

Augusta First Baptist Church
Luke 12:13-21
Answers to Life's Top Pressures
Stress: Living in a Pressure Cooker
July 9, 2006

Luke 12: 13 *Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." 16 Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' 18 Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' 20 But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."*

This morning I am beginning a series of messages responding to what we have identified as a church family as life's top pressures. Some months ago I asked you to share with me your pressures, your stress points. Here are some of the things I heard:

1. Pressures of abundance *the stress of excess*
2. Parenting issues (children and aging)
3. Financial
4. Work/Career
5. Uncertainty for the future
6. Time management
7. Caring for self
8. Saying no (*Let your yes be yes and your no be no*)
9. Peer pressure
10. Marriage, balancing priorities
11. How to deal with annoying people – Loving people you can't stand
12. Finding peace in uncertain times

I feel stressed just reading this list!

Stress has been described as "America's number one health problem." It has been estimated that 75 - 90 percent of all visits to primary care physicians are for stress related problems. Stress, pressure and anxieties, when left alone, diminish who we are as children of God created in the image of God.

We live in a pressure cooker world and we can read self-help books, buy aroma therapy candles, listen to Yanni on the CD player and follow Oprah's advice, but still feel mired up to the ears in daily pressure.

In dealing with pressure I think of the wonderful Uncle Remus story of the tar baby, whose origins come from the stories African slaves told and Joel Chandler put to paper...Like Brer Rabbit, it seems the more we whack at life's pressures, the more mired down and paralyzed we become.

And so, we have this story that Jesus tells of bigger barns, the need for speed and the desire for more. This passage is not just about money. It is about life and the pressure to live life well. And friends, if all our stress was reduced down to just one thing, is it not the pressure to live life *authentically* and *genuinely*?

Jesus tells us a story of a wealthy man who all of a sudden came into more wealth. I imagine that this farmer could have been in his fifties, maybe even nearing retirement. From what we can tell he was a hard worker and a shrewd business person. One year he had what could be called a bumper crop--so large in fact he had no where to store his produce. I suppose he did the sensible thing by building bigger barns, bigger storehouses, lest all his produce go to waste. He knows what he's doing after all, for it seems he's been farming for quite a while. When he contemplated on his successful business, he said to himself: "You have done really well for yourself and have established your financial security. Now you can take a rest and retire. Live the good life and do those things that you have been putting off." Clarence Jordan interprets the farmer as saying: "Recline, dine, wine, and shine!" The farmer believed what most of the world believes: "A significant life is a wealthy, prestigious life."

But the farmer failed to remember that tomorrow is not promised; putting off one's life is irresponsible. Facing stress and pressure with authenticity begins with:

Taking one day at a time.

Jesus said: "*So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own...*" (Matthew 6:34)

This is not a message about how to get rid of pressure. Pressure is as much a fact of life as the air we breathe. This is about how to live authentically in this world of God's. We live authentic lives by taking one day, this day, at a time. Ask any alcoholic and they will tell you that the only way they can deal with the serious addiction issues that they face is to simply take it one day at a time.

To live life one day at a time is fundamentally a faith issue that God has dominion of our lives in spite of the fact that our stress often leaves us feeling out of control.

We think that "when things slow down, then I will get a grip on life's stress..." No way. It seems we are under the delusion, as Scarlet O'Hara of Gone With the Wind phrased it, that "Tomorrow is another day." I don't mean to add to your stress, but tomorrow brings no guarantees. We should know that by now.

The great philosopher Charlie Brown of *Peanuts* fame puts it well:

"I've developed a new philosophy . . . I only dread one day at a time."

Stress is here to stay. There are many pressures that we face or will face that we can do nothing about. Let's face it; life is not worry-free.

The farmer faced his predicament of abundance and came up with what appears to be a sensible solution: (Luke 12:18) *Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, 'Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.'*

But it was in his haste to make a name for himself that life passed him right by. In effect, he said as we say, "One day..." *One day* when I graduate...*one day*...when I land that job...*one day*...when I get that promotion...*one day* when I retire...He said it, we have said it. We engage in building barns and forget about building a life. And our life starts now, not tomorrow or one day.

This story is about trusting in the sovereignty of God for today and tomorrow. It is also a story about priorities. *In other words...*

Making First things First

"So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God." (Luke 12: 21)

The farmer had all the wrong priorities. He chose to build bigger barns. He invested in the wrong building campaign. Jesus reminded us that life is not about bigger barns, the sin of more, because we were not created by God to live in barns!

Many of the pressures we face in life are exacerbated because our priorities are all mixed up. We say family is most important yet we spend **more** hours at the office to make **more** money to buy **more** things which result in **more** debt and the need to spend **more** time in the office. We *say* our health and weight is important to us because we not only want to live long but live well, yet in the pursuit of **more** we do not take time to eat right or exercise because we are too busy with other things (which are probably not as important).

If we are serious about minimizing the pressures in our life, we need to make first things first. We very well may have to build barns, but maybe we need to decide which ones to build.

If family is most important to you, build the barn of quality time. That means stop building barns of career climbing or chronic selfish indulgence or thinking you can write a check to improve the family.

If getting out of debt is important to you, then build the barns of controlled spending. Chances are really good that you and I do not need most of what we have. In fact, let me go one step further to suggest that most, if all of the pressures we face in life, cannot be solved with more money (the most concrete example of bigger barns), but with a change of priorities.

If getting a handle on your hectic schedule is important to you, then build the barns of learning to say “no” even when “yes” seems a lot easier. And by the way parents, it is okay to say “no” to your children when they come to you and say “I want...”

"Worrying does not empty tomorrow of its troubles. It empties today of its strength." Author Unknown

KJV Luke 12:31 *But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

We have all heard the cliché *stop and smell the roses*, but who has time for that? Words like “seek the kingdom” may make for good scripture, but for you and me it just doesn’t always seem practical.

Yet the claim of God is that our worth is based not on what we do but who we are. Here is how Jesus phrased it in this chapter: NRS Luke 12:27 *Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.*

Not only then is it making first things first, authentic living means...

Breaking the Need for Speed

NRS Psalm 127:2 ***It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved.***

I love to get up early in large part because I am a morning person. But I must confess, I also get up early because it makes me feel like I am working hard. There is a part of me that feels a bit smug when I am up before most of my neighbors and even before the paper is delivered. For many of us there is a thinly masked joy to speak of our culture as 24/7. It sounds good doesn’t it? Like we are really working hard, and that is, after all, something to be rewarded, right?

Actually, the Bible has a different view altogether. To be sure, working hard is important, but not most important. That’s why words like Sabbath, grace, and mercy permeates our scriptures.

Michael Yaconelli tells a charming story of the time he was watching his son compete in the 1500 meter race for junior high. During the last lap of the race the crowd was on its feet cheering the group of boys competing for first, second and third place. But there was one boy lagging far behind. There was no chance he would make it to third place much less first. In fact, it was very clear that this rather pudgy seventh grader was going to be last in the race – last by a long shot.

As he was huffing and puffing down the track with his face red and sweaty his mother made her way to the railing overlooking the track. She screamed, “Johnny, *run faster!*” The author writes: “I wish you could have seen the incredulous look on the boy’s face. He had to be thinking, *Mom! I’m running as fast as I can!*” (*Messy Spirituality*, pp. 95-96).

Dear people we do not deal with stress, we do not grow deeper in our walk with God by running faster. It is not always sin that leads us to stress, but speed. Take your foot off of life’s accelerator.

NRS Luke 12:27 *Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.*

Slow down, you move too fast
You've got to make the morning last
Just kickin' down the cobblestones
Lookin' for fun and feelin' groovy
Da-da-da-dah, feelin' groovy
(Simon & Garfunkel)

I have come to cherish my vacation times with my family...

Releasing Oneself to God

Sure, we can take one day at a time; we can make first things first and we can break the need for speed, but if we are serious about wanting to better cope with living in a pressure cooker world then we have to admit ultimately there is nothing we can do; no thirty minute fixes or 12 step programs that will solve it all.

NRS 1 Peter 5:7 **Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.**

NRS Philippians 4:6 **Do not worry about anything,** *but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

If God doesn’t have your cares then there is nothing else out there that will bring you any meaningful relief.

"Sorrow looks back. Worry looks around. Faith looks up."

The farmer took the stress of success (and that too can be a most difficult pressure), he took the stress of success back upon himself and planned for a future he had no control over, put his life on hold, misplaced his priorities and never acknowledged God as the author or giver of his accomplishments.

This parable is more than just addressing money and possessions. After all, Jesus spoke primarily to the poor common folks who didn't have much money to begin with. This parable is about life and our decision to hoard it or spend it. Our lives can be spent amassing wealth, prestige, or even stability for our "one day" or we can decide to choose living our lives today. The choice is ours: engendering friendships or neglecting them; time spent with our families or time at the work place; volunteering our skills and talents to help someone in need or doing nothing with them at all; time spent in prayer seeking guidance or time in front of the T.V. seeking fleeting

entertainment; forgiving those that have hurt us or holding grudges until we die--all of these things and more determine the character of our lives, not the barns we build.

Life is too short to hoard it all away. The farmer wasn't cruel or unjust or sinister. He was probably a lot like you and me. God called him a fool because he lived for himself; talked to himself; planned for himself, and even congratulated himself. He wanted a better life through bigger barns – and that kind of stress will kill you!

Just behind the small church building of my childhood--Concord Methodist--there is a cemetery. I use to love to stroll through the cemetery and read the name and dates of the countless headstones. I made a game out of trying to find the oldest grave. As you may know, it is the responsibility of each family to tend to their own family plots. Most of them are well cared for. The grass is kept trim, weeds are pulled away, flowers are speckled throughout serving as tangible symbols that someone still remembers, someone still cares. But there are a great many other graves that have been severely neglected. They are the graves of families that have long since left this county or have died away themselves. As I look at such abandoned graves I can't help but wonder what kind of life those people lived. Were they wealthy, prestigious, benevolent, were they well thought of by their contemporaries, were their lives ever important? Now they are just forgotten names etched on marble with little or no legacy left behind. Every cemetery you go to there are graves just like these--graves that look abandoned and forgotten. Daniel Taylor writes: "Will it matter, once I am gone, that I was ever here?"

Luke 12: 32 *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*