

In the last issue I began a series relating to the Christian marriage. However, since I want to be sensitive to immediate concerns and current issues in counseling, I am going to interrupt my previous plan of consecutive newsletters on marriage with what I feel is a very pressing topic as people begin the new year.

Why is it that we counselors are busiest around the holidays? Depression is at an all time high, stress causes a rash of family problems including marital separations and divorces. The suicide rate sky-rockets around the holidays. There are several reasons for this phenomena. In this issue I would like to discuss the predicament that not only plagues us Americans during the holidays but throughout the entire year, with the problem only getting worse.

## STRESS AND OVERLOAD - PART 1

First of all, may it be known that "stress" is a misused and misunderstood term which takes a bad wrap. If we didn't have stress, we wouldn't be alive. It propels us forward and enables us to care for ourselves. In short, it keeps us living. This type of stress is not the problem; it is a dear friend which we need to embrace. Distress is the killer I want to discuss. This is the unwarranted stuff we typically bring on ourselves. We do this in two ways: By the bad habits of our minds and by the bad habits of our lifestyles. In this issue, I will write about the first of these.

Many of us have a tendency to mentally make catastrophes out of life's circumstances. There is an insecure part of our mind that wants to take concerns that are rather insignificant in the grand scheme of our lives, place a telescope in front of them for a closer look, and then proceed to give us a bigger-than-life illusion that our quandary is insurmountable, intolerable and to be eliminated at any cost. The result of such thinking? Distress (the absence of peace). The solution? Find the Truth (the presence of peace) and embrace it as a lost love. Here it is: *Be anxious over nothing but in all things through prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God and His peace which transcends understanding shall guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7).*

To tell people to not have anxiety or distress over *anything* often results in funny looks and angry laughter. When I am counseling individuals concerning the Truth of Philippians 4:7, I have found it to be much more effective for us to look at the admonishment in reverse order.

First, what is it that people want in life? They tell me

they want to be happy. "And what does happiness look like?", I'll ask them. When all is said and done, it is peace and contentment of heart and mind that people want. Okay, let's start there. Why don't people think they have such peace? Their answer: because of their insurmountable and painful problems. (They are wrong about this conclusion, but it is not fruitful to argue this point with them at this time). It is here that scriptural obedience and disciplined persistence is mandatory. We must take seriously God's Word. Through prayer and petition (specific requests), *with* thanksgiving (we can't forget this part), we are to take *everything* to God. When hearts and motives are right, and individuals persistently and obediently embrace the counsel of Philippians 4:7, we will observe something quite miraculous, anxiety and symptoms of distress begin to melt away. Why? Because the Peace of God, which is beyond our understanding, pushes out the anxiety. It is impossible to be distressed and at peace at the same time.

*Being anxious over nothing*, therefore, is the outcome of obediently and thankfully taking our petitions to God. Being anxious about nothing is not what we do prior to taking our prayers to God, it is an outcome of having gained the Peace which transcends worldly comprehension. Additionally, receiving this Peace has nothing whatsoever to do with whether or not our particular petitions have been answered in accordance with what we believe to be the best solution. Peace is what God promises in Philippians 4:7, not deliverance from all of our woes. With this difficult bit of information, we are to lean not on our own understanding (Pro 3:5) for His ways and thoughts are higher than ours (Isa 55:9). Sometimes God has something else in mind. We learn that it really doesn't matter if our petitions are answered the way we'd like them to be as long as the end result is peace of mind and heart (happiness and contentment). The apostle Paul learned the secret of being content even when he was hungry and in prison (Phil 4:11-12). That is the real healing. Once individuals begin to experience this Godly peace, thereby displacing their anxiety, it is easier to then show them that our problems are not why we lack peace. It is what we believe about our problems that disturb and distress us.

In summary consider this: In Christ Jesus, the Peace of God which transcends all understanding shall be yours, if through prayer and petition you thankfully make your requests known to Him. By doing so in all things, you will find yourselves anxious over nothing.