

How To Keep From Stressing Out

Excerpts from Pastor Rick Warren's
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Stress is at an all-time high leading to suicide being the number one cause of injury death in America. The top 7 stresses in life are your job, money, health, relationships, poor diet, media overload, and lack of sleep. Paul gives us the *classic anti-stress management recipe* in Philippians 4:6-13. It comes with a *stress management guarantee* by God in verse seven: if you do these things you will experience God's peace, peace that surpasses understanding. God's peace is where you are at peace inside when life is chaotic on the outside. His peace will keep your thoughts quiet and keep your heart at rest as you trust in Christ Jesus. God promises a more peaceful, less stressed mind if you do these things.

There are more than 7,000 promises in the Bible, but for every promise there is a premise – a condition that if you do this, I'll do this. The premise here is "If you do these things". If you do these things it will keep you from stressing out. Now the question is "What things?" We'll there are 5 specific things God says to do in this passage. He said 1) I want you to **worry about nothing**; 2) I want you to **pray about everything**; 3) I want you to **thank God in all things**; 4) I want you to **keep your mind on good things**; and 5) I want you to **be content in all things**.

So, let's look at the **1st step** to reducing stress. If you want to keep from stressing out, you must first **Refuse to Worry about ANYTHING!** Why? Because the number one stress in your life is not work, it is worry. Work does not keep you up at night, worry does. NEVER worry about ANYTHING, leaves no room for worry anytime. Now, Jesus thought worry was such an important topic that He spent a major section of His famous sermon, The Sermon on the Mount, on stress. This is where He gave us 5 reasons why we should never worry about anything:

#1 *Worry is unreasonable and illogical.* It doesn't make sense. Matthew 6:25 says "Don't worry about your body, what to eat, what to wear. Is not life more important than food, and is not the body more important than clothes?" Worry puts your priorities out of order. Worry is irrational; it is unreasonable! Why is worry unreasonable? Well, there are a couple of reasons: 1] *Worry exaggerates the problem.* It never makes the problem smaller, it always makes it bigger! The more you think about the problem, the bigger it gets. It grows the problem out of proportion. 2] *Worry doesn't work*; it never has worked! It is *Stewing without Doing*. It doesn't make any positive difference in your life. To worry about something you can't change, is worthless. And worrying about something you can change is stupid – Just Change It! In either case, worry is not the answer.

#2 *Worry is unnatural.* There are no born worriers. Worry is a learned behavior. It is picked up by watching other people. The good news though is that if worry can be learned, it can also be unlearned. Since worry is a learned behavior, to get good at it you have to practice it. Some people are pros at worry. Jesus says in Matthew 6:26 "Look at the birds of the air, they don't sew or reap and store away in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they?" And verse 28 and 29 say "and why do you worry about clothes? Look at the lilies of the field, they don't worry about theirs!" In all of God's creation, in all the universe, only human beings worry. We are the only thing God made that doesn't trust Him.

#3 *Worry is unhealthy.* Our body was not designed to handle worry. Doctors say of people leaving the hospital, "they need to get rid of guilt, resentment and worry because that is what put them in the hospital." It is not so much what you eat, but what eats you that makes you sick. It is the worry in your life. Proverbs 12:25 says "An anxious heart weighs a man down." You are pulled down by the worries. The word worry actually comes from an old English word which means to strangle or choke. Every time you worry, you are strangling or choking the life out of your life. Proverbs 14:30 says "A heart at peace gives life to the body." So, if you want to be healthier, Stop Worrying!

4th *Worry is unhelpful*. It can't lengthen your life (although it can shorten it). Worry cannot change the past and it cannot control the future, it just messes up today. It is like sitting in a rocking chair where you use a lot of energy but you don't make any progress. The only thing worry changes is You. It makes you miserable. It has never solved a problem.

5th *Worry is unnecessary*. There is no need to worry. Jesus says in Matthew 6:30, "if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't He most surely care for you, oh you of little faith." He created you and the flowers, but you (not the flowers) are His child which He loves. 1Peter 5:7 says "Unload your worries on God since He is looking after you." The word "unload" in the original Greek means to just drop it or let it go.

[Another source of stress and worry is when you don't forgive someone for doing you wrong. Your unforgiveness eats you up while it usually doesn't even bothering the other person. You are hurting yourself over and over as you worry about it. So here I'd like to insert some excerpts from the article "A Lesson In Prayer" by Beyond Today host Gary Petty seen at www.GNmagazine.org. "God offers us forgiveness for the terrible things we've done against Him. In return He expects us to extend forgiveness to others. Forgiveness is giving up the emotional need to punish someone who has treated us in a hurtful way. Forgiving others isn't easy, but you will never experience true peace of mind until you do. When you refuse to give up the desire for revenge, you not only twist your own emotions into anger and bitterness, you damage your ability to respond to God's forgiveness. Once you become obsessed with the wrong someone else has done, you start down a long road of anger and despair. So, what must you do? You must consciously decide to not dwell on the offences of others. You must replace the thoughts of hurtful treatment from others with positive thoughts of God in your life."] You cannot always control what happens in your life, but you can choose how you respond.

For the 2nd step to reducing stress, it says in Philippians 4:6 to **Talk to God about Everything**. Don't Panic – Pray! Don't Worry – Worship! When you are worrying, you are silently (or occasionally out loud) talking to yourself. Stop talking to yourself about all the stuff that stresses you out and start talking to God. Talking to yourself won't do anything, but talking to God will. In every situation let God know what you need – in your prayers and in your requests. If you prayed as much as you worried, you'd have a lot less to worry about. If it's not worth praying about, it is not worth worrying about.

When you worry instead of asking, you are acting like an atheist. Worry is practical atheism. It is acting as God doesn't exist to you. God says "I'll take care of you" but worrying is as if God can't be trusted. If when you pray you ask God for His help, but you keep worrying about what you prayed for, this effectively means that you do not trust God to really be able or willing to help you. James 4:2 says "You do not have, because you do not ask (God)". So remember this 2nd key to stress management: "*Worry Less, Ask More*". No problem is too tiny to God. Tell Him all your concerns.

Your biggest problem as a human is getting into heaven, because heaven is perfect but you are not. You are not good enough to get into heaven on your own. So to help you get into heaven, God came up with Plan B. He came to earth in human form and He said I'll live a perfect life and I'll die for you to pay the penalty for your sin and this will be your ticket into heaven. This is Grace – God giving us what we don't deserve just because He loves us. Since God did not spare His own son but gave Him up for us, won't He give us what else we need! If He has taken care of my biggest problem then every other problem I have is small in comparison. If God loves you enough to die for your sins, don't you think He loves you enough to help you with your problems.

Often people say something like "I prayed but God did not answer my prayer." So why doesn't God answer all our prayers? God hears all our prayers, but He answers them how He sees fit and when it is the right time for Him. He doesn't always follow our timeline or schedule. His thoughts, understanding and ways are far beyond our understanding. It is not your job to figure out how God is going to help you; it is your job to just ask. There is no

area in your life that God is not interested in. God says “I’ll care for you and I’ll care for you all of your life.” One of the dumbest things you can say is “God, I’ll handle this!”

The **3rd step** to reducing stress is to **Thank God in All Things!** It doesn’t say to thank God **FOR** all things because there are things you shouldn’t be thankful for, as death, illness and all evil in this world. It just means that even in the bad times you can find something good to be thankful for. So when you ask God for things, thank Him for all He has done. Always ask with a thankful heart. You cannot be happy and ungrateful at the same time. Happy people are grateful and unhappy people are ungrateful. Many studies have shown that the healthiest emotion known to humankind is The Attitude of Gratitude. The more you build gratitude in your life, the more happy and healthy you will be. Studies have shown that an Attitude of Gratitude actually raises your immunities. And being ungrateful and resentful actually lowers your immunity. So to be healthier and happier, get into the habit of thanking God and other people in your life for all the little things they do for you. Look for the good, not the bad. We know that gratitude is one of the remedies for depression. It gets my eyes off myself and gets them on other people. Instead of looking at what I don’t have, I look at what I do have. It is a stress reliever – it gets the focus off me. You can always find something to be grateful for. Try this – keep a Grateful Journal where every day you write down one thing you are grateful for. This helps you develop a grateful heart by helping you to think about being grateful everyday and whenever you get depressed, you can be reminded of all the things you are blessed with.

Railroad tracks can be representative of the good and bad of our life. In your life you always have 2 rails at the same time. One rail is the good things happening in your life and the other rail is the bad things that happen in your life. Rick said that he used to think that life was a series of hills and valleys, high and low times in life, good times and bad times, but that is not really true. The fact is that we get them both at the same time all of our life. There is no time in your life when everything is good and there is nothing bad in your life and there is no time when all is bad and there is nothing good in your life. No matter how good things are going in your life, there is always something you need to be working on and no matter how bad things are in your life, there is always something to be thankful for, be grateful for. You can always find something to be thankful for. 1Thessalonians 5:18 says, “In everything give thanks, for this is the Will of God, in Christ Jesus, for you.” Often people wonder, “What is God’s Will for me?” Well, first of all you are to be Thankful!

The **4th step** to reducing stress is to **Think About Good Things!** Stress is not in the outside world – it is in your thoughts. It is how you handle the problems in this world that determines your stress. The battle is in your brain, in your thought life, in your mind. What you fill your mind with will determine the level of stress in your life. If you want peace of mind, you are going to have to control what you allow in it. GIGO – Garbage In, Garbage Out. Whatever you let in your mind is going to come out in your life. Most people let anything into their mind by reading and listening to all sorts of things – good and bad. Philippians 4:8 says fill your mind with those things which are true and good and right. Think about things which are pure, beautiful and respected. If anything is excellent, if anything is worthy of honor, think about those things. The Bible gives us 8 tests on whether we should allow something into our mind or not. You must change what you think about and control what you allow into your mind. Before you listen to or watch, or before you talk or say anything, you should say, “Is it True, is it Good, is it Right, is it Pure, is it Beautiful, is it Respected, is it Excellent, is it Worthy of Honor?” All these things picture God. So what he is saying is “Think About God!” Isaiah says if you fix your thoughts on God, God will keep you in perfect peace. What you think about will determine how stressed or at peace you are. Cory Tenenbaum, who lost her entire family in the Nazi death camps, wrote once that “If you look at the world, you will be distressed; if you look within, you will be depressed; but if you look at Christ, you will be at rest.” It all depends on what you have your eyes on.

The **5th step** to reducing stress is to **Be Content with Anything.** Being content does not mean you are to have no ambition. Contentment is not laziness or apathy or complacency. It is not fatalism – *What will be will be.* Contentment is – enjoying what I have right now rather than waiting for something else to happen in order for me to be happy. You are not waiting for something to happen in your life to be happy. Contentment is the opposite of coveting. Coveting is *When and Then Thinking!* It is saying *When this happens, Then I’ll be happy!* Contentment is

independence from circumstances. This means that *My joy is not connected to what is happening in my life right now*. My joy is not based on my happenings or circumstances. Learn to enjoy what you have right now and don't wait for something to change to make you happy.

Paul says in verses 11 & 12, "I've learned to be content with whatever the circumstances" – whether rich or poor, full or hungry, well or suffering. Contentment is not natural, it has to be learned. How do you learn contentment? Well here are 3 ways: **1st Stop Comparing!** The source of all discontentment is comparison. The Bible tells us that it is foolish to compare yourself to anyone else. Why? Because you are always going to find someone who is doing a better job than you and somebody who has more than you and you are going to get discouraged, OR you are going to find somebody who you are doing a better job than or you have more than and you get full of pride. Discouragement and Pride are the two things that knock you out of life. God made you to be you – not like someone else. Most of us start off as originals and end up as carbon copies. God never makes copies of anything. No two things are exactly alike; everything in nature and everyone are original. Even identical twins are different in many ways. When God made you, He broke the mold. God wants you to be you. If you try to be like someone else, then who is going to be you? God does not need two of the same person. Be careful when you idolize other people and wish you were like them. Remember "Every Rose has it's Thorns" – which means that no matter how perfect someone's life seems, everyone has problems. No one is perfect. So Stop Comparing! When you compare – you get Jealous and you get Envious. The Bible says "Peace of mind makes the body healthy, but Envy is like a cancer – it eats you up". Peace of mind translates to contentment. So contentment makes the body healthy.

The **2nd** way to learn contentment is **Stop thinking that having More is Better**. You see, there are 3 myths we are taught by advertising in society: 1)Having more will make me more happy, 2)Having more will make me more secure and 3)Having more will make me more valuable or important. None of those are true. They are all lies. You can lose it all. Your value is not based on your valuables and your self-worth is not based on your net worth. It is based on who you are, not what you own. You need to find your security in something that can never be taken from you. Do not put your security in your job or your bank account or your health or your good looks, all of which you can lose. You have to put your security in God which can't be taken away from you.

The **3rd** way to learn contentment is **Learn to Admire without having to Acquire**. You don't have to own it in order to enjoy it. Ownership is a pain a lot of times. A lot of people are possessed by their possessions. It often requires a lot of time and money to maintain possessions. But if you rent or borrow something, you can enjoy it then give it back for someone else to maintain at their expense. There is nothing wrong with possessions unless you make it your God. If your whole life is to work harder to pay for stuff and to maintain it, you are missing the point.

These 5 steps to reducing stress are very hard to do. It is not easy to worry about nothing, to pray about everything, to thank God in everything, to always think about good things, and to be content with anything. So where do you get the energy to do these things to reduce the stress in your life? God says this – You come to Me and I will give you the power and the ability to help you do what is best for you. Paul ends this passage with verse 13: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." I have the strength to face anything and everything by the power that Christ gives me. I can do all these steps to reduce stress when Christ strengthens me. What we are talking about here is not a religion, it is a relationship. God has never made a person He does not love and has a purpose for. When you become a Christian, God indwells in your heart. As you grow in your relationship with Him, loving and trusting in Him, He helps you have peace. Job 22:21 says "Obey God and be at peace with Him, this is the way to happiness." You see the real reason you are not at peace is because you are at war with God. And when you make your peace with God, you get the peace OF God and then you can have peace with others. The Prince of Peace is reigning in our hearts.

So, if you want to learn how to control and reduce stress in your life and learn how to keep from stressing out, learn to live by the teachings in Philippians 4:6-13 – 1) Don't worry about anything; 2) Pray about everything; 3) Thank God in all things; 4) Think about good things; and 5) Be content in all things. Also 6) Forgive others.