



Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church

The Sermon on the Mount - Part 2 • Dealing with Stress • matthew 6:25-34; luke 22:39-44 •

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Main Point

God wants us to deal with stress by surrendering to Him in prayer rather than turning away in fear.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is one decision in your life that has caused you stress recently?

Come up with a list of the main triggers for stress we face in day-to-day life.

What is your go-to coping mechanism for dealing with stress?

As you know, stress is an unfortunate and unavoidable part of life. The top sources of stress for adults include money, work, the economy, family responsibilities, relationships, family health problems, and personal health concerns. Stress exists because our world is broken by sin. As Christians in this world we live in the “in between” of life on earth while we wait for eternity. This divide means we are prone to the stresses of the world, but we must learn to deal with them in a godly way. If we don’t learn how to deal with stress appropriately, then it can literally kill us.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Stress in and of itself is not a bad thing. Oftentimes stress shows we understand the weightiness of life and its burdens. What matters is how we deal with our stress. First, let’s look at a teaching of Jesus that points out the wrong way to deal with stress. Then we will consider Jesus’ own example to see how God wants us to deal with our stresses.

| Have a volunteer read Matthew 6:25-34.

What does Jesus' teaching in this passage reveal about the wrong way to handle stress?

Why is anxiety sinful? What do we communicate to God when we choose to deal with stress by being anxious and fearful?

How we deal with stress not only gauges our love of God, but it also measures our trust in Him. Since we cannot serve two masters (6:24), we need not worry about the basic needs of life: food, drink, or clothing. Jesus did not say we should not work to provide for ourselves and our families. He did stress we should trust God to provide for us. The images of the birds and the lilies drive home this point. Since God provides so well for birds and flowers, you also can trust He will provide for you.

How does knowing that "your Heavenly Father already knows all your needs," help you face the future?

Read Psalm 37:25-26. What did the psalmist know to be true about God? What perspective does this give to the stresses and anxieties that divide your heart?

We often think our fears are perfectly valid, but Jesus says otherwise. Jesus could not be more clear in this passage. He doesn't want us to fear the future. Anxiety is living out the future before it gets here. Jesus says anxiety is paralyzing and draining, not to mention sinful. Instead of trying to figure out the will of God, Jesus calls us to focus on what we can confidently know about the will of God. This discussion about anxious care was not merely a collection of helpful hints to cope with stress and worry. On the contrary, Jesus understood that these issues go to the nucleus of our relationship with the Lord. Chronic worry signals a malfunctioning faith. Worry and worship cannot exist together in the same human heart. God demands the priority in our lives.

What is God's will for us (v. 33)?

Do you sometimes wish God would spell out the future? Why do you think He doesn't give us more details about our futures?

God is in control and doesn't need our frantic worrying to sustain the universe. We don't have to be in charge because we serve a God who controls everything. Jesus understood God's control and also the goodness of His will, even in the face of unimaginable stress. As Jesus prepared for the cross, He gave us a picture of the best way to deal with our stress and the difference it makes in our lives.

| Have a volunteer read Luke 22:39-44.

How would you describe Jesus' emotional state at this moment in His life? What were some of the things likely causing Him stress?

How did Jesus choose to deal with His stress?

Why do you think Luke included the detail that Jesus knelt to pray? What does that indicate about the nature of prayer and what Jesus was feeling?

These verses provide a moving glimpse into the humanity of Jesus. Jesus, more than any of us, knows about stress. He knows the difficulty of aligning our desires with the will of God. Jesus didn't approach the cross glibly. He was realistic about the physical, emotional, and spiritual pain He was about to endure. Though He was tempted to avoid pain, as we all are, Jesus was confident in the plan and goodness of His Father. The Father gave Him a cup of suffering and death. The Son, in obedience and subjection, would drink it. Jesus' examples shows us that we can only find the strength and peace we need to deal with stress through the power of God.

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Stress is literally killing us as a nation. Anxiety (which means to divide in Greek) is the natural consequence of dividing our hearts and trying to serve multiple masters. Seeking first the kingdom of God and His will for our lives enables all other priorities to find their rightful place.

What do you most frequently find yourself stressing about? How does today's discussion speak directly to those concerns?

What is one decision you are facing that you are anxious about? How might our group pray for you as you seek to choose trust over fear with that decision?

Read John 14:27. What difference can the truth of this encouragement from Jesus make in our lives as we learn to deal with stress in a way that honors God?

Pray

Pray that your group would focus on what we know about God's will rather than what we don't. Pray that the Lord would help us know that He is in control and at work in our lives to make us more like Jesus. Pray for the specific situations mentioned above, that in each one the person would trust Christ rather than fear the future.

Commentary

| Matthew 6:25-34

6:25. Jesus' point could be translated as "stop worrying." The questions in 6:25b imply, "If God is the provider of life and body, He will also provide for their sustenance."

6:26. In this verse Jesus came to the first of two illustrations, supporting His main theme in verse 25. Note the use again of the phrase heavenly Father, especially in this context of God's loving care. Jesus was not advocating waiting lazily for God's provision, but avoiding anxiety as we take responsibility for obtaining it.

6:27. This verse moves away from the specific example of food to the broader picture of anxiety in general, showing its utter futility. Jesus was saying, "If you try to take your basic provision into your own hands, you will find you do not have the power over life and death. Only God has this power, and He will sustain you as long as His plan intends."

6:28-30. Here we are given a more fully developed picture of the second illustration supporting Jesus' main point in verse 25. Verse 30 is a conditional statement, assuming the truth of the condition. So it could just as easily be translated, "Since that is how God clothes the grass of the field." The qualifying phrase, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, emphasizes the transience and worthlessness of the grass. If God cares so much for something of little value, He will certainly care even more for us who are of much greater value to Him. This passage is not only an exhortation to trust the Father, but it is also an affirmation of our great worth in His eyes.

The words you of little faith in 6:30 should be translated literally "little faith ones" (and is used elsewhere in the New Testament only in Matt. 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; 17:20; Luke 12:28). While it can be a confrontational term, it may also be endearing. In this context, Jesus' tone was not scolding, but coaxing and reasoning. He was asking, "Do you trust your Father or not?"—not with a slap in our face, but with an arm around our shoulder. Jesus was not belittling His disciples; He was encouraging them upward.

6:31-33. With these three verses, having illustrated and supported His theme, Jesus built His case. In verse 32, He made two more points about anxiety. First, it was downright pagan; anxiety was the attitude of those who were not a part of God's kingdom. Second, it was totally unnecessary to worry about what to eat or drink or wear, because your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Three times in verses 32 and 33, we find the phrase all these things. We might imagine Jesus using it somewhat disparagingly. This was not to belittle the importance of basic necessities, but to place them at the back of the mind of His disciples, far behind His kingdom and righteousness in importance. "All these things" are what pagans (and the Pharisees) scrambled after. "All these things" are thoroughly known by the Father. "All these things" will fall into place when we put God's kingdom and righteousness in its proper place and serve the kingdom's interests.

6:34. Jesus restated for the third time His command, Do not worry. This time He broadened it to include any possible anxieties we may have for tomorrow. As an expression of trust in his heavenly Father, the kingdom servant is to live in the present, trusting the Father for the grace to cover the needs of the present. "When tomorrow comes, the Father will provide the grace to cover its needs also," is the implied assurance.

22:39. Prayer was a way of life for Jesus. He had a special place in the Mount of Olives where He habitually went for prayer. The disciples followed, an ironic statement in light of Christ's original call to "follow Me" (5:8-11, 27-28; 9:23, 59, 61; 18:22-28). Now they followed, but only to fall asleep in Jesus' greatest moment of need and in the face of Satan's renewed attack on them. They followed, but not in the way a person takes up a cross and follows.

22:40. Jesus gave them a prayer assignment. It centered on their chief need. The renewed activities of Satan called them to pray to escape temptation as Jesus had escaped Satan's tempting. Judas and Peter were not the only ones Satan wanted. He wanted all of Christ's disciples and would tempt each of them. Only prayer and Scripture can successfully fight such evil power and overcome temptation.

22:41-42. Prayer time for Jesus. Every major decision called for special prayer time for Jesus (3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28-29; 11:2; 18:1). Jesus knew what lay ahead. The cup of the blood of the new covenant must be spilled. Yet He, as a human being, did not want to suffer. He did not want to die. He would have liked to have found another way to follow God's plan. Still, He submitted to the Father. The Father's will He would do, not His own. The Father's will He knew was best. The Father's will was what He always prayed for and did, even when the human side wanted something else.

22:43. Verses 43-44 are missing from many of the best Greek manuscripts and may reflect the interpretation by an early Christian scribe. Christ found immediate answer to His prayer, but in a somewhat unexpected way. Rather than tell Him what to do, God sent an angel to feed and encourage Him. The angel's presence reaffirmed what Jesus knew. He had to face the task God had placed before Him. He had to go to the cross. But He went with heavenly presence, heavenly strength, and heavenly nourishment. Angels played a significant role in Luke. Gabriel guided Zechariah, announcing John's birth (1:18-19). Gabriel also told Mary of Jesus' birth (1:30-38; cf. 2:21). Angels delivered Jesus' birth announcement to the shepherds (2:9-14). Angels thus prepared for the coming of Jesus and for the exodus of Jesus as He looked to the cross.

22:44. Prayer was not a small thing for Jesus. It was a time of anguish as He sought God's will for His life. Just like us, He faced a difficult decision and suffered emotional distress while He tried to make it. He became so emotionally involved that He perspired profusely. His perspiration became so heavy that it did not run in little rivulets like water. Rather, it dropped from His skin as if each drop of sweat were as heavy as a drop of blood.