

# Sermon Outline

## DE-STRESS:

PRACTICING GOSPEL-ROOTED, CHRIST-CENTERED, GOD-EXALTING STRESS REDUCTION

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### THE PRACTICE OF REJOICING (PHILIPPIANS 4:4)

#### I. Stressed!!

- A. Everyone in the world seems stressed out. *Stress* is our new word for suffering.
- B. How we handle stress is a matter of concern to our heavenly Father.
  - 1. Like any good father, God cares for our experience of stress. God cares for what it is that troubles us.
  - 2. Handling stress, managing stress, or even weakening stress in a God-centered way is one of the good works God calls us to do.
  - 3. It might not occur to us, because some of us may secretly believe that being stressed-out is a mark of piety, diligence, and self-importance.
- C. Three reasons why the way we handle stress matters to God.
  - 1. The physiological reason
    - a. Stress can affect our health.
    - b. While we are not to worship pleasure or comfort, does that mean we hurry up our deaths by failing to care for our own health and wellbeing?
  - 2. The relational reason
    - a. When we do not handle our stress well, we end up causing our neighbors to suffer.
      - How is it loving to our children when we allow stress to make us impatient with them (cf. Eph 6:4)?
      - How is it loving to our spouses when we let our stress make us harsh with them (cf. Col 3:19)?
      - How is it loving our church when we bring our stress into fellowship and bring discouragement as a result of it?
  - 3. The spiritual reason
    - a. When we allow our stress to rule us, it affects our prayers, our ability to look to God, and our trust in God.
    - b. When stress is allowed to boil over, to blot the glory of God from our minds, it opens us to all kinds of temptations and addictions (e.g. alcohol, pornography, seething resentment, hyper-defensiveness, etc.)
- D. Philippians 4:4-8 shows that handling stress in a Christ-centered way is one of the good works God calls us to do.

#### II. The Peace-Giving Wisdom of Philippians 4

- A. Why do we think that Philippians 4:4-8 teaches us how to deal with stress?
- B. This section contains one of the most popular passages often used to help Christians deal with anxiety (which is what stress is).

- Phil 4:6-7: “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
- C. Alongside that important verse, this section of Scripture has two other passages that—*if taken seriously, if obeyed*—will help us deal with stress (fear, anxiety, etc.) in a holy, Gospel-empowered way.
  - Both verse 4 and verse 8 surround verses 5 and 6 which contain this idea of not being anxious about anything and allowing God’s peace to guard our hearts in Christ Jesus.

### III. The God-Centered Reason for Stress-Relief (Phil 4:1)

- A. Most of all, this section of Scripture subordinates our desire for stress-relief to a larger goal.
  - Phil 4:1: “Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, *stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.*”
- B. As believers, we do not seek stress-relief merely for stress-relief, to help us feel better so that we can go on pursuing our ambitions or indulging in our sins.
- C. Instead, Gospel-empowered stress-relief is ultimately to help us stay close to the Lord and not be captivated by the idols of this world.
- D. While Gospel-empowered stress-relief will have its therapeutic effects on us, the goal of Gospel-empowered stress-relief is to help us abide in the Lord and not run from him.

### IV. “Rejoice...”

- A. The *practice of rejoicing*:
  - Phil 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.”
- B. This statement carries an imperative, a commandment: “Rejoice.”
- C. Some view God as a disgruntled father-moral accountant-harsh disciplinarian-task master. This prevents us from rejoicing in him and believing that he truly desires our happiness.
- D. But in Philippians 4:4, we see the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ for us.
  1. Because the Lord Jesus calls us through his apostle to rejoice (and rejoicing involves celebration and feelings of happiness), we are reminded that the Lord Jesus and God the Father really are for us.
  2. The desire of God the Father and his Son the Lord Jesus is really and truly our happiness. The fact that rejoicing is a commandment indicates that this is so.

### V. “...in the Lord”

- A. But if the Lord wants us to rejoice, what exactly does the Lord want us to rejoice in?
- B. The Lord want us to rejoice in himself: “Rejoice in the Lord...”
  - The Lord Jesus wants us to find our deepest joy, our greatest delight, our heartiest and most unrestrained celebration in him.

## VI. The Obedience of Rejoicing

- A. This command to rejoice in the Lord reaches all the way back to the Hebrew Scriptures. When we read the Torah, we discover that rejoicing in the Lord is a sacred obligation.
- B. In Deuteronomy 12, Moses instructs Israel to worship God at the central shrine designated by him. Bringing sacrifices to the Lord was meant to be a joyful affair.
- Dt 12:7: “And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, *and you shall rejoice*, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.”
  - Dt 12:12: “And you shall *rejoice before the LORD your God*, you and your sons and your daughters, your male servants and your female servants, and the Levite that is within your towns, since he has no portion or inheritance with you.”
- C. In Deuteronomy 14, the Lord teaches Israel about tithing the yield of their harvest.
1. When the Israelite brings his tithe to the place where God’s Name dwells, he is to eat of the tithe in the presence of the Lord (vv 22, 23).
  2. If the place of God’s Name is too far for a particular family, that family is to go to a place designated by the Lord, convert the sacrifice into money, and then do the following:
    - Dt 14:26: “and spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and *rejoice*, you and your household.”
- D. In Psalm 97:1, we are called to rejoice in the kingship of the Lord:
- Ps 97:1: “The LORD reigns, let the earth *rejoice*; let the many coastlands *be glad!*”
- E. Habakkuk calls us to rejoice in the Lord even when we have nothing.
- Hab 3:17-18: “Though the fig tree should not blossom,  
nor fruit be on the vines,  
the produce of the olive fail  
and the fields yield no food,  
the flock be cut off from the fold  
and there be no herd in the stalls,  
<sup>18</sup>yet I will *rejoice in the LORD*;  
I will *take joy in the God of my salvation.*”
- F. So from those verses, we see that the Lord calls us to rejoice in him in all kinds of settings. The Lord calls us to...
1. Rejoice before him during set times and seasons of worship.
  2. Rejoice in him by enjoying the good things he gives to us or enables us to acquire (Dt 14:26).
  3. Rejoice in him even when we cannot get what our appetites crave, even when “the fields yield no food” (Hab 3:17).
  4. Rejoice in his sovereign rule over the entire created universe (Ps 97:1).

## VII. The Gospel Root of Our Rejoicing

- A. The greatest motivation for rejoicing in the Lord comes to us in the *Gospel*.

—We are able to rejoice in the Lord not just because he is our Creator, but because he is our Savior.

B. Why can we rejoice in the Lord?

1. Because neither “height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39).
2. Because Christ “became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).
3. Because “no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, <sup>30</sup> because we are members of his body” (Eph 5:29-30).
4. Because “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’—” (Gal 3:13).
5. Because the Lord Jesus “loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood <sup>6</sup> and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6).

C. We can rejoice in the Lord Jesus Christ, in God the Father, and in the Holy Spirit, because they love us, accept us, and are for us in Christ Jesus.

D. So we can stand boldly in the presence of God—and thoroughly enjoy ourselves!

E. No matter what is happening in our lives, even if our fields produce no food, this solid ground of happiness never shifts. *It is always there.*

## VIII. Always

A. If the Lord is *always* our Savior, *always* good, *always* loving toward us, *always* our supreme ground of happiness, *always* our Father no matter how much we fail him—yes, we can rejoice in him *always*.  
—“Rejoice in the Lord *always*; again I will say, rejoice.”

## IX. Practice: Rejoice through Scripture and Prayer

A. If we are to rejoice in the Lord always, how do we do that? I would now like to give us several smaller practices that form this larger practice of rejoicing in the Lord.

B. First: Rejoice in the Lord by fixing our eyes on him, through prayer and Scripture, as our supreme Good (our Savior, our Glory, and the true Lover of our souls).

C. Two recommendations on how to do this.

1. Find Scripture passages that ground your focus on the Lord (e.g., Sgs 7:10; Lam 3:24; Rom 8:39).
2. Pray short prayers throughout the day that focus us on the Lord.
  - “Lord Jesus, I belong to you” (cf. Sgs 7:10; Rom 14:8, 9)
  - “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me” (Mt 20:30; Lk 18:13).

## X. Practice: Rejoice by Enjoying God’s Blessings

A. Second: Rejoice in the Lord by *enjoying his good gifts before him*.

B. Paul rejoices in the Lord over the material helps that were given to him.

- Phil 4:10: “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.”

- C. This opens the door is open for us to recognize that rejoicing in the Lord does include enjoying the material blessings that he gives us.
- D. This does not detract from what our Lord Jesus' words in John 6, when he told the people not to "work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life."  
—Jesus was urging us to make eternal blessings a priority. He's not saying that we shouldn't enjoy what God has given to us.
- E. Scriptures that encourage us to enjoy earthly blessings without guilt.
  - 1 Tim 6:17: "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy."
  - James 1:17: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."
  - Dt 14:26: "and spend the money for whatever you desire—oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves. And you shall eat there before the LORD your God and rejoice, you and your household."
  - Eccl 5:19: "Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God."
  - Eccl 7:7: "Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do."
  - Eccl 7:9: "Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun."
- F. The main problem is not enjoying the earthly blessings. The problem comes when we think those blessings bring eternal life.
- G. But when our hearts are resting on Jesus alone for salvation, when we are devoted to the glory of God, we are free to enjoy these blessings as gifts from the Father.

## **XI. Super-Spirituality Kills Rejoicing**

- A. Perhaps one reason we don't rejoice in the Lord as we should is because we don't receive our material blessings as gifts from him.
- B. Consequently, we are always dissatisfied and thinking poorly about the Lord.
- C. We don't rejoice in the Lord as we should because we are sometimes too "spiritual" for our own good. We misread the Lord's call to "seek the things that are above" (Col 3:1) as a call to despise all earthly pleasures.
- D. Since God "richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (1 Tim 6:17), enjoy what he has given you.
- E. Don't try to be more spiritual than what Scripture permits. It only feeds your pride and makes you a sourpuss.

## XII. Rejoice Down Your Stress

The Lord Jesus has a plan to help his beloved ones to reduce their stress so that they can continue standing firm in him. This plan calls us to rejoice in the Lord always (Phil 4:4)! Make the Lord your highest celebration! Let him be your greatest happiness! Rejoicing in the Lord is a fundamental part of what it means to love him. We rejoice in the Lord by fixing our eyes on his goodness toward us through the prayerful use of Scripture. We also rejoice in the Lord by enjoying his blessings to us, learning to see that he is behind all the good things we enjoy. We rejoice in the Lord because of who he is toward us—our Savior, our Lord, the true Lover of our souls. So it all begins with the Gospel. Trust in Jesus. Rest your tired soul in him. Then rejoice in the Father’s love to you.

### Questions for Reflection

1. Was there anything in particular about today’s sermon that blessed and encouraged you?
2. Was there anything with which you disagree or found difficult to accept?
3. Why do we think that Philippians 4:4-8 teaches us how to deal with stress?
4. Based on Phil 4:1, what is the ultimate goal of Gospel-centered stress relief?
5. What does the Torah (Old Testament) teach about rejoicing in the Lord?
6. How do we use Scripture and prayer to help us rejoice in the Lord? What ways were recommended in the sermon?
7. Read the following Scriptures (Dt 14:26; Eccl 5:19; Eccl 7:7, 9; 1 Tim 6:17; Jas 1:17). How does this shape the way we understand what it means to “rejoice in the Lord”? How does being “super spiritual” (i.e., despising earthly pleasure) hinder our rejoicing in the Lord?
8. Homework: Find Scripture passages that you can run to often to help you nurture joy in the Lord. Begin praying short, one word prayers throughout the day to draw your attention back to the Lord.