about the right things, to spend some time with You in the Bible every day, reading Your Bible, Your word. Fill my mind with positive things, not the negative garbage that's out in the world. I ask You to put Your peace in my heart." If you've never invited Christ into your life, say, "Jesus Christ, I turn the controls of my life over to You. I want to follow Your plan. Be my Lord, my manager." We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.