

PART 51 – DEALING WITH STRESS

As we begin this section of our series, I want to give a passage that I want to serve as a foundational baseline as it relates to the subject of stress. The actual word “stress” is not actually used in the Scriptures, but there are well over 100 verses that talk about distress and many more that talk about anxiety. We will look at some of those verses, but this passage is the one that I want to set the tone for what we are going to teach. It is [2 Corinthians 4:7-12](#) which says,

2Co 4:7 (NKJV) But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- ¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So then death is working in us, but life in you.

If there was ever anyone who experienced a stressful life, it had to be Paul. Everywhere he went, people hated him and wanted to kill him. It seems like his life was just one constant stressful event after another, and under those circumstances, it would be more than easy to become stressed out. There are simply those moments in your life when you have to do what [1 Peter 5:7](#) encourages each of us to do.

1Pe 5:7 (NKJV) casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

This is something that you simply have to learn to do when things in your life are building up on you and applying pressure on your life and your family that are unhealthy. You have to take your care and your concerns and your hurts and your disappointments to God. The longer you wait, the harder the stressful moments become. [2 Thessalonians 3:16](#) says,

2Th 3:16 (NKJV) Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.

❖ STRESS – THE SILENT KILLER

I wonder if you have ever felt really stressed out about something that was happening in your life? Well sure you have. You live in America, you work with irritable and snappy people, you have to drive on the highway, and you may not make enough to live on. I get stressed just trying to find a parking space at Walmart. I actually chose to retire at the ripe old age of 59 because of the extreme levels of stress that I incurred at work each day. On top of simple things like these mentioned, then there are the moments in life over which we have no control that can significantly stress anyone out – some unexpected crises moment that makes a bad day look like a great day. No one is exempt from stress, and stress in many different forms. It is actually called the silent killer.

I was doing some research on stress and according to the American Institute of Stress, 77 percent of Americans experience major levels of stress on a very frequent basis. No surprise there. It actually seems to be a fairly normal experience for most people – living under different levels and degrees of stress. Some of the symptoms associated with stress are headaches, a loss of physical, mental, and emotional energy, chest pains, nausea, dizziness, digestive disorders like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS),

rapid breathing, high blood pressure, anxiety, loss of sleep, lack of concentration, poor judgment, irritability, agitation, avoiding responsibility, lack of energy, lack of purpose, having a short fuse, depression, easily fatigued, and many other similar symptoms.¹ In fact, studies have identified that 48 percent of people struggle to sleep well because of stress related issues. None of this sounds very good to me. I love the first part of [Proverbs 14:30](#) in the NIV which says,

Pr 14:30 (NIV) **A heart at peace gives life to the body...**

The Amplified Bible says,

Pr 14:30 (AMP) **A calm and undisturbed mind and heart are the life and health of the body...**

That is what we want to learn to develop in our life – “**a heart at peace**”, **a calm and undisturbed mind and heart**”, and a heart that knows how to deal Scripturally and spiritually with the stress that life so often brings on our life.

❖ **THAT BIG AND IMPORTANT MEETING**

So, just think about two of these statistics for a second - 77 percent of the people you meet may be experiencing stress and 48 percent of the people you meet may never get enough sleep. Let us just assume that you are in a very important meeting to make some very critical decisions, but you realize that almost 8 out of every 10 people attending the meeting are currently experiencing some kind of physical, mental, or emotional difficulty because of stress. So, how confident would you be that a good decision could be successfully made. On top of that, one out of every two people in the meeting did not have a good night's rest the evening before, so they may be a little grumpy and irritable. Probably not a good way to start the meeting – right? Where this can be really frightening is being on the highway with so many people who are totally stressed out and who are severely sleep deprived. All of this can make for a very bad day.²

I guess the real takeaway from all of this is quite simple. Most everyone you know is experiencing some level of stress in their life – health issues, relational issues, family issues, financial issues, work issues – the list is endless. Now, I realize that much of it could be self-inflicted, but still they are experiencing stress at some level, and often times because of things totally beyond their control. The following are some areas where stress may be impacting people. In fact, you may be eerily familiar with some of these. I know that I have been.

1. Your schedule. You leave early for work and get home late in the evening. That is not good. I do not know how some people work these swing shifts where they work in the day this week and at night the next week. No wonder their body and brain are stressed out.
2. Your budget. Normally a lack of funds is simply a reflection of bad planning or a lack of contentment, but that does not eliminate the stress. Monetary issues are often the root cause of nearly 50 percent of all divorces.
3. Your physical health. If you are always tired, I doubt seriously that you will normally feel good, and when you do not feel good physically, I think that nothing works as well as it should

¹ Hunt, 24-26.

² Pitman, 16.

emotionally, relationally, mentally, and even spiritually. Some health problems may be out of your control, like getting Covid or some form of cancer. However, many of people's health problems are simply related to their lifestyle. They eat too much red meat, too many carbs, too much sugar, not enough vegetables, and drink more carbonated drinks than they do water. They rarely if ever get any exercise, work too many hours, and have developed really bad habits that contribute to them not feeling well.

4. Your relationships. I know some people who do not seem to be able to get along with anyone. Every issue is a hill that they are more than willing to die on. This kind of person probably does not have many close friends simply because they will argue with them about anything. They do not even know how to talk to resolve issues they may have with someone else. Surely that will stress you out.
5. Your decision making. We have clearly seen that bad choices create bad consequences. Then to make it worse, some people even struggle to make a decision. They evaluate, evaluate, evaluate, and before you know the evaluation process becomes stressful. They have what some have called "analysis paralysis". Your life is always headed in the direction of whatever choices that you are making, and if they are bad choices, well good luck with that result.
6. Your spiritual conflicts. I can assure you that if you do not know how the enemy will defeat your life that it will create high levels of stress in your life. He is never doing anything that is designed to really work for you or greatly benefit your life. To the contrary, what he does in your life eventually leaves you empty, frustrated, irritable, angry, disappointed, and discouraged.
7. Then there are the things that happen to people that are way outside of what they can control. You cannot control the stock market or the weather or the government. You cannot control other people and the decisions they make that may impact your life. You cannot control how people drive on the highway or how much food at the grocery store costs or how much gasoline costs. All of these things are way beyond any single person's control, but I can assure you that they can all create a high level of stress in your life.

Now, at this point in the study, it would be really good to define stress and to see if stress is really the issue or not, or could it possibly be something else. How interesting would that be? In reality, it seems reasonable to both assume and accept that many things in your life have the potential to cause stressful scenarios for you. I think it would be good to see what stress does to you as a point of evaluating if you really think like God thinks. Surely stress related issues are able to reveal various levels of weakness in your life. Let us just say that you work with some very difficult personalities. Well, how you respond to those people will probably reveal a great deal about your relationship to God, as well as your understanding of how the Christian life is to actually work itself out in a practical way. Maybe something very unexpected happens and you have a crises moment in your life. How do you respond? Are you completely stressed out, or does the crises actually reveal something much deeper about you? I certainly hope the latter is true in a very good sense.

Let us clear the table for a moment. You cannot live a life that is exempt from experiencing various levels of stress. That life does not exist. Jesus was surrounded by stress every day of his life after He was baptized by John in the Jordan River, but the good news is that **He never let stressful circumstances**

govern His response to those circumstances. The dictionary defines stress as various forms of physical, mental, or emotional strain and tension, and the definition certainly recognizes that stressful circumstances can upset someone's physiological equilibrium very quickly. No one argues that reality. The real question, however, is what are stressful circumstances really doing to you and in you, and do you have the power and strength to overcome the inevitable negative impact they can create on your life? **The problem comes to the surface when you begin to believe that the difficult circumstances and people you encounter are greater than your ability to overcome them.**³ Now, I am not trying to be arrogant or facetious in what I am about to say, but Jesus never believed that they were. Why is that? It was because He was thinking like God thinks – right. Mental and emotional stress are caused by the way that you think and how you mentally process what is happening in your life. For instance, if you dwell on something negative that is happening in your life, it will create stress in your life. If you think bitter thoughts, you cannot help but have bitter emotions. If you want to be a forgiving person like God is, then you have to think thoughts of forgiveness.⁴ I love [Isaiah 26:3](#) because it seems to put stress and anxiety into perspective when it says,

Isa 26:3 (NKJV) You will keep *him* in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.

Everything always gets back to God and how you relate what is happening to you to God. [John 14:27](#) says,

Jn 14:27 (NKJV) Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

I think that it would be perfectly okay to add to this verse the idea of “**let not your heart be troubled or stressed out or anxious**”. Whatever is troubling you, stressing you out, or making you anxious and afraid is exactly what God wants you to bring to Him.

Now, I want you to think about the difference between what we want to call “**stressors**” and “**stress**”. The “**stressors**” are all of those circumstances, events, or people that actually create the levels of pressure and tension that you are experiencing. Stressors can be big or small. You can catch a cold or sprain your foot or forget an appointment. None of those are what I would call a major source of stress. They are events that we can easily overcome with a fairly low level of stress. However, things like bankruptcy, a terminal illness, a divorce, a major accident, losing your job - now any of those can be considered as a major source of stress.

I remember when the young man totaled our truck in Gainesville, Georgia. The unexpected wreck that happened when we were sitting at a stop light was what created the stress. It was the stressor. Right before the accident, right before the stressor we were doing fine. We were relaxed, talking, looking forward to getting to where we were going, but suddenly something changed all of that. In just a moment of time, we had no means of transportation and no way to even get to a motel. We knew no one. So, think of a stressor as something negative that happens to you that you certainly preferred that it had not happened. It is that circumstance that you would have changed if you could have, but you could not

³ Pitman, 26.

⁴ Hunt, 37-38.

change it. I would have much preferred that lightning not hit the tree at our house and cause as much damage as it did, but it did happen. The lightning was the stressor that caused the stress. So, at that moment, something had to happen in our life. How were we going to view what had just happened? Would we allow it to stress us out? Would we be overcome by the inconvenience of not having any water for over a week, or no way to wash clothes or wash dishes or take a bath? For both Brenda and myself, we chose to not allow it to stress us out. It was major at the moment, but minor in the big picture of our life – and we immediately recognized that reality. It just became an inconvenience, but nothing greater. We had family nearby where we could get water, take a shower, wash clothes, and we just used paper plates. So, here is what we want to understand when it comes to the issue of stress.

KEY PRINCIPLE 187: A STRESSOR IS WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU. STRESS IS HOW YOU RESPOND TO WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU.⁵

A stressor may make you nervous, anxious, despairing, or you can let God use it to help you glorify Him in the midst of the tension. Think of it this way. The event is the stressor and your response to the event is what **creates the stress or eliminates the stress**. What may be very stressful to you may not be stressful at all to someone else. How you handle a difficult relationship may be very difficult for you, but not difficult at all for your best friend. It is stressful for me to be going fast in traffic, but it does not seem to effect race car drivers the same way it does me. Everyone has different levels of endurance, of anxiety, of patience, and of faith. The issue is simple, and this is what actually creates the stress in your life.

The greater the stressor and stressful circumstance, the greater will be the threat that it imposes on you – on your resources, on your resolve, on your family, and on your faith.

Now, it would be very naïve for any of us to think that just because we are a Christian that for some mystical reason that we will be exempt from difficult, stressful, and tense moments and circumstances in our life. In fact, as we get closer to the Second Coming of Christ, Paul said this in [2 Timothy 3:1](#),

2Ti 3:1 (NKJV) But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:

The Greek word for “**perilous**” has the idea of reducing one’s strength, of being very difficult and dangerous. By implication, it refers to a “furious and fierce” time in history.⁶ In fact, one translation says “**there will be violent periods of time**”. The NASB says “**difficult times**” and the NIV says “**terrible times**”. The Amplified Bible says,

2Ti 3:1 (AMP) But understand this, that in the last days will come (set in) perilous times of great stress and trouble [hard to deal with and hard to bear].

You get the picture. Stressful times that we have no control over will happen to everyone – wars, famines, pestilences, economic downturns, sin running rampant, an immoral culture – it is all out of our control. Listen to [1 Peter 4:12](#),

1Pe 4:12 (NKJV) Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;

⁵ Pitman, 28.

⁶ Strong, *chalepos*, #5467, ep.

So, once again, the question is how are you going to think about all of these kinds of events? Will they overwhelm you, will they destroy your faith in God, will they exhaust you, or will you be more than an overcomer? All of those options are possible.

You have to determine what it is that distinguishes you as a Christian from the world.

It is not that as a believer that you will be free from stressful circumstances. It is not that God is going to keep tense and trying moments out of your life – not at all. The real issue is whether or not that you as a believer are able to experience the overwhelming, supernatural peace of God during very difficult and ongoing times of stress in your life. [Philippians 4:6-7](#) says,

Php 4:6 (NKJV) Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

This is supernatural peace that only God can provide. This is what helps you more than anything else to overcome the stress that the world and the enemy will inflict on you at certain times. This is the mindset that God wants you to develop in your life because He knows that His peace is much greater than your anxiety. He wants you to let His peace actually guard your heart and your mind. That is definitely a great trade in my mind.

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