

“FROM STRESS TO REST: MY FUTURE”
by Rom A. Pegram (5/17/20)

Good morning! And welcome to our new worship series called ‘Stress2Rest.’ How appropriate that we’re going to talk today about how God wants to move us from stress ... to rest! The reality is, folks, we all get stressed from time to time, don’t we? We all need God’s power in our life—that same power, I might add, that raised Jesus from the dead (Easter wasn’t that long ago)! Well, God offers us that same power today ... and we need it...

Folks, stress has been called ‘America’s #1 Disease!’ And we all deal with stress in our lives ... and the Bible has a lot to say about that. In fact, there’s a very famous passage of scripture where Jesus talked about how he’ll move us ... from stress to rest, when we trust him with our lives. So, let’s go there now **Matthew 11:28-29 (NLT)**...

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

So, look, if you’re feeling a bit stressed today, you can come to Jesus and he will give you rest. He’ll take you from a place of stress ... to a place of rest. And this passage gives us *a couple of things* that are really important...

First, I want to say this: The Bible never promises us a stress-free life. In fact, Jesus is very clear throughout scripture that life can be tiring. Life is going to wear you out ... and it’s going to stress you out from time to time. And, in fact, *you don’t want a stress-free life!* Did you know that? Because the only people with stress-free lives are in the cemetery; *I don’t know of anyone who actually wants that!* BUT (which means, please listen to this), *if you trust him with all your life, you can find rest in the midst of this life.* You can find PEACE in this life like you’ve never known before...

It’s not unchristian to be stressed out; did you know that? *No less of a Christian was the Apostle Paul when he found himself in a very stressful situation.* Let’s take a look at a particular circumstance Paul found himself in, where he’s arriving at a new missionary post (2 Corinthians 7:5): “When we arrived in Macedonia, there was no rest for us. We faced conflict from every direction, with battles on the outside and fear on the inside.”

‘Anyone ever been there before? You dread going to the office because there’s conflict in every direction. Or you dread going back home for the holidays, or other occasions, because so-and-so’s always there and they’re always in your face. I’m sure you can come up with more examples. We all feel that way sometimes. It’s where *an external circumstance takes a toll on us inside.* That’s what stress is! And Paul said there was fear inside, because of the uncertainty going on. (Maybe some of you are feeling that stress today, not knowing what the days ahead will hold.)

A poll was taken in some churches not too long ago ... and the #1 answer to ‘what stresses you out?’ was ... FEAR OF THE FUTURE. So, that’s where we’re going to start today. What is it about the future that stresses people out? It’s that it’s ... *unknown.* It’s uncertain. We don’t know what’s going to happen. That makes us unhappy and stresses us out sometimes. So, what do we do? How do we move from

Stress2Rest regarding our future? That's where we're going today. And I've got 4 steps I want to talk about today ... to take you from Stress2Rest, Jesus' way. Are you ready? I'm going to make this personal now. **WHEN / FEEL STRESSED ABOUT MY FUTURE, I...**

REMEMBER GOD'S FAITHFULNESS IN MY PAST. When you're looking forward into the future, and you feel stressed, the first thing you might need to do is ... *look back!* The truth is, the Bible says over and over that we're to remember the past...

The Old Testament records over 31 times where God says to his people ... 'Remember!' And if you recall, in the stories of the OT, whenever God did something great in the lives of the Israelites, they would build an altar—that altar serving as a remembrance of God's faithfulness. So, as their history moved on, any time they felt stressed about a particular situation they were going through, they had reminders. They'd just look to the altars (markers) they'd built, remember God's faithfulness of the past, and that lowered their stress for the future! As a matter of fact, King David dealt with the stresses of his life in this way (Psalm 42:5-6): "Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again— my Savior and ⁶ my God! Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember you— even from distant Mount Hermon, the source of the Jordan, from the land of Mount Mizar." David's on a bit of a rollercoaster here, isn't he? He's discouraged, then upbeat for moment, then discouraged again. But then he finally says, "I will remember...." In other words, as I look all over my kingdom, I can remember your faithfulness all the way up to this point in my life ... and I have no reason to stress about the future. So, it's good to have altars, isn't it? We need those reminders...

Toward the end of my time at Asbury College (University now), some remodeling was going on. At the back of the chapel building, they were adding on a lecture hall and some other rooms. So, now I'm confessing just a bit. Laying there near the current sidewalk that went around the back of the chapel ... was a pile of bricks. I took one. Did I steal it? No, I was building an altar (so I thought it was OK). To this very day, however, this brick sits on a shelf in my office, reminding me of God's faithfulness to Jane and I and our family during those years! (So, if they were one brick short of being able to finish up that addition, they know where their brick is...) Every time I glance at this brick, there are so many memories that come up, reminding me of how God has carried us through some tough, very uncertain, days in the past ... and will do it again!

So, what's on your shelf? What kind of altars are you building in your life— reminders of God's faithfulness—that will carry you through your stressful days? That's the first step to God's PEACE: Remember God's faithfulness. Next ...

EVALUATE THE SPECIFIC SOURCE OF MY STRESS. What exactly is it that's causing me to be stressed? You have to learn to evaluate the specific source of your stress...

Toward the end of Jesus' life—after a conversation with some of the religious leaders, John records this in John 2:23-25. "Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. ²⁴ But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew human nature. ²⁵ No one needed to tell him what mankind is really like."

If you don't know this about me, I AM AN ETERNAL OPTIMIST (most of the time). I always look for the very best in people—God's very best. Sometimes I find it ... and sometimes I don't. That's a reality I wasn't always able to accept. At one point, not too long before my heart issues surfaced, I was unbelievably stressed. Why didn't people—in the Church—act Christ-like? Couldn't they see how they were hurting one another (including their pastor)? I met regularly with my Lay Leader at that time—a principal at one of our local schools. And she finally told me to 'get a grip.' She said, "Rom, your whole problem is ... you've set the bar way too high regarding people—even those in the Church!" In other words, the very thing that was causing my stress was ... my expectations! Why didn't I think of that?

I had to go back and look up the scripture I just shared with you from John 2, where Jesus clearly said, "But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew human nature." My problem was I wouldn't accept that. And my expectations of people were driving me crazy! I couldn't even see myself moving into the future with those I was frustrated with ... all because I expected too much. It was killing me! Literally...

Before I go on, let me share with you about 2 different kinds of stress—good and bad... Did you know there's such thing as 'good stress'? Here it is: Eu-stress: Eu = good in Latin, so eu-stress would be ... *good stress*. Good stress is the stuff God allows in your life to help you grow.

To be able to move to Lomira, to pastor a church called Trinity ... has been good stress! Once I got over my unrealistic expectations of people in general, ministry has been a lot more enjoyable! And it has here at Trinity, too. What I've dealt with here has been ... good stress—all I've experienced helping me continue to grow in my faith, too. A good example from God's word is in Mark 6:30-31: "The apostles returned to Jesus from their ministry tour and told him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then Jesus said, 'Let's go off by ourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile.' He said this because there were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his apostles didn't even have time to eat." It wasn't that he was doing anything wrong; it was good stress—the kind that helps you (and those around you) to grow...

But here's the thing: If you don't have good stress in your life, you're always going to fall into ... *distress*! And that's what I'd call 'bad stress'. Whenever we choose to do something we know is against God's will, that's what we'll experience: distress (bad stress). Principle to remember: *If you have enough 'good stress' in your life, you can minimize the 'bad stress' (distress) in your life!* It's in Matthew 5:31-34; look it up... Next, here's how you deal with the stress of an unknown future (and I'll give these to you quickly)...

STICK TO WHAT YOU KNOW IS RIGHT. Here're some practical guidelines when under stress: Be very careful making big decisions in your life if you are under stress. Don't make big relationship decisions when you're under stress. Don't make big career decisions when you're under stress. Don't make big financial decisions when you're under stress.

You get the idea. But, along with sticking to what is right, you have to *know what's wrong!* whatever you do, DON'T DO THIS! Are you ready? *Don't run away from God!*

It's always amazes me how people do the exact opposite of what they know is right ... when they're under stress. A newly married couple, under stress, and they decide to stop going to church, so they can spend Sundays together *working on their relationship* ... but, eventually, that just leads to greater arguments. Another person gets a new project at work, where they can prove themselves, so instead of having their regular time with God in the morning they begin to skip their quiet time, get dressed and run out the door to work on their ... new project. They cut God out of their daily routine. Or another person ... overwhelmed with their finances or falling into a bad relationship ... and instead of spending time with their small group at church, they pull away from the very things that could help with their stress. And it's a vicious cycle...

So, don't run away from God ... whatever you do! While under stress, you should be running toward God; he's the only one that can get you through those times successfully. 1 Peter 3:12 reminds us of this: "The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right, and his ears are open to their prayers. But the Lord turns his face against those who do evil." Those who run toward God ... or those who run away... So, what do you need to focus on if you're under stress? Here it is (Phil. 4:8-9): "And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. ⁹ Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you." If you don't hear one more thing I say while I'm in Lomira—while I'm still walking the face of this earth, hear this: *Always run toward God!* That's the right thing to do... And, finally, I have to...

TRUST GOD COMPLETELY WITH MY FUTURE. You know, stress is really *an issue of ... trust*, isn't it?

Stress is like a warning light on your car. Stress tells you something is out of whack. It tells you that you have ... *misplaced trust*.

So, have any of you ever been to a meeting before where you don't know anyone? I don't know about you, but I always go with a bit of apprehension—especially if I don't really know those who are in charge of the meeting, and so forth. I've been to conferences like that, and it usually takes me a little while to feel comfortable—meaning it takes a little while for me to *trust* who's in charge of the meeting...

But if I go to a meeting that I've been to a number of times, and I know personally who's in charge of the meeting, I go with great comfort, excitement, and anticipation! There's quite a difference, isn't there? If you know who's in charge ... or if you don't?

So, look up Jeremiah 29:11 sometime. I've quoted it a lot. God has plans for you—plans for good! Or how about the words of writer of Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."

Look, do you need to trust God with some area of your life today? With your work life, or your financial life, or your relational life, or some other area I've not mentioned? Why not today? Just take that area and say: "God, I'm handing this over to you." And when you hand that area of stress over to God, God—in return—hands over his very best! And that includes God's gift of PEACE. Are you concerned about your future ... because of

the coronavirus pandemic? Because of the financial constraints the world is putting on you right now? Because of a difficult relationship you're dealing with right now? Why not give it to God today? Why not run toward God today? Remember God's faithfulness in your past. Pinpoint what's stressing you right now. Stick to what you know is right! Then, trust God—fully—with whatever's ahead, knowing that no one loves you more or more desires what's eternally best for your life!