

4 Steps to Managing Holiday Stress

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Although the holiday season is one of the happiest seasons of the year, it can still be stressful—particularly for those of us in ministry. Not only do we have our regular weekly stresses, such as preparing sermons, counseling people in need, and leading our staff and volunteers, many of us are not able to gather with family and friends due to the pandemic.

But I don't want you to just survive this season. I want it to be a joyous time for you—and a fruitful time for your ministry. In Philippians 4:4-8, Paul gives us four simple yet profound statements about how to manage stress during this season.

Worry about nothing.

“Never worry about anything. But in every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests while giving thanks” (Philippians 4:6 GW).

Worry has tempted many of us this year. It's a killjoy, and it adds unnecessary stress to our lives. We worry about getting sick. We worry about making someone else sick. We worry about how our churches will respond to the unique challenges that the pandemic brings.

But worry, even during the holiday season of 2020, isn't inevitable. It is something we learn. If it is learned, it can also be unlearned. Jesus tells us how in Matthew 6:34: *“So don't ever worry about tomorrow. After all, tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own” (GW).*

Insight: In order to relieve stress, live one day at a time.

Pray about everything.

“In every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests” (Philippians 4:6 GW). Whenever God tells you to eliminate something in your life, he always has something better in store. He always replaces a negative with a positive. In this case, he wants you to replace worry with prayer.

When you stop worrying, you'll create more space in your life that can be filled with prayer. The time you once spent worrying will now be spent praying, and you'll have less stress in your life.

God wants you to pray about more than just your ministry. He wants you to pray for all areas of your life, including the areas that are stressing you out. Philippians 4:6 says we're to pray *“in all things.”*

The Phillips translation of Philippians 4:6 says, *“Tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer.”* If it's big enough to worry about, it's big enough to pray about. Many

pastors feel like they have no one to talk to. While it's important to have someone you feel comfortable sharing your problems with, you can be rest assured you can tell God anything.

Insight: *There is no problem that is too big for God's power or too small for God's concern.*

Thank God for all things.

"In every situation let God know what you need in prayers and requests while giving thanks" (Philippians 4:6 GW). The attitude of gratitude is the healthiest human emotion. It actually increases your immunities. Ungrateful people also tend to be unhappy people. Nothing ever satisfies them. If you're depressed, make a list of 50 things you can be grateful for. When you're grateful, it gets the focus off your problems and puts the focus onto the many blessings in your life.

First Thessalonians 5:18 says, *"Whatever happens, give thanks, because it is God's will in Christ Jesus that you do this"* (GW). God's will for your life is to constantly give thanks—for the good days and bad days, the ministry highlights and the struggles.

Insight: *There is always something to be grateful for.*

Think about the right things.

"Finally, brothers and sisters, keep your thoughts on whatever is right or deserves praise: things that are true, honorable, fair, pure, acceptable, or commendable" (Philippians 4:8 GW). You'll need to change how you think to reduce stress. The stress is inside of you, not outside of you. Your mind is a special gift from God. It's capable of storing more than 100 trillion thoughts. What you think about impacts your entire life. And God gave you the freedom to choose what you think about.

God wants you to use your brain's power to focus on *"whatever is right or deserves praise."* Yet many people, even Christians, are totally indiscriminate about what they allow to enter their minds. They let all kinds of negative books, movies, music, and television shows into their minds. Then they wonder why they are depressed. Your thoughts affect how you feel, and your feelings affect your actions. So keep your mind on the right things.

Insight: *Whatever I think about is what I am becoming.*

Philippians 4:7 says, "Then God's peace, which goes beyond anything we can imagine, will guard your thoughts and emotions through Christ Jesus" (GW). God stands ready and able to give you peace that goes beyond anything you can imagine—even in the middle of one of the busiest seasons of the year, in the strangest year anyone can remember.

This is God's promise.