

Sermon Notes

“Living a Juggling Act?” – encouragement from 2 Corinthians
Text: 2 Corinthians 7:5

(All references from 2 Corinthians)

October 14, 2007

A. Introduction – I have stress: pressure and turmoil

- at work:
- at school:
- at home:
- at church:

1. I find that these affect me by:

- I can relate to Paul’s question in 2:16 because:

B. Paul dealt with stress by strengthening _____

1. 1:15 – what had his intention been?

2. 1:23 – why had this not happened?

3. of what does Paul assure the Corinthians ...

a. ... in 1:24?

b. ... in 2:17?

4. from Paul’s example I need to learn:

C. Paul dealt with stress by overcoming _____

1. 2:12-14 – Paul felt this because:

2. In response to it Paul:

3. 8:1-5 – as a result of doing this, the Macedonians:

4. 7:6-7 – He also overcame by being _____ because he knew:

5. from Paul’s example I need to learn:

D. Paul dealt with stress by depending _____

1. 3:4-6 – Paul could do this because he recognized that God:

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.” (Romans 8:28 NAS)

2. 12:7 – to keep Paul from pride he had a:

3. 12:8-9 – as a result of this he learned that:

4. from Paul’s example I need to learn:

E. Paul dealt with stress by recognizing _____

1. 5:17, 20: a Christian has:

2. 5:9-11: a Christian is:

3. 4:14-18: a Christian expects:

4. from Paul’s example I need to learn:

F. Conclusion – the underlying way that I need to deal with my stress is:

A. Introduction

1. Are you living a juggling act?

- a. the host of a TV program stood between two jugglers who were hurling Indian clubs past his head – what a picture of pressure and turmoil – and a pending headache!
- b. things spinning by you on all sides – in business, at school, at home, in the church – do you feel that you are living as part of a juggling act? Are you under stress?

2. stress – pressure and turmoil – is no stranger to most of us

a. in business

(A) globalization:

- (1) we are no longer competing with the business down the street or in the next town – but with one on the other side of the world
- (2) there are incessant demands on us for increased productivity

(B) business practices

- (1) ‘just in time’ methodology so that if you work on the supply side you never know when you will be called upon with sudden, insatiable demands
- (2) in the retail trade, businesses are open 7 days a week and in some cases 24 / 7

b. in school

(A) I really cannot recall there being much in the way of homework until about half-way through high school — there may have been homework, but I don’t remember it affecting me (until I had to repeat grade 12 history!)

(B) but now, as well, there are all sorts of extracurricular activities and demands, including community service; and these start to appear in the lower grades – I am waiting to hear about kindergarteners coming home saying ‘I have to get caught up on cutting and pasting’!

c. in the home

(A) it isn’t simply keeping up with the Joneses, but parents feel they are letting their children down if they aren’t letting them participate in all sorts of activities – which means driving them to and fro at all hours

(B) practical economics often mean that both parents need to work – resulting in difficulties and tight schedules

d. in the church

(A) “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.” (Matthew 9:37 NAS)

(B) there are opportunities we know we should be taking

- (1) for service and outreach
 - (2) for spiritual growth in prayer and Bible study
 - (C) yet we find ourselves so constrained by time and by the limits of our strength and energy
 - e. so, on one hand, we find ourselves under pressure
 - (A) beset by employers, friends, families, pastors
 - (B) all with demands on our limited time and energy
 - (C) nearly all of these demands eminently worthwhile
 - f. and, on the other hand, filled with inner turmoil
 - (A) questioning ourselves ...
 - (1) am I doing the right thing?
 - (2) did I say the wrong thing?
 - (3) what will they think of me?
 - (B) we find our own priorities in opposition one to another
 - (C) we are burdened by responsibilities and duties
 - (D) we are left feeling inadequate and insufficient
 - g. so we feel like throwing up our hands and asking, 'How in the world can I be expected to be look after all this?'
3. such pressure and turmoil were no stranger to Paul
- a. our Scripture reading today, 2 Corinthians 4:7-12
 - b. is but one of many examples in a letter where repeatedly Paul opens his heart to his readers
 - c. telling of the pressure and turmoil afflicting him daily
 - d. today's text, 2 Corinthians 7:5, is a key verse in this letter
 - e. "For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within." (2 Corinthians 7:5 NAS)
 - f. ... afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within ... does that not describe the state in which we often find ourselves?
 - g. so that at one point in this letter, Paul demands, '... who is adequate for these things?' (2 Corinthians 2:16b NAS)
 - h. and that is our question, too.
4. so how did Paul deal with this pressure and turmoil?
- a. that we might appropriate his solution as our own

- b. by way of background, let me summarize
 - (A) Paul had written the first letter to the Corinthian church to deal with immorality and abuses there
 - (B) Paul followed up with perhaps another letter, now lost, and then by sending Titus to find out if the members of that church had corrected themselves
 - (C) Now, Titus has returned bearing news and he writes this letter, 'Second Corinthians' in gentleness and love to bring reconciliation between them and him
 - (D) so this had been a time of pressure and turmoil for him
- c. today we will pick out highlights from this letter – keep your Bibles open so you can turn to them – highlighting four ways Paul dealt with this stress; he did so ...
 - (A) ... by strengthening personal relationships
 - (B) ... by overcoming disappointment
 - (C) ... by depending on God's strength
 - (D) ... by recognizing eternal realities

B. Paul dealt with stress by strengthening personal relationships

1. in the midst of pressure and turmoil these can suffer

- a. in many ways, this letter is to ensure that didn't happen
- b. Paul explains his failure to come to Corinth: chapter I
- c. 1:15 ¹⁵ "In this confidence I intended at first to come to you, so that you might twice receive a blessing; ¹⁶ that is, to pass your way into Macedonia, and again from Macedonia to come to you, and by you to be helped on my journey to Judea." (NAS) – he had fully intended to do so
- d. the ensuing verses assure them that it was not because he had been frivolous in this intention; but rather
- e. 1:23 "But I call God as witness to my soul, that to spare you I did not come again to Corinth." (NAS)
- f. Paul recognized that for personal relationships to thrive,
 - (A) firstly, in today's vernacular, sometimes the other person needs some space
 - (B) secondly, you need to communicate clearly and kindly the reason for doing so

2. on this same theme, Paul made something else clear to them

- a. 1:24 "Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm." (NAS)
- b. 2:17 "For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."

(NAS)

- c. Paul assures them of the integrity of his motivations – not to lord it over or to benefit from them, but to care for them
- d. the U.S. supreme court has declared that religious beliefs are protected under the first amendment only when they are convictions and not just preferences. If under certain circumstances it can be changed, a belief is a preference: if pressure of peers, family, litigation, jail or death change your belief, it's only a preference. A conviction is a belief that is self-determined, non-negotiable, and consistent with a person's manner of life. ^{-(2)}} I am ambivalent, of two minds, on the matter of public funding of faith based schools. On the one hand, there is the matter of equity; on the other, if there is funding there will also be the exercise of regulation. Moreover, by removing faith's cost, one's belief may be reduced from conviction to mere preference.

3. in the midst of pressure and turmoil, we can strengthen our personal relationships by not pressuring others and by keeping the lines of communication open.

C. Paul dealt with stress by overcoming disappointment

1. disappointment is one of the deadly D's that sap our energy

- a. some of the others are discouragement, disillusionment, depression, discontentment, despondence ^{-(3)}}.
- b. which we find Christian encountering in John Bunyan's allegory, "Pilgrim's Progress"
- c. first: from chapter 2, Paul had felt disappointed: look at verse 13a: "I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; ..." (NAS) – he had expected to have Titus meet him there and bring information on the Corinthian church
- d. how did he deal with this? ... let's read further, starting at verse 12: "¹² Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, ¹³ I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I went on to Macedonia. ¹⁴ But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place." (2:12-14; NAS)

2. Paul dealt with this disappointment by action

- a. not by sitting about brooding about it
- b. but led by Christ, engaged in physical and spiritual action
- c. and continuing on to Macedonia, found their personal support as he reports in 8: 1ff, "¹ Now, brethren, we wish to make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia,

² that in a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality. ³ ... *they gave* of their own accord, ⁴ begging us with much urging for the favour of participation in the support of the saints, ⁵ and *this*, not as we had expected, but they first gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God." (8: 1-5 NAS)

d. and going into action, being disappointed on one hand, found his expectations exceeded on the other

3. Paul dealt with this disappointment by patience

a. Paul knew God's comfort would come, for he knew God

b. so he could wait patiently, and was rewarded

c. saying in 7:6, "⁶ But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus;" (NAS) and continues, "⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more." (NAS)

4. in the midst of pressure and turmoil, we can deal with the resulting disappointments as Paul did, by following God in our actions and waiting patiently for His comfort

D. Paul dealt with stress by depending on God's strength

1. in His sovereign appointments; in chapter 3:

a. "⁴ Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, ⁶ who also made us adequate *as servants of a new covenant*, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." (NAS)

b. Paul knew that he was where he was because God was in charge of his life, in charge of the church, ... of all things

c. Romans 8:28 is not just nice sounding words that look nice on a plaque on the wall, but a fundamental spiritual truth which needs to be engraved on every believer's heart

d. in the midst of pressure and turmoil, all believers should have the assurance that they are where they are because the sovereign God is in charge, that He is adequate for our every need in our every circumstance

2. Christ's power within as perfected in our weakness
 - a. in chapter 12, Paul tells us he was beset with an affliction, 'a thorn in the flesh' – it seems most likely a problem with his eyesight – which he admits was to keep him from pride
 - b. 12:8-9 “⁸ Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. ⁹ And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” (NAS)
 - c. if we should be weakened by pressure and turmoil, can it not be that it is in order that God may be manifest in us, His strength & faithfulness made evident in our weakness?

E. Paul dealt with stress by recognizing eternal realities

1. the Christian has a privileged position in Jesus Christ (ch. 5)
 - a. 5:17,20 “¹⁷ Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. ... ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (NAS)
 - b. Paul never lost sight of the high calling he had from the Lord, Jesus Christ; nor should we
2. our accountability is to God, not men
 - a. much of the pressure and turmoil we face results from the questions noted before, or, 'what will people think?'
 - b. but Paul has an antidote to this in 5:9-11 “⁹ Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.” (NAS)
 - c. 'I,' says Paul, 'will first make sure my life is what God wants of me, and then, hope that it will also please others'
3. the reward awaiting God's people: back to chapter 4 ...
 - a. 4:14-18 “¹⁴ knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us

with you. ¹⁵ ... ¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." (NAS)

b. Paul faced this world's stress with eternity's values in view

It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus;
Life's trials will seem so small, when we see Christ;
One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow will erase,
So bravely run the race, till we see Christ. —^{4}.

4. like Christian, in "Pilgrim's Progress" we are headed to the celestial city, the place of God's abiding presence with us His people forever; and on our way, we take joy in this fact and live in order to please our Lord; what a marvellous truth to strengthen us in every pressure and turmoil we may face!

F. Conclusion

1. for any of you who are under a special load of pressure and experiencing great inner turmoil, I would commend to you the reading through of this letter in its entirety, perhaps more than once, so that you may learn by the way Paul shifts his focus back onto God in every extremity that he faces
2. you may not find answers to the difficulties that are perplexing you, but you will find the solution in trust in the character of God as did the writer of our closing hymn, William Cowper, who spent many hours with his pastor, John Newton, trying to resolve his acute depression. That hymn of settled faith in God is 'God Moves in a Mysterious Way' which we will now sing.

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. Source, “Test of Belief: Conviction vs. Preference” by David C. Gibbs, Jr – Kerux illustrations #3390
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