

Sermon Outline

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

THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER (PHILIPPIANS 4:5-7)

I. Don't Freak Out

II. Be Famous for Reasonableness (Phil 4:5)

- A. Having exhorted us to “Rejoice in the Lord always,” (v 4), Paul goes on to tell his friends and everyone else listening in, “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone...” (v 5).
- B. The word translated “reasonableness” (*epieikes*) can also mean “fairness,” “gentleness,” “mildness.”
- C. Instead of being known for our anxiety, we who love the Lord must be known for our “reasonableness.” We must be known as fair, mild, and sensible people; people not given over to stress, anxiety, or annoyance, but rather to *reason*.
- D. Why must believers be known for reasonableness? “The Lord is at hand.”
 - 1. Because “The Lord is at hand”—because the Lord is coming to save his people—we who rejoice in the Lord Jesus must *not* allow ourselves to be swept away by all the fears that characterize our world.
 - 2. Followers of Jesus should be the last people on earth to be consumed with stress, because we have hope.
 - 3. Our hope is not that everything we want will fall in place. Our hope lies specifically in the Lord Jesus Christ.

III. Do Not Be Anxious (Phil 4:6)

- A. We become reasonable, non-anxious people by doing what our Lord calls us to do in verse 6: “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”
- B. “do not be anxious about anything...” is a command from the Lord. Our Lord does not want us to be anxious.
 - 1. On the one hand, the instruction comforts us. It reminds us that God really loves us and that he really cares for our mental, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

2. On the other hand, the instruction is a call to resistance, to push back against anxiety.

IV. The Practice: Present Your Requests to God (Phil 4:6)

- A. So if we are to resist anxiety, how do we do that?
- B. What an anxious person needs is a way of unloading the burdens that he or she is carrying. The Lord Jesus teaches us through his apostle: “but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”
- C. The most basic lesson of this verse is quite clear: “let your requests be made known to God.”
 1. That is how we resist anxiety and manage our stress and fear in a holy way—it is by turning to God.
 2. It is by telling God what troubles us, what we would like happen, and what we would like him to do—and then leave it to God.
- D. If we do not find this advice helpful, we must ask: Have we truly done what the Lord calls us to do? Have we truly known what it means to let our requests be made known to God in “everything”; in every area of our lives, with nothing held back?
 1. Maybe that’s why we’re not experiencing as much as peace as we can—because we are not opening up to God.
 2. We are not releasing everything to him. We are not unloading everything before him.
 3. But God does not want us to hold back. He wants us to let him know our requests “in everything...” He wants us to be open to him in “everything.”
- E. And what does “everything” include? “Everything” would include:
 - our hopes and dreams for the future;
 - our deepest desires in various areas of life;
 - our frustration with our jobs;
 - our feelings about criticisms that were thrown at us;
 - our anxieties about the near future;
 - our worries about possible health problems;
 - our struggles against secret, besetting sins
- F. “Everything” means “everything.”
 1. God wants us to cast *all* our cares on him.
 2. God doesn’t want us to withhold any fear, any dream, any hope, any desire, any frustration, any secret lust, any dark desire, any lofty hope, or any ugly thought from him. He wants to hear about “everything.”
 3. He wants us to cast “everything” on him.

V. Openness Depends on Love

- A. Perhaps one reason we fear coming to God in such openness is because our own parents never gave that to us. There were some topics or sentiments you could not raise with them for fear of upsetting them.
- B. Maybe you are afraid that God would reject you if you were truly honest about everything.
- C. Such attitudes depend on a misconception: We think that God's acceptance of us is dependent on what we have in us, how sanctified we are, how good we feel toward God, how passionate we are for his will, etc.
 - 1. God's acceptance of us is based entirely on the Lord Jesus Christ—and that is a truth that can never be emphasized enough.
 - 2. God accepts us not because we have done well. He accepts us because Jesus did well on our behalf.
 - 3. If we are fully well, we would not need a Savior to begin with. If we could come to God on our own goodness, why would we even need a Mediator to go between us and God? We can just come to God directly on the basis of our own merits.
 - 1 Tim 2:5: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."
- D. When we come to God, we must discipline ourselves to come as believing, beloved children. *You and I are open to God only to the extent that we believe he truly delights in us.*

VI. The Gospel Strengthens Our Confidence

- A. How do we strengthen our confidence in God's love? By revisiting the Gospel again and again.
 - Galatians 2:15-16: "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."
 - Galatians 3:10-14: "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." ¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The

righteous shall live by faith.”¹² But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”¹³ 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”—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

- B. Through Jesus Christ, the following promises apply to us now.
 - Zephaniah 3:17: “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.”
 - Romans 8:39: “nor 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.”
- C. The Gospel is the good news concerning Jesus Christ our Savior. If we have put our faith in Jesus, God loves and rejoices over us as he loves and rejoices over his Son, because we are in his Son.

VII. The Practice: Prayer, Supplication, Thanksgiving (Phil 4:6)

- A. Now that we are more confident of God’s love for us, how then do we offer our requests to God? We offer our requests to God, as the apostle writes, “by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving...”
- B. The words “prayer” and “supplication” overlap in meaning.
 - 1. “Supplication”¹ is another word for “petition” or “asking.”
 - 2. Most of the time, our prayers take the form of supplications or petitions.
 - 3. We petition God for many things.
 - 4. Petitioning the Father is a necessary part of dealing with our anxieties.
- C. Simply by presenting the Father our requests, we take the burden off our shoulders.
 - 1. When we place our petitions before God, what are we doing?
 - a. We are relinquishing our control over those issues that give us stress.
 - b. We are letting God deal with those issues. We are placing our heavy backpacks into God’s hands.
 - 2. In the event that the worry keeps coming back, we repeat the same act of prayer. We keep going back to God: “Father, I am really worried

¹ τῆ δειήσει

about this issue. I cannot seem to stop worrying about it. But I place it into your hands”; or “Father, I am afraid for my loved one’s health. I entrust her into your care.”

- D. But prayer involves more than supplication. It also involves “thanksgiving.”
1. In thanksgiving, we acknowledge...
 - a. that God has heard our prayers.
 - b. that God has already given us many good things.
 - i. Our Savior-King Jesus Christ.
 - ii. Eternal life (Jn 3:36; 5:24)
 - iii. “everything to enjoy” (1 Tim 6:17).
 2. Basically, thanksgiving reminds us that our heavenly Father abounds with goodness toward us; that he does love us and will never stop loving us (Lam 3:22-23).
- E. Why is thanksgiving an important part of prayer? Thanksgiving is important because it...
1. protects us from thinking hard, mean, cynical thoughts about God.
 2. protects our faith in God.
 3. is a way of practicing rejoicing in the Lord (Phil 4:4)

VIII. A Protective Peace (Phil 4:7)

- A. We pray not simply to get what we want. We pray, most of all, so that we may enter more deeply into God’s peace and stay rooted to the Lord who loves us (v 7).
- B. When we place our cares and concerns in God’s hands, “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” will come to us.
- C. The peace of God “will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
1. Why do we pray? We pray so that we can sense the peace of God.
 2. Why do we seek the peace of God? Because the peace of God keeps us close to Christ (cf. 4:1).
- D. In summary: We present our requests to God in all things so that we can enter into God’s protective, nourishing, and quieting peace.

IX. Pray Away Your Stress

The Lord Jesus cares deeply for his beloved ones. He has a plan to help us manage our stress so that we can stand firmly in him. This plan calls us to bring all our requests to God, knowing that God has already justified and accepted us in Jesus Christ. It calls us to offer God all that troubles us with an attitude of thanksgiving, entrusting all our cares to God. When we do, God will give us his peace. God will make us wise and reasonable people

in an anxious world. God will keep our hearts and minds on the Lord Jesus.

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. Paul says, "do not be anxious about anything..." (4:6) How does this command comfort and challenge us?
4. How does the Gospel enable us to be open to God?
5. How do we bring our requests to God?
6. According to verse 7, what happens when we entrust our cares to God? What does verse 7 teach us about God's intentions for our bringing our requests to him?
7. Homework: Bring something that has been troubling you to the Lord. Offer your request and thank God for hearing your prayers and for giving you so many blessings already.