

The Commands of Jesus – *Dealing with Stress*

February 23, 2020

In an article entitled, *Lord, Help My Daily Unbelief*, writer, Bonnie McKernan gives us a tiny glimpse into her struggling world. She writes:

I once sat in a hospital room and watched my incoherent eight-year-old boy battle a life-threatening brain blood clot. I was oddly calm. I clung to the goodness of God and did my best to trust that he held my son in his hands — at that point it was essentially my only option. There were no more decisions to make, no actions I could take, and nothing I could control.

Now, not even a year later, I'm losing my temper with that now nine-year-old boy as he fights with his brother, or makes one of his little sisters cry. I'm weary from a hard move that's not finished. Worried about a house that needs to sell so we can join my husband in a different state at a new job. Stressed about finances and the future. Losing my cool over a leaking washing machine and a kitchen being taken over by ants. Concerned that my children are planning a coup d'état in response to my obvious weakness and lack of leadership.

I feel far from God. My quiet times, when they happen, seem rote and shallow. My prayers feel weak. My soul is at war.

Sound familiar to anyone here? Anyone else ever deal with stress in their life? Anyone ever feel distant from God when life's situations become overwhelming? If so, then you're in the right place this morning. Because we're going to be looking at three solutions that Jesus gives on how to deal with stress and worry.

The first solution involves a desperate father who's daughter is sick and quickly dying.

Luke 8:40-42 (NIV) Now when Jesus returned, a crowd welcomed him, for they were all expecting him. 41 Then a man named *Jairus, a synagogue leader*, came and fell at Jesus' feet, *pleading with him* to come to his house because his only daughter, a girl of about twelve, was dying. As Jesus was on his way, the crowds almost crushed him.

So, Jesus is going to go to this man's house per his frantic request. However, it's right here that we're introduced to another desperate individual – a woman who's own stress comes from a medical condition that has cost her all of her finances and made her ceremonially unclean, therefore people are keeping their distance from her. Her last hope is to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. As she does, she's instantly healed but Jesus calls her out of the crowd and tells her that *her faith has healed her*. Not sure how long this exchange took, but they are losing precious time to get to the 12 year old girl who's dying. Before they can even resume their trip this happens.

Luke 8:49-56 (NIV) While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. *"Your daughter is dead,"* he said. *"Don't bother the teacher anymore."*

50 Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, *"Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed."*

51 When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. 52 Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. *"Stop wailing,"* Jesus said. *"She is not dead but asleep."*

53 They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. 54 But he took her by the hand and said, *"My child, get up!"* 55 Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. 56 Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

We can only imagine the feelings that must have been going through this father's mind and heart. He could have been blaming the woman, who took up Jesus' time, for delaying Jesus enough that his daughter died. But whatever, he's feeling, as soon as the word comes that his daughter's died – Jesus *immediately* turns his attention to the broken hearted father and commands him to believe. Jesus jumps into action, realizing this father's grief.

And it ought to remind us of two important truths;

1. No situation is hopeless from God's perspective.
2. Our pain matters to God

The command in Jesus' words are directed to the broken hearted father in the words, "*Don't be afraid; just believe.*" This teaches us that **one of the main ways to battle our fears is to believe**, to trust in God's love and promises to His children. However, it's easy to get distracted by our own circumstances and have our faith falter.

Peter learned that lesson the hard way. When he was walking on the water toward Jesus he got scared by the wind and the waves and began sinking. He desperately cries out to Jesus and Jesus says to him, "*O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*" Peter was pretty bold and courageous as long as he kept his focus on Jesus, but once he focused on his pressing problems, he began to sink.

One of the great promises of God is:

Isaiah 26:3 (NIV) *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.*

Who doesn't want "*perfect peace*"? In order to stay in peace you need continually focus your attention and trust in God. What exactly was Jesus asking this broken hearted father to believe? There are at least 2 key things for him and us to believe in within any situation.

- That God cares about him and his daughter and
- that God has the power to make a difference.

How many of you believe those two things: that God cares about you and that God can make a difference in your situation of life? The truth is that fear creeps into our lives when we begin to focus more on our problems than on God. Or when we begin to believe that God is not going to do anything about our problems.

God may not always fix your problems the way you'd hope He would. Because sometimes He needs to change **us** more than He needs to change our **problems**. Often, God uses our problems to make us more like Jesus.

The Apostle Paul penned this promise of God that's important the hang on to in the midst of our problems. *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:19 (NIV) But the rub comes when what we think is our greatest need in the midst of a crisis isn't actually our biggest need.

Jesus' second solution on how to deal with stress focuses specifically on the issue of "**worry**". So, if you never struggle with worry then you don't need to listen to this part of the sermon. But I'm guessing none of us have perfected living worry free. Jesus' teaching concerning worry occurs in a fairly well known section of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus says,

Matthew 6:25 (NIV) *"Therefore I tell you, **do not worry** about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes?"*

Jesus begins with "*Therefore*" because this section is an extension of his previous discussion about us and our money and possessions. His concluding statement to that section was "*You cannot serve both God and money.*" For most of us money is often the source of our biggest worries. And even if you don't have much of it, acquiring enough to live on can become an obsession and hence an idol. So, Jesus tells us not to worry about money or other issues in our lives. Well, that's not very helpful advice – because the bills are real and simply not worrying about them doesn't make them go away. But as we'll see shortly, Jesus wants to give us a more productive way to deal with stress than just worry about it.

The word Jesus uses for "**worry**" is fascinating. **It means to be divided into various parts instead of being a whole.** And isn't that what we feel like when worry. We feel **divided** and **disjointed**. We certainly don't feel whole. We're not living the way God created us to live. So, what's the solution? Jesus points out both the **birds of the air** and the **lilies of the field** as examples of how God takes care of us children. And if He takes care of them, then why wouldn't He take care of His children. Jesus' solution is expressed in verse **33 But **seek** first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.** Now, "**seek**" is not just a helpful suggestion but it's a command by Jesus. What does that mean to "*seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.*"

Jesus taught us to pray, “*Thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” You and I as His children are his ambassadors on this planet. And what we are to pray and desire and work for is for God’s kingdom, his reign and rule, to come in full measure here. And that begins first with you and I living as servants of our King. We are called and equipped to bring the power and influence and characteristics of the King into our own parts of the world. We ought to pray against Satan and his power and influence wherever we go. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil – and we are called and empowered to continue on that mission. We need to recapture this warfare mentality and not live content to let Satan have his way in this world. Jesus said that his kingdom should be attacking and knocking down the gates of hell on an ongoing basis. We certainly saw that happen when Jesus was here on earth and we continue to see that around the world today. People are being healed physically in miraculous ways and relationships are being restored and people are being set free from various chains of addiction. We ought to wake up every morning with a warrior mentality, fully believing that you are an ambassador of God’s kingdom and you’re going out into the world to reclaim valuable property that rightly belongs to God. Through the power of God living inside of you, you’re determined to introduce people to a God who loves them and died on the cross for their sins. People need to know that they can be restored back into that relationship. That’s what **righteousness** is all about. We ought to be thanking God every single day that we have a right relationship with Him because of Jesus. And that ought to create a hunger and thirst for your friends and co-workers and neighbors to come to know Jesus. If that becomes the driving force behind your daily agenda, I guarantee that your problems will take on a whole new perspective because you’re living in the power and purpose of Jesus. You have the power and the privilege to live up to the level of life that Jesus has called you to. Living life like this brings us to the level of “more than conquerors” that Paul describes in Romans 8. In that context Paul is talking about some pretty powerful problems he’s encountered in his life and continues to encounter every day. He says that every day he faces the possibility of being killed by people that don’t like him proclaiming Christ. But he says, that all Christians are “*more than conquerors through him who loved us.*” And the reason that we’re **more than conquerors** is because nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ!!

And if God loved you enough to send his son to die on a cross for your sins – do you think He’s just going to forget about you? Do you think He’s not going to enable you to live a victorious life.

God has promised to give us everything we need to accomplish everything He’s called us to do. Jesus is calling us to have a bigger more compelling vision for our everyday existence, which should displace worry.

The third solution of how to deal with stress comes through Jesus’ commands to his disciples in the Upper Room as he prepared to leave them to die on the cross. He said to them:

John 14:1-3 (NIV) “*Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*”

The command is to not let your heart be troubled. They may not have been troubled quite yet, but in a few short hours they certainly would be. Their worlds would be turned upside down when Jesus was arrested, severely beaten and hung on a cross to die. Their meaningful lives instantly became terrifying lives. Lives filled with broken dreams and hearts. What they’d come to believe about Jesus seemed to be all wrong and there was no explanation. Perhaps that’s also a good description of your life at times as well. Life hasn’t turned out the way you thought it would. What looked like such a promising future seems like a distant dream now.

If someone came to me and poured out their heart over the many troubles in their lives and my expert advice was simply, “*I know things are tough but don’t let your heart be troubled.*” I doubt they’d leave feeling very helped. But Jesus adds more. He shares with them what to focus on when He’s no longer with them. He focuses their attention on an amazing future. That one day we will be able to join Jesus and the Father in heaven, in a place carefully prepared for us. This won’t make your problems go away, but it gives you a higher sense of purpose for living in the midst of your problems. It’s easy to get wrapped up in your problems so much that you lose a sense of any future. Jesus is giving them and us a

way to look beyond our present circumstances. There will be a day when some of you will no longer be blind or confined to a wheelchair or betrayed by trusted friends or spouses. You will no longer have any financial problems or walk with pain or shortness of breath. You will no longer have to worry about what others think of you or what God thinks of you. Instead you'll be living with God in the midst of all of His glory and power. You'll be living in a constant state of awe. Won't it be amazing to live in a constant state of awe? How would that change your perspective on each individual day?

Jesus is inviting each of us to live every day that way on this side of heaven. You don't have to live in constant worry but by focusing on God and His plan for your life right now and your future with Him in heaven, it can change our daily lives into a constant state of awe and purpose.

I really enjoy Randy Alcorn's perspective on living this life in light of eternity. And he shares the following thoughts: *When we view today in light of the long tomorrow, the little choices become tremendously important. Whether I read my Bible today, pray, go to church, trust Christ through suffering, share my faith, and give my money—actions graciously empowered not by my flesh but by His Spirit—is of eternal consequence, not only for other souls, but for mine.*

After all, what will last forever? God. God's Word. People. Spending time in God's Word and investing in people will pay off in eternity and bring me happiness and perspective now. This life need not be wasted. In small and often unnoticed acts of service to Christ, we can invest this life in eternity, where today's faithfulness will forever pay rich dividends.

Not only will an eternal perspective change our actions, it will also change our attitudes. Living with eternity in mind will infuse us with a joy and purpose that can sustain us in daily life, even as we face hard things. Recognizing our future life on a resurrected Earth can help empower us to stick with a difficult marriage, to persevere in the hard task of caring for an ailing parent or child, or to stay with a demanding job. Moses stayed faithful to God because "he was looking ahead to his reward" ([Hebrews 11:26](#)).

Summary:

1. **Don't be afraid** – just believe God
2. **Don't worry** – but live in the power and purpose of God's kingdom, trusting God to meet your daily needs.
3. **Don't be troubled** – but let your eternal destination change your present motivation for living.

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- No situation is _____ from God's perspective
 - Our _____ matters to God
- One of the main ways to battle our fears is to _____
- Often God uses our _____ to make us more like Jesus.

2. **Do not** _____ (**Mt. 6:24**) **but seek** _____ (vs. 33)
- Worry means: _____
- What does it mean to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness?

3. **Do not let your hearts be** _____ (John 14:1)
- How do you not let your heart be troubled?
- What's troubling your heart right now? Why?

Summary:

1. **Don't be** _____ – just believe God
2. **Don't** _____ – but live in the _____ and _____ of God's kingdom, trusting God to meet your daily needs.
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Application:

What situations in your life cause you the most stress right now?

Which of Jesus' principles can you apply to your situation and how?

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