

克利夫蘭華人教會

Cleveland Chinese Christian Church

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Youth Pastor Letter

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Dear Church Family,

As a youth pastor, I hear students talk about stress all the time. From prayer requests to just conversations I over hear, students are stressed and are talking about it. How can the gospel change the way we think about stress?

I recently read about stress from a writer who categorized stress in two ways. One of these ways is much more insidious than the other. The first and less worrisome type of stress comes from the sheer over-accumulation of work. The second is the first type, amplified by what is often called an “existential crisis.”

Imagine a student who has delayed studying for a major exam until late the night before. If he or she belongs to the first category of stress, that of someone who sees all the work that he or she has to do, he or she might think, “how can I possibly finish reviewing this entire textbook in one night? I might fail the test!”

Someone in the second group would extend that thought to, “If I fail, what will my friends think of me? What will my parents think of me? What if this means I’m not as smart as I think I am and I’ll never be able to get into med school and become a doctor? If I can’t be a doctor, then who am I?”

The first person makes a calculated, though gloomy, prediction about a single event, whereas the second person reasons from that thought a cutting analysis of their worth as a person. This is where stress is most debilitating, and it’s also when the gospel can be the most edifying.

Which category do you think you children find themselves in most of the time when dealing with stress?

Whether someone will more likely fall victim to the first version of stress or the second version comes down to a sense of spiritual certainty. Spiritual certainty is a confidence in the character of God and a profound belief in the notion that once you are accepted as a child of God through faith in Jesus Christ, nothing can separate you from that heavenly union.

You can fail every calculus exam, and get rejected from every medical school, but the truly important fact about your life that justifies your value as a person cannot be stripped or even blemished. You may fail, but Jesus didn’t. When you are in Christ, everything he did is credited to your account. This is good news. This is the gospel.

As Christians, we are free from the oppressive uncertainties of performance and we can approach work from a perspective of joy. Yes, there can be joy in stress. The opportunities afforded us on Earth that allow us to go to school, to make friends, to play sports, to hold jobs, and to have families are not only the origins of stress but also reflections of God’s desire for us to “have life and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Our stress therefore is a manifestation of the fall – where previously, we were allowed to enjoy the abundance of life without the possibility of failure. Because of the grace of Jesus Christ, that continues to be true.

As always, if you have any questions, comments, or prayer requests, please contact me at jmlilley@clevelandccc.org.

In Christ,
Pastor Jonathan Lilley