

Fil-Am Community Church

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Key Verse: Philippians 4:4-8

## “BEING THANKFUL IN TOUGH TIMES”

Happy Thanksgiving! I'm sure many of you are thankful that **Manny Pacquiao won** again. I'm sure glad he did. Like a super typhoon, he battered his opponent without letup, landing a lot of damaging blows until he won a unanimous decision. From start to finish, Pacquiao was inspired and motivated by his desire to lift up the spirits of millions of Filipinos. In fact, he said that his victory was a symbol of the Filipino's resilience in the midst of a natural disaster and natural tragedy. Pacquiao himself suffered two disasters, when he lost twice. But now he's back in his winning ways. Now, enough of Pacquiao and let's get on to our message this morning.

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. I have never seen as many stressed out people in the last few months as I've seen. I want to talk about that this morning.

There's a well-known stress scale called the Holmes and Rahe 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 between Thanksgiving and New Years. 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. The stress level goes up significantly. Someone has said "This is the season to be uptight."

How can you be thankful in tough times? When the economy is not good. When things aren't going your way. How can you be thankful in tough times?

In Philippians 4, Paul says in verse 4, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Is that possible? Is it always possible to be joyful, no matter what the circumstance? Yes it is.

I'd like to share with you a passage in Scripture that gives you a strategy for surviving seasonal stress. I'd suggest you write this down or print it and then tack it up to your refrigerator wall for the next month to help you make it through the pressured times of the holidays.

In Philippians 4:6-8 Paul says "Do not 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. Finally whatever is true and noble and right and pure and lovely and admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think."

In this short passage we have the four keys to surviving stress. Let me share with you what these are.

## **1. WORRY ABOUT NOTHING**

V. 6 “Do not be anxious about anything.” In other words, 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.

The Smithsonian Institute magazine in a recent article says that we are in the Golden Age of Anxiety. We not only have micro worries, which are your personal worries, but now you’re confronted with macro worries, worries of the world. It’s no wonder people are uptight.

They 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 Iraq, Afghanistan, and half a dozen other things happening too. You set down to breakfast to eat your Wheaties and you read the newspaper, which is full of great news!?! It’s no wonder you’re stressed out by the time you get to work.

Let me give you some facts about worry: Dr. Walter Calvert did a study and discovered that 40% of your worries never happen. So there’s 40% of them that you don’t even have to worry about. So out of your list of ten worries, pick out four and throw them out because they don’t count. Then, 30% of your worries concern the past. Worry cannot change the past and worry cannot control the future. All worry does is mess up today. You can worry about the past all you want to but it’s not going to change it. The past is past. It’s over. It’s gone. And it’s not going to control the future no matter how much you worry about it. All worry does is mess you up right now. So you can’t control the past, you can’t control the future and 40% aren’t even going to happen so 70% of your worries are worthless.

Then, 12% of your worries are needless health concerns. Like the hypochondriac who had written on the tombstone, "I told you I was sick!"

Then, 10% of your worries are insignificant and petty issues.

What's left is 8% . Only 8% of your worries are actual, legitimate concerns.

Worrying doesn't change anything. It's stewing without doing. There are no such things as born worriers. Worry is a learned response. You learned it from your parents. You learned it from your peers. You learned it from experience. That's good news. The fact that worry is learned means it can also be unlearned.

How do you unlearn it? Notice what Jesus says. Matthew 6:34 "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own."

He's saying don't open your umbrella until it starts raining. Don't worry about tomorrow. Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday. Don't do that.

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.

It's interesting that when Paul wrote this he was in prison. He was in prison in Rome in a dungeon and he's saying, "Don't worry about anything." Whenever God tells us not to do something, He always has a positive replacement. Whenever God has a "don't" He always has a "do". Anytime He says eliminate this from your life," He adds something in and that's the second step.

## 2. **STEP TWO: 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.” If you use the time you have worrying for praying then you’d find the time to pray. If you prayed as much as you worried, you’d have a whole lot less to worry about. Don’t add any prayer time to your schedule. Just pray when you used to worry. If you’ll do that, you’ll find you have plenty of time for prayer. 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. Some people think God only cares about religious things: God cares about how many people I talk to about Christ or how many people I invite to church, my giving, my tithing. Is God interested in car payments? Yes. Is He interested in postnasal drip? And the heartbreak of a break-up? Yes. He’s interested in every detail of your life.

ThePhillips translation of the Bible says: “When you pray, tell God every detail of your life.” God is concerned about the big things and the small things. He knows every detail of your life. He has even the hairs on your head numbered. The God who made every thumbprint unique, who made every voice print unique, who made every snowflake unique has no problem handling the details of your life. There is nothing you can not pray about. If it’s worth worrying about, it’s worth praying about. There is nothing insignificant to God. You can pray about anything and everything.

It says “by prayer and petition.” What does petition mean? A petition means a specific, detailed, direct prayer. Most people pray too vague so they never get any answers. They pray such a general way.

Things like, “God, bless me.” What is a blessing? Can you define what a blessing is? Sometimes a problem is a blessing. Is that what you’re praying? To have some problems? You need to be specific. And it says you can pray about any detail in your life.

1 Peter 5:7 “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

Notice “all”. We have to learn to unload our problems instead of worrying. Prayer is a tremendous release valve. People ask me, “How do you handle the stress?” I just turn it over to the Lord. I release it to God. I love the word in Greek “unload”. It literally means, “just let it drop.” It’s not toss it or throw it or heave it fifteen feet. It says this is the kind of load that’s so heavy you couldn’t hoist it if you had to – just let it go. He says that’s what God says to do with your worries. Dump them on God. Unload them. Learn to unload your stress through prayer.

I read recently that major life insurance companies have done studies and discovered that if you attend church every week you will live on the average 5.7 years longer than people who don’t attend church every week. Why? One guess I have is that those people who do go to church unload on the Lord. They decompress. They let God have their worries. If you don’t talk it out to God, you’ll take it out on yourself. When you swallow your worries your stomach keeps score. You’ve got to let it go, unload it.

The Phillips translation of the Bible puts 1 Peter 5:7 this way “You can throw the whole weight of your anxieties upon Him for you are His personal concern.”

So, just ask God to help you with those worries, those problems, those stresses because he cares for you deeply. And here's the plain truth: 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. Simple, but it's something that you have to learn over and over.

### 3. **THIRD STEP: THANK GOD IN ALL THINGS**

“With thanksgiving, present your requests to God.” The Good News version says: “Always asking Him with a thankful heart.” Whenever you pray, you should always pray with thanksgiving.

I've shared with you before that the healthiest human emotion is not love but the healthiest human emotion is gratitude. It actually increases your immunities. It makes you more resistant to stress and less susceptible to illness. It's the healthiest emotion. The attitude of gratitude. People who are grateful are happy. But people who are ungrateful are miserable because nothing makes them happy. They're never satisfied. It's never good enough. So if you cultivate the attitude of gratitude, of being thankful in everything, it reduces stress in your life.

There used to be an old song, “Count Your Blessing, Name Them One By One.” I think that's a good thing for you to do. Go make a list. I did yesterday. I sat down and made a list of things I was grateful for – my wife, my kids, they all know the Lord, the wonderful directors that God has brought to serve with me here.

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.” 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." That's often a misinterpretation you hear with TV preachers. They'll say things like, "You should give thanks for everything." The Bible doesn't teach that.

It says give thanks in every circumstance. You have a flat tire ... "Thank God." ?? I just had a car wreck ... "Praise the Lord!" Be serious. That's loony Christianity not biblical Christianity.

You don't have to give thanks for evil in the world. If my children were murdered I would not be thankful. If my wife came down with cancer, I would not be thankful. When there is a war with one country against the other, I'm not thankful for the war. 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 bigger than the problem and (b) He will give me the power to overcome the problem, and (c) I will grow through the experience if I allow it to help me grow. In every circumstance. Even in the evil that happens in the world I can be thankful because I know God is greater than the problem.

A lot of people ask me, "How do I know what God's will is for my life?" It's right there. "Give thanks in all circumstances for this is God's will." You want to know God's will for your life? "In everything give thanks." In fact, if you're not experiencing the attitude of gratitude you're out of God's will.

How can I be grateful when I've lost so much? I've lost my job, I've lost my health, I've lost my husband or wife. Imagine if you were a typhoon survivor in the Philippines. How can I be thankful in that situation? You look not at what you've lost. You look at what you have left. And you have an awful lot left. You're still alive. So, you look at what you have left.

So the question is: What are you taking for granted? Your health? Your freedom? Your relationships? In everything give thanks. Gratitude is a stress reliever because it gets your eyes off the problem and puts it on the positive things in your life.

I worry about nothing. I pray about everything. I give thanks for all things.

#### **4. THINK ABOUT THE RIGHT THINGS**

“Finally brothers, whatever I 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.

None of us use our brain to our potential, the potential God has given us. Whatever you put in your brain is what's going to come out. It's like a computer. Garbage in, garbage out. Whatever you feed into your mind, whatever you think about is going to come out in your life. The way you think determines the way you feel. And the way you feel determines the way you act. So he 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, it seems like movies and TV today glorify the unhealthy in life rather than the healthy.

It says think about the things that are true, noble, right, lovely, admirable. Does that describe the typical movie? Not a chance! Most typical movies are the exact opposite of that. It says fill your mind with those things. Fix your mind. It involves a deliberate conscious choice where you change the channels. 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 I choose to think. Why is it that you can take two people, put them in the exact same circumstance? One of them is blown away and they fall apart, collapse emotionally. The other handles it with no problem, unruffled feathers. Obviously, the problem is not the circumstance. It's your response. It's how you're viewing it. Your perspective. How you're interpreting life. And that's your choice, how you're choosing to look at the problems you're going through right now is the source of your stress.

Your problem is not your problem. Your problem is how you choose to respond to your problem. You've got to think about it in the right way.

**Proverbs 23:7** says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." What do you think about most? What dominates your mind? Whatever you think about the most is what you're becoming. We always move toward what we're focusing on. If you want to become like Christ, you think about Him. Fill your mind with the Bible.

What is the result of doing these things? Worry about nothing, pray about everything, thank God in all things, keep my mind on the right things. What's the result? V. 7 "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

What a guarantee! He is guaranteeing peace of mind. Have you noticed that is what everybody seems to be looking for?

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. And 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? That keeps me calm in the crisis? That gives me strength in the storm? That 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. "In Christ Jesus." It's a relationship.

Now, the verse also says "The peace of God... will guard your hearts and minds." When Paul was writing to these people in Philippi it was a Roman city, a colony protected by the Roman legion. The Roman legion, the sentry guards, kept the peace of the city.

God says when I'm Christ, He puts a sentry 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 sentry guard of your mind and the center of your life, you will find a peace you could not imagine.