

Topic	The Gospel And Emotionally Healthy Spirituality
Reference	
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Anthony Bourdian suicide was the most shocking. Why, he is the epitome of cool, he never looked stress, he is very calm. He is at the peak of self-actualization. What better job can you get then to eat and get paid for that. He has got a beautiful girlfriend, 11-year-old daughter that loves him, yes he may have had some history of alcoholism and drugs, but toxology report shows he has got no history of depression. Why did he take his life?

Right now in the United States suicide is the tenth highest reason for death. We live right now in a golden age of humanity where poverty is at the lowest level. Where human mortality is at the lowest level, people are living better, living older and yet suicides are going up.

4 in 10 Malaysians will suffer from some form of mental ill health in their lifetime. The Star Newspaper- Star 2, 15/04/18.

It is a struggle; it is a painful topic. So this morning we do really need to deal a bit with this and more so for us Asians, why because we don't talk about these things.

When you have hurt in the church, the world creeps in and the world offers you a substitute. When the church steps aside, the world comes in and offers a solution.

Mindful meditation comes from John Kabat-Zinn. He gets his mindfulness meditation from Zen Buddhism. So what starts of as a simple thing to help your monkey mind, to calm you down, eventually moves into this. So the church is ill-equipped for the many in our midst that suffer. So let me read you something for 9 marks of a healthy church.

The gospel produces the church; the foundation of the church is the gospel. The gospel promotes the church, it plants the church, but it protects the church because the gospel shepherds people.

One of the biggest struggle of this topic is that you do need to go into a bit of a science. God is a God of science, so there is no reason why we shouldn't talk about this.

Science of Anxiety:

Your body has a central nervous system. There is another thing called the autonomic nervous system. It is autonomous, it goes by itself. It has two sides, they call it a sympathetic arm and parasympathetic arm. Parasympathetic arm is your rest and digest. The sympathetic arm is the opposite, it is your fight or flight. What happens in

your fight or flight. The fight or flight is where you get stress and this is what happens. Now there is a reason for it. Can you imagine, if God didn't put this in you, you just had your lunch then a tiger comes in front of you, you just had lunch and you are going to be his lunch very soon. So the way God has wired the body is that it pushes these things up, your heartbeat goes up, your pupils dilate, you are prepared to either fight or run and it is got to do very heavily with a hormone. This hormone is called cortisol. What happens is that your adrenal gland pumps this out, it prepares you for action. The brain gets the body ready, but here what it does, because you are so focused on your problem, you can't sleep. Your blood pressure goes up, your immune system is depressed, you don't feel like eating. The whole idea is that once you see that lion and that lion goes away or you run away, it goes back to rest and digest, because the cortisol is not meant to be on all the time. Now here is our problem with modern society. You don't get lions and tigers in front of you, you get a message saying, 'your health is bad'. You get a fight with your wife, you get a lawyer's letter, you find out your kid is doing something else and the cortisol switch goes on and guess it, it never goes off.

Because what Cortisol does, it builds. So when you talk to a person, he appears very normal but that switch is still on, you know, why because he is worrying about it. He just stuck it at the back. Now as you get older, it is worse, because one of the thing that impedes it is growth hormone. Young people have it at our age we don't and that's why cortisol produces stress. It is why they call it the stress hormone. So here is a little bit of thing. Sometimes when we meet people who are very stressful, be gracious, its biological, not everything is spiritual. Cortisol effects so many things. They call it gut feeling, because your gut talks to your brain. They call it the gut-brain access. It is by-directional. So therefore before you do certain things, you get butterflies in your stomach. That's why when you are anxious, you don't feel like eating.

God is telling you something. Mark Driscoll calls it the best, he is from 9 Hills Church

Fear in the mind causes stress in the body.

It means if we tackle this, we had to tackle this holistically. Sometimes when you look at the word, 'salvation', the Greek word is Suza. It is not salvation, forgiveness of sins, it is to make you whole and God puts his spirit in you. That spirit effects your soul which is the will, which is the mind, which is the heart and from that it effects your body. It has to do that. Either that you compartmentalized your life and you are not obedient to Romans 12, because Romans 12 is to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, in Old Testament language, you do not take a lamb which is blemish and sick before God. You take a healthy lamb and it is our responsibility to do this.

- **What** is your *attitude* when you face stress?
- **How** does *praying* help you face stress?
- **Why** does your *everyday thinking* affect your stress?

Is stress bad for your health?

Science says that stress is good for your health. Stress is not bad for your health. There are two reasons for it; one is spiritual and then the other one is biological. Paul had one session that begins with a stressful fight between ___ and __, tells them to reconcile and then he begins this section and the verse before that is key. How do you know it? Here is another reason, because the two are tied by the word, the Lord is near. When you are very stressful you want to know that God is near you. So that's the key, rejoicing is the key.

There are two types of rejoicing. One is impulsive, it is a deterministic type of rejoicing.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

It is in your face kind of rejoicing. You got to get that true. It is the kind of rejoicing that says, you know what I am not going to get depressed, is fighting words. I am not going to let these circumstance make me a victim. I am going to rejoice and I say it again I am going to rejoice. Now do we find support for this in the Bible, tremendous. It is all our Hebrews, 1-Peter, it is all over the Old Testament.

Now let us define the characteristic of rejoice:

It is a will power kind of rejoicing. There are two characteristics of it, which is quite important. The first is gentle, now the Greek word is interesting here. The second is the Lord is near.

Rejoice, how do you define it.

Gentleness, it is a horizontal relational thing, it is how you and I relate, because you and I stress each other out, especially in church. The second is a vertical, get the vertical right, you get the horizontal right. Now the gentleness here, the Greek is found in 1-Corinthians, when Paul says, I came to you with a gentle spirit, it is shepherding language. It is a language of the good shepherd, excellent shepherd that knows the flock. The other way that gentleness comes is from James 3:17, it says

The wisdom that comes from God is first and foremost pure, considerate and is called gentle.

Meaning gentleness is considerate. So sometimes our stress level goes up, when you are in a fight with someone that stresses you and you are telling yourself God I glorify you by being a living sacrifice by being gentle, your cortisol will go down. It is a biological reason for this and I cannot do that if the Lord is not near me, because I have no impotence to do it. The moment I tie myself to the presence of God and Romans 10 tells us again, we are not being given to the spirit of fear but the spirit leads us to say, Abba father. Fear is not just the judgment of God, it is generic. So no need to be anxious, Abba father and then it goes out.

- 1:4- Paul **rejoices** because of the partnership of the gospel with the church.

- 1:18- Paul **rejoices** that Christ is preached, even though it's by those which selfish motives who want to stir up trouble for him.
- 2:2- Paul urges the church to make his **joy** complete by having less disunity among themselves.
- 2:17-18- Paul **rejoices** despite suffering for the gospel, and ask the church to likewise rejoice.
- 3:1- Paul tells the church to **rejoice** while watching out for false teachers.
- 4:1- Paul expresses his **joy** for the church while asking them to stand firm in the Lord.
- 4:10- Paul **rejoices** because of the concern renewed by the church for him.

None of the rejoicing has got to do with something he gets. Now we find this again in Hebrews 10:34, joyfully accepted the confiscation of property. 1 Peter 4:12 rejoice during suffering.

What is the key joy and you find in chapter 2, he takes joy and he says, I will tell you what is the joy that makes me complete.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

Paul is easily the most stressful person in history, but what we forget a call to discipleship is a call to stress. A call to discipleship is a call to joy. There is a science to this. Kelly McGonigal wrote a book, why stress is good for you and how to get good t it.

Her TED talk is the number one TED talk of all time. There are three studies in the talk, one is from Harvard and another one is from Wisconsin University, very reputable hospitals who do research. They took three groups of people, group A got lot of stress, group B also lot of stress, group C all sipping peanut colada at Bali Beach, no stress. Group A has got lot of stress; they think stress is bad. Group B got lot of stress, they think the stress builds resilience. Group C no stress.

This is what Kelly wrote,

People who experience a lot of stress, but did not view stress as harmful, were not more likely to die. In fact, they had the lowest risk of dying of anyone in the study, including people who had relatively little stress.

I think this is groundbreaking and very much in parallel to Philippians and she said something which I thought was wow, it looked like it came out of the book of Philippians,

When you choose to view your stress response as helpful, you create the biology of courage.

You can understand why Paul can face death, can face persecution, can face people defaming his name, can face all sorts of issues and his health is better. Stress is not for you. now you might think that this is all psychobabble, you think at this moment that we

are just talking about psychology, I will tell you this is a health psychologist, it is biological.

If I go and hug the person, that's the release of oxytocin. Oxytocin is released the most in church during praise and worship. It is also called the cuddle hormone. It is the hormone that is released when you are in the Abba Father mode. It is the hormone that's release in Philippians chapter 4 verses 3, the Lord is near, but what we don't realize is oxytocin is a stress hormone. So Philippians 3 and 4 is true. The Lord is near, oxytocin coming up, Philippians 4 stress is coming, why, because when you are under stress, your gland pushes these things out. All the science is showing you this.

Oxytocin is a relational hormone, that's why when you cuddle it releases it. So God has hardwired you that not only when cortisol comes out, he gave you something else to lower it. He gave you oxytocin. So when you cry out, 'Abba Father', the lord is near. When you rejoice, these things pump out and this thing makes you resilient.

If you pause and think deeply through this, it is very powerful. Because what the Bible is telling you, when you read again and again, rejoice in the midst of suffering, rejoice when your property is taking away. If you can do that, your health improves.

When the Lord is with you and you overcome your fear it gives you joy. You face your anxieties in a controlled environment.

Should we take a more stressful job?

Yes- I need the money. Unfortunately this means I can't be involved in church.

No- I will honor God to provide a less stressful job. I am already quite stressed at church work.

The answer is both answers are wrong. The first one puts God on the backburner, the second one means you cannot face discomfort. There are a quite a few people who come and work in church environments and NGOs because they cannot take the real world there, but if there is anything you learn about discipleship, you face your fears, why, because the Lord is with you. You cultivate a gentle spirit and God in his mercy will pump out so much oxytocin in you, your heart will be better, your digestion will be better, your mind will think better and generally he will supply all the means to help you through this and this is really to me groundbreaking.

So what is your attitude when you face stress? An attitude of courage and comfort and Godly rejoicing.

How does praying helping you face stress?

The prayer has three parts.

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The key here is your prayer life. do you pray with thanksgiving all the time. David says evening and morning, I cry out to all O Lord. When you see the word thanksgiving, it means by faith you have already appropriated that prayer. God has answered that prayer, you are thankful. Meaning, if you have the habit of only coming to God and really praying under stress, he will not answer that prayer, because it is a prayer of disobedience, but if prayer is so in your bloodstream, in your life, in every situation, small and big you pray, God will answer and if you accept that with Thanksgiving. Now here is another thing that reinforces that, thinking, because he separates prayer and petition. Petition is when you come to God and say, God I am sick, my son is sick, I have a lawsuit, God I am very worried that's the petition, but that's prayer, he separated it. Prayer is when you pray firstly by this, how should you always start your prayers. You should start with praise and adoration. You want to have peace, you praise God, peace on earth that's what we see in the Matthew text, but first the angels glorify God. Glorify God and then there is peace. You don't glorify God, no peace. If your prayer life is marked by glorifying God, praising God all the time, praise you God, peace comes. If your prayer life, everybody is stressed, that's the way the prayer is structured.

He says two things which are quite interesting. He says the peace of God which transcends all understanding, now what it means is simply this, the opposite of stress is not just peace, the opposite of stress in the bible is a peace which people don't understand. That's very important, because what we all want when we pray, if we are very honest with ourselves, is we want God to remove that problem, but if Paul can be a man that can rejoice when he is going to die, rejoice when people defame him, rejoice when there are false prophets, rejoice when there are fights, when the Hebrews can rejoice when their property is taken away. It means it is a prayer, so thankful to God that it says God that even though the waters envelope me, I will praise your name. That's why the world says, you are crazy, because it is the peace that despite your circumstances, you rise up and you do not do that overnight. You do that by two things, One, a regular practice of prayer. So how do you minimize your stress. Very simple, pray every day, all the time. Every time just pray and talk and as you pray, the Lord is near and one day when the bad days come, you are so ambute with God, he will give you that peace that surpasses all understanding.

The second point is, he used the word guard your hearts and mind. The Greek here is military guarding. Why guard your mind? The mind can imagine every scenario. The devil is whispering many things and making you more anxious and so God gives us the spirit to guard. How do you guard?

When you see the word in Christ Jesus, you guard it together, because all those verses would tell you, it is communal. The second way of getting rid of stress is intercessory prayer. Stress is spiritual warfare and prayer is your victory.

Why does your everyday thinking affect your stress?

8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

How it is connected to the earlier verse. Because of verse 9. After saying this, Paul says, lets mentor this. That means not just you thinking it, learn it from others.

Peace of God comes from the God of peace; it is all one big section. Stress management happens moment by moment, second by second, hour by hour, day by day what you are doing sitting there, right now is stress management.

There was a very famous book by a man called Aldous Huxley, called Brave New World. It is about the future of a certain kind and in this future everybody is on drugs. Not only you take drugs, drugs is encouraged to be taken. He says the drug is Christianity without tears. Meaning, I am going to give you all the euphoria of religion minus the responsibility of it. All this praise and worship and love and forgiveness and kindness, I am going to give it to you, all this pain and suffering and not doing sane, all those stuff that don't bring people to church, I am going to remove it, I am going to cut it all out. In this world, everything is allowed, it is a completely promiscuous society. Your body belongs to the other person, drugs are allowed, free sex is allowed, you can think anything you want, do anything you want and they will control it to make sure your health is managed.

To a lot of people that's paradise you know, it is actually health. He picked on something very-very profound and this is what he says, the perfect dictatorship will have the appearance of a democracy, but with basically be a prison without walls, in which the prisoners will not even dream of escaping. It will essentially be a system of slavery through consumption and entertainment, the slaves will love their servitudes.

You can almost hear Roman 7, the things I do not do I do and we live in this age. Because nowadays you open your computer, you can see anything you want, just a fingertip away, any website. You can go out there and buy anything you want, think anything you want. Let me tell you your number one stressor, we must know our stressors and what this is telling you is that,

If I am going to poison a person, I wrap it around candy, so that you don't know it is poison and I feed it to you every day, because you get use to it. Then I kill you so slowly. The bible has a simpler word for it, it is simply called bondage. The number one stressor we all have and some of you may even be doing it this morning and you are stressed right now because you don't realize it. The number one stressor is the number of time you look down instead of looking up to God.

You track in one day, the amount of time you spend on Facebook, Instagram, twitter, email, Whatsapp and downloading all those stupid videos people send you, what you

don't realize is that if every day you do that, that is actually junk. If every day you fill your mind with junk, you will break. Stress management is not something you do just before you get the stress, it is a day to day, moment to moment, second by second thing.

Who I mix with, what I see, what I hear, what I do every day, that affects my stress. So God in his goodness tells you,

The battle with stress in your life is going on between your ears. What you fill your mind with determines your level of stress.

Paul put it,

Whatever is true and sometimes speaking the truth is very difficult, because we like to believe lies. Sometimes when the truth comes out, it is destructive. Whatever is right is justice, it must be pure, lovely, admirable, excellent.

Every day I thank God for three things, and then I learn to hang around people that don't stress me. It is the simple little things you do that changes, but make a point to hang around people that edify you. it slowed me down, and I began to see things better and when I began to see things better, I began to see problems better and I then realized there was a verse in the Bible that said the same things. One of the very famous verses about stress is found in Matthew,

Do not worry

Consider the lilies of the field,

Meaning the moment I slow down and I began to take that literally and I looked at the lily, I see beauty, I see God's hands, I become calm, I think praiseworthy things and I am grounded. So when I go back to my problem, whatever that problem is, my mind is in the battle state to phase it.

There is so much in clinical psychology which fits the Bible. Pause, slowdown, switch off your handphone, don't fill your mind with rubbish, every day play some praise music, read your bible a bit more, thank somebody, cuddle your wife, encourage your kids and as you do that daily, more and more, the Lord becomes near, you will be gentler and you will find stress is easier to handle.

Why does your every day thinking effects your stress?

Because excellent praiseworthy thoughts builds up stress resilience. Dr Abraham Varghese is an utopian doctor. He became a novelist. He did a TED talk which went viral and he talk about the need for human connection and he is very into spending time with people, the need for relational talks and he talk about one case where somebody had AIDs and this guy was about to die,

And I wanted to read you this one closing passage about one patient. "I recall one patient who was at that point no more than a skeleton encased in shrinking skin, unable to speak, his mouth crusted with candida that was resistant to the usual medications. When he saw me on what turned out to be his last hours on this earth, his hands moved as if in slow motion. And as I wondered what he was up to, his stick fingers made their way up to his pajama shirt, fumbling with his buttons. I realized that he was wanting to expose his wicker-basket chest to me. It was an offering, an invitation. I did not decline.

And the message, which I didn't fully understand then, even as I delivered it, and which I understand better now is this: I will always, always, always be there. I will see you through this. I will never abandon you. I will be with you through the end."

I read this and it reminded me about the Bible. As you look at the great commission, the most famous verses, the mandate for the church, we always hear these verses but we miss out the second part of verse 20, surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. The Lord is near.