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Stress Busters: God's Strategy For Busting Stress
"Stressed Out Over The Future"
(Part 1)

Intro: Does it stress you out thinking about the future? When it comes to the future, there are plenty of things to be stressed out about! (Share – upcoming elections / Economy / Recession / Gas prices / Terrorism / Who will win the Super Bowl?)

Statistically, we are a bunch of stressed out people. (Share stress statistics)

Matt. 6:34 "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." (NLT) Easier said than done.

Prov. 12:25 "Anxiety in the heart of a man weighs it down..." (NASB) This is how many people feel. You may feel like this today? Weighed down!

- Is my future just going to be determined by random events and circumstances that I have no control over? How do I not stress out thinking about the future when I can't predict what's going to happen?
- There are some truths that God wants us to take hold of that will lessen our stress about the future. God doesn't want us living with a sense of dread hanging over our lives. He wants us living with a sense of peace about the future. How is that possible?
- Explain series on stress. (Today, 3 truths about dealing with stress about the future.)

I. Believe God Has A Plan For Your Future

A. God's future plan for your life is personal

Jer. 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you", says the Lord. "They are plans for good not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." (NLT)

1. How can I have any peace about the future if I think I am a victim to random circumstances and there is no larger plan? You want to talk about hopelessness and stress! Is life all about fate and chance?
2. God says that He has good plans for your life. God says that His plans for you are to give you a future and a hope! It's not about random circumstances...it's not all about fate / chance / OR your own ability.
3. God's plan for your life is personal. It's tailor made for you. It fits your personality / it fulfills your hopes and desires / it's better than anything you can come up with / AND this life can't take it from you!

4. God's personal plan for your life doesn't hinge on what the economy does / political events / other people / or any other external situation or circumstance. God's future plans for your life are not impacted by what happens here. They are secure, waiting for you to experience them.
5. God knows that as we anticipate the future, we will either look at it with dread and fear or with anticipation and hope. God wants you to look at the future with some hope in what He has in store for you in this life.
6. Believing and anticipating God's future plans for you is a lot like looking forward to a vacation. (Explain how looking forward to something in the future helps with the stress of today) Future hope is a stress reducer!

Ps. 119:143 "As pressure and stress bear down on me, I find joy in Your word."
 (NLT) WHY? Because God's word reminds me what is true! God's word reminds me that God still has a plan even in the midst of circumstances. HOPE!

B. God's future plan for your life is eternal

- This is the end of the Bible – end of the story – world history.

Rev. 21:1, 3-4 "And I saw a new heaven and new earth...I heard a loud shout from the throne saying, 'Look, the home of God is now among His people! He will live with them and they will be His people. God Himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever.'"
 (NLT)

1. As we live in the midst of this stress filled / imperfect / painful / unpredictable world, I need to remember the end of the story. I need to remember that God's plan for me is more than just the here and now...it's eternal. He has an eternal plan. There's an ultimate destination.
 2. All the events of history are moving towards God's eternal conclusion that I can be a part of! How does this relieve stress as I think about the future? It's like knowing the final score of a game before it's over.
 3. Example: It's like watching a tapped game where you already know the score—explain) 1977 – Portland Trail Blazers won the NBA championship. I remember the stress. Since then, I have watched that game ESPN – A few years ago they showed it locally. No stress! WHY? When you know what the final score will be, there's a lot less stress.
 4. When it comes to the future, God wants us to know what the final score will be. WE WIN! You get to be part of the winning team! It may feel like we're behind by 20 in the 4th quarter...BUT, we win! Stop stressing. I'm going to fix this world eternally and you can be a part of it. Transform it!
- Believing in God's plan produces hope about the future and hope lessens stress.

II. Believe God Has Provision Waiting In Your Future

- Part of our stress regarding the future is the uncertainty of how we're going to make it in the future. What if this happens...what if that happens....?
- This is the fear that AFLAC commercials go after (explain) What if you're injured or sick and can't work?
- God wants us to know that His provision / His help is waiting for us in the future therefore, we don't have to stress about all the "what ifs"... He'll be there!

A. God's provision is not affected by future events

Matt. 6:30 "And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't He more surely care for you? You have so little faith!" (NLT) Why do we doubt that God cares about us?

Is. 41:10 "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am the Lord your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with My victorious right hand." (NLT) Don't be dismayed...stressed out!

1. God wants us to live a life of confidence anticipating the future, knowing that His provision / His help will be there when we get there regardless what happens. (Recession / gas prices / political / world events / loss your job / None of these things effect God's ability to help us.
2. We experience less stress when we believe and anticipate God's help in the future rather than the fear that comes from "What if-in" ourselves to death about the future.
3. God's future provision is not like Social Security. Honestly, I'm not holding out a lot of hope that it's going to be there when I get there. WHY? Because so many factors can influence this. Therefore, I'm supporting many of you!
4. God's future provision is assured. **Remember** when you were a kid living at home? The reason a child can live stress free is they don't worry about provision. You don't worry that mom and dad won't provide for you next year. Their provision isn't tied to circumstances. They will provide regardless.
5. Yet, this is how God wants us to live. This is what God wants us to count on. His help will be there for us regardless what happens!

- Some of you may say, "Well looking forward to all this in the future is fine and good. What about God's help today? I'm stressed now!"

B. God's provision is something He wants you to experience now

Phil. 4:19 "And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from His glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus." (NLT)

God wants you to experience this!

1. Until you actually experience God's provision in your life it will be pretty tough trusting that He will be there in the future. Unless you experience Him in the current, it's hard to experience less stress about your future.
2. I don't feel like God's helping me now. Where is He?

- Difficult to experience something we don't believe in. Some of you just don't believe in God's provision. You're convinced He will not help you. You've never seen it, so it's not real!
- Difficult to experience something we don't want: Some of you don't really want God's help. You'd rather figure life out yourself. You'd rather trust in your self-reliance. Your pride is in the way.
- Difficult to experience someone we don't trust: Some of you feel let down by God / disappointed by Him and don't trust Him. You've asked Him to help you in the past and you feel ignored by Him.
- Difficult experiencing something for the first time: Some of you want God's help but just don't know how to go about getting it.

Illustrate: I remember when I first tried steelhead fishing. How many hours I spent fishing before I finally caught my first Steelhead. "Oh, that's how it works!" Fishing light bulb moment.

Some of you need to NOT Quit because you're about to experience a spiritual light-bulb moment. Don't quit reaching out to God. You may be one cast away from a connection.

3. The truth from God's word is simply this. God wants you to experience His resources now so you can have peace as you anticipate them in the future. God has already decided to help us. We are the ones who get in the way.

There is a decision we all need to make so that God's provision will be a reality.

III. Choose God's Priority To Experience Your Future

Matt. 6:33-34 "He will give you all you need from day to day if you live for Him and make the Kingdom of God your primary concern. So, don't worry about tomorrow..." (NLT)

- The most important word in this passage is the word "IF"! There is a condition attached to experiencing God's help. There's a condition we must live to in order to have peace and hope regarding God's provision in the future.
 - A. God's provision is experienced when we embrace His priorities.
 1. It just amazes me how many people want God's help / expect God's help / yet give very little concern for what He wants in their life. Then, they blame God for not coming through.
 2. Matt. 6 tells us that God will give us everything we need from day to day (there's the peace), but we have to decide to live for Him. If we decide to live for ourselves, then we have to provide for ourselves from day to day (there's the stress.) 2 choices – 2 results
 3. If you are living for yourself and your primary concern is with your own kingdom, then you are probably pretty stressed out regarding the future.

WHY? Because you are completely responsible for what happens. It's all on your shoulders. The future can look pretty scary.

4. BUT, if you're living for God and your primary concern is His Kingdom, then you will not be overly stressed out about the future. WHY? Because the future is His problem. He will make sure His plan and His provision will be there regardless what happens.

Which way would you rather live? I'd rather live God's way!

B. God's priorities are about choosing relationship not religious duty

1. God's Kingdom is a relational Kingdom. Living for Him is a relational command not one about religious duty. When we finally realize that it is relationship that God wants from us not religious activity, our lives are opened to His resources. (spiritual light bulb moment)
2. Some of you are still thinking...Great, I have to earn His help by doing enough good deeds? Absolutely NOT! You and I could never be that good. God's help is simply part of the deal of being close to Him relationally.
3. The peace that He offers comes through a relationship with Him.

John 14:27 "I am leaving you with a gift – peace of mind and heart. (you don't earn a gift!)And the peace I give isn't like the peace the world gives (circumstantial). So, don't be troubled or afraid." (NLT)

*John 16:33 "I have told you all this so that you may have peace **in Me...**"*

(NLT) Peace is found in relationship with Jesus. The only way to bust out of our stress over the future is IN JESUS!

** My daughters experience my provision and help because they are in relationship with their father who loves them. (Dad can I have \$20) Your kids do not experience my provision.

WHY? I am not in relationship with your kids. Everything that God promises in His word is experienced through relationship with Him NOT trying to earn it.

4. Who wouldn't want to trade their stress for peace? This is the offer? The peace that Jesus refers to is the peace that is only found IN Him.
5. Some of you may think that Jesus doesn't want a relationship with you. That's not true! He has already decided that having a relationship with you is His greatest priority. WHY? Because He died for you to make it possible.
6. The cross was a relational event NOT a tragedy. Jesus' death on the cross removed the barrier of sin that kept us from God and His resources. Now the barrier of sin is removed and forgiveness is offered, we have a choice. We can choose relationship with God or not. We can enter into relationship with God through Jesus, or live for ourselves. We can live stressed out or find peace in Him.

The future is always going to be uncertain, but experiencing God in your future can be certain and be the greatest source of peace we can have in a stressed out world. Will you make a choice this morning to find your peace IN HIM...in relationship? Only in relationship will God's plan and His provision be realized in your life. It's only in relationship can we experience peace rather than stress about the future.