

# Worship in All Circumstances: Stress

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. My name is Eric. I'm one of the guys here on staff at Watermark. It's great to be here with you today. I have never met someone in my entire life who is most content when they don't know where their next meal is going to come from.

Random, maybe, but true. As humanity, we have this craving for stability and security. It comes in different quantities.

Some people want to know every part of their life, how structured it will be. But even the most bohemian, hippie person you've ever met in your life wants some level of security.

They want to know at least where their next meal is coming from. It's a common condition that goes back to the earliest days of humanity. If you look back in the book of Genesis in the Bible, you have Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, and then their sons, Cain and Abel.

Cain kills his brother, and God says, Okay, Cain, as a punishment for your sin, you're going to be a restless wanderer and a fugitive on the earth. And the first thing Cain does after God tells this to him is he goes out, he has a kid, and he builds a city.

[ 1 : 13 ] Because family and city mean security and stability. It's built into our nature as human beings. You fast forward a couple chapters later, you're at the city of Babel.

And the people come together and they say, We need to build a tower into the heavens, to reach to the heavens, so that we will not be scattered across the earth.

We want stability. We want security. We want to make sure our friends don't leave. We like them around. So we need to do what we can to keep them here. And this craving for security and stability comes down to today.

I messaged a number of people from the church this week and asked them, If you think about you and the people you know, what are the greatest causes of stress in your lives or their lives?

What are the things that keep you awake at night? And if you listen to their responses, it shows that we still struggle with these issues today. One person said, We lose sleep because we don't feel we're in control of the situation before us.

[ 2 : 20 ] And we always think the worst will happen, and any immediate misstep will lead to dire outcomes. A lot of people said things like, Providing for your family. The future, your next job, contract renewal at your current job, lack of job security in general, the thought of losing someone or something that I love, finding that special someone, or if you've already found them, are you on the same page with them?

You listen to this list, and it comes down to security and stability. One person said, You know, the definition of stress is sitting in a room, listening to a talk, knowing that you can't leave, but there are four Pokemon right outside the door.

Another person said, You know, everyone at work must have sleepless nights too, but a big part is just not to show it. Even when we know that the world is going crazy and we can't sleep at night, we want to put on this show that we are stable and secure for everyone else to see because we crave stability and security.

And it's not just a watermark issue either. It's going on worldwide. How do you explain world events like Brexit, the election of Duterte in the Philippines, and the rise of Trump in America? People want stability and security.

They know that the current political system, or they think the current political system will not give them the stability and security they want, and so they feel this need to take drastic measures to get it.

[ 3 : 57 ] It's a common human condition. Everyone wants stability and security, and when we feel like we don't have it, our natural human response is stress.

And today we're going to continue in our series looking at the Psalms and worship for all seasons and talk about a psalm for when we are stressed. And what we're going to see is that God gives his people all the things we are tempted to stress over and become anxious about.

We're going to have three steps that are going to help us see this. First, our effort. Second, our sleep. And third, our hope. First, our effort.

Psalms 127, verse 1, says, Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Now if you look throughout the Bible, it's very clear that God expects us to be working.

You go back to the Garden of Eve, and what does God tell Adam and Eve? He says, Rule the earth. Have dominion. Do work. If you look at the Ten Commandments, God comes and he says, You need a day of rest because all the other days you're going to be working.

[ 5 : 09 ] He expects us to do work. He expects us to go to our jobs, to do our school. In the church, he expects us to be making disciples. But this verse is clear that unless God is behind our work, it is in vain.

If you look at the title of this psalm, it says that it's written by Solomon. And it says, Unless the Lord builds the house. Solomon built a very famous house.

It's called the temple. It was the place, the dwelling place of God on earth. Solomon did lots of work to take this temple, make it a beautiful, beautiful building. They put a lot of time into it, a lot of money into it.

And that's quite possibly what he is referring to in this verse. But what he is saying is, we built this elaborate, beautiful, intricate, expensive building.

We put in our time and our effort and our energy, but if God's not in it, it's wasted. It's useless. This word labor in this verse isn't just the word that we would typically think of when we think of work.

[ 6 : 17 ] It can actually be translated more along the lines of toil, trouble, work that leaves us just feeling empty and exhausted at the end of the day. And he's saying that if we don't have God in our work, all of our work is going to be that kind of work, the kind of work that leaves us empty, the kind of work that leaves us stressed.

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. What does it mean for a house to be built in vain? There's a pastor in the States named John Piper and he lists four ways that a house can be built in vain.

He says, first off, you can build the house and you just never complete the construction. Sort of like the Tower of Babel in the Bible. You start building, you never actually complete the house. It's built in vain.

It can't be used like it's meant to be. Second off, you build the house, you get it, it's beautiful. You move in, you live there for a couple years and then all of a sudden the house collapses.

Sort of like the foolish man that Jesus talked about who built his house on the sand. The storms came, they knocked out the house. If you build your house and two years later it collapses, the house has been built in vain.

[ 7 : 34 ] The third way that the house can be built in vain is that you build the house, it's beautiful, you oversee it, the construction finishes and the day that you're meant to move in, you dropped out of a heart attack and you never get to enjoy the fruit of your labor.

The writer of Ecclesiastes in the Bible talks about this, the man who does all this work and prepares everything just for someone else to enjoy it. And then finally, the fourth way that the house can be built in vain and I think this one is one that is all too common in our culture.

You build the house, it's beautiful, you get everything ready, you move in and the house, once you move into it, becomes a house of pain and mourning filled with broken marriages, rebellious children, marble shelves that hold meaningless trinkets.

and why? Why? Why is this type of building vanity? Because when we build a house or really do any venture in life, start a business, start a church, start a family, and we do it without God in it, everything involved in the process starts and ends with us.

we toil, we labor, we work with power that comes from us. We complete a project and the glory goes to us. We celebrate what we have accomplished.

[ 9 : 04 ] We get consumed with ourselves and that's that. And if we can't enjoy it, it's over. We never get to be a part of something bigger than ourselves.

But what does it look like on the flip side if God is the one building the house? Well, when God is the one building the house, the power and energy to build it comes from him and the glory for it goes to him.

A historical example of this would be the temple, this house that Solomon built. If you think about the temple, they brought in this team of people with incredible skills who contributed to the work.

They did incredible, intricate artwork, carvings, sculptures, architecture to build this incredible building and many of them never even actually got to see the completed fruit of their labor.

There were rooms in the temple that certain people, only certain people could go into. In fact, in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred place in the temple, only one person could go in there one time per year.

[ 10 : 17 ] Which means anyone involved in building that room never got to take their wife and their friends to go say, check out this work that I did here. Isn't this a great carving? Isn't this a cool sculpture?

No, none of that. You can never show them what you had done, but everyone did it. Everyone joined in because they knew that their work was going towards the worship of God.

Their work was not in vain. Their work was part of something bigger. Their work was part of glorifying and worshiping God. And now most of us won't be involved in something like building the temple in our lifetime.

So what does this look like in a modern context? When I was a little kid, my dad actually built our house in the States. He went out to the woods, chopped down trees, milled, like literally milled the wood himself, brought it back and built it, had some friends come over to help him stand up the walls.

He built it from the ground up and we moved in there when I was two years old. And over the years, in that house, my parents have raised four boys, constantly pointing us towards Jesus, constantly teaching us to love him and worship him.

[ 11 : 30 ] In that house, over the years, numerous people have come over and talked to my parents during difficult times in their life and found encouragement, found encouragement to go back to Christ in those difficult times.

In that house, the kitchen has been used to cook, I can't even guess how many meals for people who are sick, for people who have just had babies, for people who are mourning. In that house, when I was about 12, we had a homeless family come live with us for six months.

Literally, out of the homeless shelter, they came and took my bedroom and I had to go stay with my brothers in their bedroom. In that house, amazing ministry has happened for God over the years.

Yes, my dad built the house, but I believe that God also built that house and has used it to make an impact that will last for eternity for him. But again, most of us aren't actually going to literally build our houses in Hong Kong, you know?

It just doesn't happen here. But everyone has a place that we live. And what does it look like for us to use the places that God has given us for this season in our life to make an eternal impact for him?

[ 12 : 47 ] You know, I had some friends, they used to go out every Saturday night. They had a couple kids from the streets that they would bring in and these kids would spend the night at their house. My friends would give them a healthy meal to eat.

My friends would hang out with these kids, teach them life skills and discipline. My friends would teach these kids about Jesus, give them a safe place to spend the night. In the morning, they would eat breakfast together, and then they would bring the kids to church.

I think God built that household. God used it. Even though they were only in that apartment for a couple years, God used their time in that household. He built that house to make a difference for eternity.

And the fact is that if God is not building our house, whether it's in our homes, in our businesses, in our church, those who build it labor in vain.

Like I said, it's true even in the church. We can have, we could save up lots of money, build this great building, have a great speaker, and gather together to hear talks all about how great we are, and just get focused on ourselves, lose our sight for the gospel, for helping the world around us, and all the work that's gone into making this incredible, beautiful church is in vain.

[ 14 : 12 ] I don't think we're there right now at Watermark, but it very easily could happen in the future if God is not in it. And it's true not only in the church, but in our jobs.

We can go to work, we can stay up all night long trying to get this deal done, trying to get the work done, anxious. It can be true what's said of us in verse 2, it's in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest eating the bread of anxious toil.

How many of us does that describe staying up late because we're stressed about work and then waking up as early as we can in the morning because we feel like everything is dependent on us, the power comes from us, and the glory goes to us for a job that we're doing in vain.

It says, not only unless the Lord builds the house, but unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. We're dependent on God for getting things started and built, but we're dependent on God for them maintaining and sustaining into the future as well.

You can get your house built, but if God's not watching over the city, then an entire city worth of houses can be destroyed in one night. Again, that's true for the church.

[ 15 : 28 ] We can have a healthy church today, but if God's not watching over it, giving can stop, attendance can stop, the church no longer exists. Or, giving can go up, attendance can go up, and we lose sight of the gospel, and the church continues on years and years to come, and no one's life is impacted by it.

Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. So God expects us to work, but ultimately, every endeavor in our lives is dependent on God's work for its success or its failure.

That is, our effort. Next up, our sleep. It says, in the end of verse 2, he gives to his beloved sleep.

Sleep comes from our trust in God's provision. If we believe that God is a good father who loves us and takes care of us, then we will sleep. And if we don't believe that God is a good father who loves us and takes care of us, we're going to stay up all night long trying to provide for ourselves because obviously God's not going to provide for us and everything's going to go wrong if I don't.

But God gives to his beloved sleep. I love the movie Gladiator. Anyone here love the movie Gladiator?

[ 16 : 54 ] Yes? Thank you. It's a great movie. If you haven't seen it, you should. In Gladiator, there's this scene. It's great. Commodus is ruling over the Roman Empire, but he's stressed.

He's afraid that all of his work to take over the country is going to be in vain, that it's going to fall apart, that he's going to lose his power. It's late at night. He's wide awake, and he's standing in the doorway to his nephew's bedroom watching his nephew sleep.

And his sister walks up behind him, and he turns to her, and he says, he sleeps so well because he knows that he is loved. He sleeps so well because he knows that he is loved.

If we are Christians, and we have a God who takes care of us and provides for us, that's what the world should be saying about us. Those Christians, they sleep so well because they know that they're loved.

If we look at this passage again, this part that says, he gives to his beloved sleep, there's actually a possible alternate translation for this line.

[ 18 : 11 ] It can, if you look at the original language, it could also be translated, he gives to his beloved in their sleep. Slight change, but a slightly different meaning as well.

It's not just that God gives us sleep, but that as we sleep, God gives us all the things that we would have been stressing over if we had stayed awake. We could stay up all night stressing about whether the business deal is going to go through, or we can go to sleep.

And God is capable of making that happen while we are asleep. Now, it's not going to happen every single night that amazing things happen, but God provides for us in our sleep, which is why we are able to sleep.

A picture of this happens in the Bible in the book of Acts. The apostle Peter, he's arrested. He's in prison, and he's going to be executed the next day. I don't know about you, but I feel like if I was in prison about to be executed the next day, I would be awake, plotting, hey, maybe I could get this guard's key off of him while he sleeps and unlock everything.

Do you think that would wake them up? Maybe. I'm not really sure, but then there's the other guard I also have to get past. What can I do? What can I do? Maybe my friends will jump me while I'm being transported tomorrow to the execution place.

[ 19 : 25 ] I'm not really sure. But Peter sleeps. The night before his execution, he is asleep. And in the middle of the night, an angel appears, his chains fall off, the prison door breaks open, and he's able to walk right out, free.

Peter was able to sleep because in his sleep, God provided his rescue. God gives to his beloved in their sleep.

We can sleep at night because while we sleep, God still cares for us, God still provides for us, God still takes care of us. We can stay up, anxious, stressed, worried, or we can rest, sleep, because we have a God who loves us.

Looking down at verse 3, behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward. If we think about what we stress about in life, so much of it relates to kids and the future.

How are their grades? Where are they going to go to school? Can we afford to have kids? Can we even have kids? But then, in the midst of all our stress, all our worry, comes the statement that God gives us kids.

[ 20 : 56 ] This happens on a physical level, that God physically gives children, and it says here that he gives them as a gift, not a burden, by the way. I think our culture often sees them as more of a burden, but it says here that they are a gift.

And really, if God's big enough to give us children, then surely he's going to be big enough to provide for those children throughout their life. God gives children as a blessing for his people.

If you think about the context that this was written in, this is written during the Old Testament, which means that it's, God's promises at this point in time were made to the nation of Israel through Abraham.

Abraham was the founding father of the nation of Israel, if you go way, way back in time. And God made a promise to Abraham. He said that he would give him three things. He said that he would bless him, said that he would give him a land for his descendants to live in, and he said that he would give him descendants, that he would multiply him and make him into a great nation.

And this promise followed the descendants down the line. If you were an Israelite and you had kids, that meant God was blessing you. God loves you.

[ 22 : 06 ] God has provided you with children. God has kept his promise to Abraham through you. If you don't have kids, maybe there's something wrong. If you don't have kids, maybe God's withholding his blessing from you.

And so, what he's saying here is that kids were a sign that God was keeping his promise. Kids were a sign that God was giving his blessing. That is why kids are a heritage or an inheritance from the Lord.

But what about people who can't have kids? Whether it's a married couple who's just physically unable to, or a single person who can't have kids because in obedience to God, they're living a celibate life and they can't have kids.

In the New Testament, Paul talks about the advantages of a single life for a Christian. And how can it be that if children are a blessing and single people living in obedience God can't have kids, that that's a good thing?

Well, if you look at these promises that God gave to Old Testament Israel, what you see is that in the New Testament, these promises are fulfilled in Christ. That through Christ, God is forming a people for himself.

[ 23 : 20 ] That through Christ, God has established a kingdom that will last forever. That through Christ, God has given his blessing to the entire world. Which means that these promises that God gave to Abraham actually still apply to Christians today, but we interpret them differently through the lens of Christ.

Which means that the family of God is now a spiritual family. Yes, there's a people of God, but the thing that unites us is not our literal physical bloodlines, but the blood of Christ, our common faith in him.

And so the Bible tells us that if we are Christians, we are all brothers and sisters with one another. In the book of Corinthians, Paul talks about how he became their father in Christ when he shared with them about Jesus and they trusted in him.

And what the Bible tells us is that God, whether we have physical children or not, whether we're married or single, young or old, that God wants us and expects us to be spiritual parents, to be people who share his word with others so that they can come to know him, so that they can be brought into the family through us.

And God gives us children today, physically and spiritually, as a blessing, as a way of building his family, that physical children, yes, but also spiritual children are a heritage from the Lord because God uses us to impact their eternity.

[ 24 : 54 ] and if you look at it, it says that children are supposed to be arrows. I don't know if you've ever thought much about arrows and the life of an arrow.

Arrows are made to be sent out. I know a lot of parents who really want their kids to have a perfectly safe life, to stay close to home, to be comfortable, but God says children are meant to be arrows.

Arrows are weapons used in war and hunting. The life of an arrow is not a safe life. If your goal for your kids is nothing more for them to stay safe, then I want to ask you today, do you have the same plans for your kids as God does?

God wants us to raise up children, physically and spiritually, who will make an impact for him in the world. Children who will go out and serve in their communities, maybe even go overseas as missionaries.

Children who will be lights for him, who will be arrows that pierce the darkness of the world. So if you have kids here today, how are you preparing your arrows to be released?

[ 26 : 16 ] You know, the amazing thing about an arrow is that if it's aimed properly, it can do great damage to the enemy. If it's aimed poorly, it can do great damage to your own side. If you're an arrow, or if you're a parent here today, and you put the same amount of effort into your job as you do into your parenting, would you still have a job tomorrow?

If your friends were to watch the way that you interact with your family and the way that you lead them, would they think that you're more concerned about where your kids go to college or where they spend eternity? God has given us children as a blessing, but he's also given us to them as an incredible tool to be used for his kingdom.

And are we using them responsibly? And again, just as with everything else in life, how our kids turn out ultimately is dependent on God. But he expects us to be working alongside of him to raise them up towards him.

There's a pastor in the States named Matt Chandler, and I love his description of their parenting. He says, you know, my wife and I, we constantly talk to our kids about Jesus.

We bring them to church every week, we pray with them, we read the Bible with them, but we also try to do things to remind them that God is good and that he loves them. So when I ask my daughter what's her favorite color and she says pink, I say, do you know where pink comes from?

[ 27 : 51 ] And I tell her, God made the color pink because he loves beautiful things and he wants to create a beautiful world for you to enjoy. Or he tells stories about how they'd put their kids to bed at night, get them all settled down, and then 10 minutes later go back and wake the kids up and take them out for a late night donut run to remind their kids that it's not all about rules, that we as parents love you and even more, God as your heavenly father loves you.

But then he says, after having done everything that I possibly can to raise my kids properly and point them towards God, I put them to bed at the end of the night and I walk around to each of their rooms and I beg for God to save their souls.

He mixes his metaphors and talks a little bit about it like a bonfire. He says, what I do is I take all this kindling and I wood and I pile it up and then I douse it with gasoline and I pray for God to send a spark that will light it so that, but in the meantime while I wait, I build that pile as big as I can so that when the spark comes, it will burn as bright and as long as possible.

Children are a heritage from the Lord, a great blessing but a great responsibility. And again, just like anything else, our parenting is dependent on God's work but when we've done all that we can to raise our kids and point them towards Christ, we can go to bed at the end of the night and sleep because we have a good Father who loves us and cares for us and provides for us.

So we've seen our effort, we've seen our sleep, finally, our hope. You know, this idea of being able to sleep and not needing to be anxious and not needing to be stressed, it's a great idea in theory but is it practical?

[ 29 : 52 ] Can we live it in the real world? Ultimately, that comes down to one question. Is God for us or against us?

Because if God is for us, then we can. We can sleep, we can rest because we know that he's going to provide and take care of us. And if God's against us, then we're probably not going to succeed, definitely won't succeed, but we still need to try everything we anxiously can, give up sleep, to try, try to make it work because we don't have a Heavenly Father who's going to take care of us.

Is God for us or against us? And how can we know? How can we know for sure whether he is for us or against us?

The answer comes from the cross. See, at the cross, Jesus, fully God and fully man, came to earth when we were in rebellion against God, when we had said to God, we hate you, we want nothing to do with you, stay away from us, let us live our lives the way that we want, we had declared ourselves as enemies against God and we were deserving of his destruction.

Jesus came down to the earth as fully God and fully man and he bore all of the punishment that we deserve for our rebellion at the cost of his own life.

[ 31 : 35 ] At the cross, God provided for our greatest need at the greatest cost possible to himself. And if God is going to provide for our greatest need at the greatest cost possible to himself, then surely he's going to provide for all of our other needs as well.

Romans chapter 8 verses 31 and 32 says, if God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Modern translation, if God loved us enough to give up his son for us, he's going to love us enough to give up anything else for us that we possibly could need. If you have kids, think about this for a second.

How many people on earth are there that you would sacrifice your child's life to save? I'm guessing for most of you that list is like zero, maybe one.

But you think about whoever possibly made that list of people that you would sacrifice your child's life to save. If that person came up to you and asked you for a meal, would you say no to them?

[ 32 : 57 ] Of course not. You love them enough to give up the most valuable thing in the world to you, you're going to give them a meal, you're going to give them a place to stay, because you love them, because you care for them.

God gave up his son for us. He's going to provide everything else that we need. And, you know, I talked earlier about if God doesn't build the church, you know, in addition, God has promised to build the church as well.



Now, it's not a categorical promise that watermark's just going to exist forever, but it means that while we're here, the things that we're doing for God's kingdom are going to have an eternal impact, that God's going to use the preaching of his word and the lives that we live, to spread his kingdom in the earth.

So what difference does this make in our lives? If you're not a Christian, trust in Jesus. You know, these things that I've been saying about how God loves us, how God gave up his son for us, how God is on our side and not against us, if we are still declaring ourselves as enemies against God by refusing to trust in Jesus, then God says, okay, you're still enemies.

But he still wants us to be his children and his friends and he offers us today that if you have never trusted in Jesus to forgive you for your rebellion against God, that you can have forgiveness, you can have new life, all you have to do is ask.

[ 34 : 44 ] So if you have never done that before, I encourage you to do that today. And if you're here and you are a Christian, if you trust in this God who is so big, so loving, so powerful, what difference does this make in our lives?

Let's sleep this week. You know, we say we worship a God who's all powerful, who loves us, who provides for us, even when we sleep, and yet for so many of us, we stay up late, we stay up anxious and stressed.

but this week, let's view climbing into bed as an act of worship. Probably never thought of it that way before, but let's view climbing into bed as an act of worship.

It's an intentional step where we can say, God, I know there's more I can do. I know there's more I could stress out about and be anxious about. I know I could stay up later and do more work, but I'm trusting in you, and I'm climbing into bed.

I'm going to get a good night's sleep because I know, God, that you are a good father who loves me, who cares for me, who's on my side, and who provides for me.

[ 35 : 56 ] Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are a good father. We thank you that in the times where we turn to stress, when we turn to anxiety, that you're there, and you're aware of everything that's going on in our hearts, in our minds, and in the world around us, and that you care.

We thank you that you have provided for our greatest need at the greatest possible cost to yourself that there is, and that you've promised to provide for all of our other needs as well.

We pray that we be a church that trusts that, that is able to sleep, sleeping so well because we know that we are loved. Thank you that you're good.

We thank you that you love us. In Jesus' name, amen.