

PART 52 – DEALING WITH STRESS, PART 2

As we have seen, the stress that you experience in your life can come from so many different sources - your schedule, your budget, your physical health, your relationships, your decision making, your spiritual conflicts, and unforeseen things that happen that are beyond your control. So, when you have multiple issues and incidents creating stress in your life, the build up of that stress is magnified and can have an enormous negative effect on you both emotionally and physically. That reality is inescapable. Just as one example, all throughout this entire study, it has been clear that your words have great power either to help or to harm. We have seen how the words that you use can and do change your brain in a physical way. Just think about this for a second, especially if you want to reduce stress in your life. First, you have to speak well – godly words, Christ’s words, encouraging words, helpful words, kind words – you name it. Secondly, in order to do that, you have to listen well. If you do not listen to what other people are trying to say, you will rarely be successful impacting them with the words that you speak to them. Then when you add to that all of the other features of communicating, things like facial expressions and body language, it should become clear that if you listen well and then speak well that you can build trust with people, you can resolve conflict much more easily, and in things like marriage, you can increase the intimacy levels of your marriage drastically. I would say that it should be intuitive that the greater sensitivity that you develop to what, how, and when you say something, that it can drastically increase the quality of the relationships that you have with people – and thus, reduce some unnecessary levels of stress that you may be having in your life.

I think about Jesus and how He seemed to always know what people were thinking and how to respond to them. It could be the lady at the well, the woman taken in adultery, the woman with the issue of blood, the man lowered through the roof, the demoniac at Gad, the disciples on the rough seas of Galilee, or even how He washed the feet of His disciples on the night that He was betrayed. You know, when you read those passages, it is remarkable that He never spoke ungracious words to Judas. He knew what was happening and through whom His betrayal would happen, but still He stayed the course with the quality of words that always characterized His life.

One of my favorite Key Principles is that “*Right words spoken at the right time and in the right way (right tone), will produce the right results*”. However, if you leave just one of those elements out, then in all likelihood, you will generally get the wrong results. I think that you can count on that. Just yell at your children, or your marriage partner, or your co-workers, and see how much respect they give to you. What you are saying, or what you want to say, will actually get derailed. For instance, it is very possible to say the right thing at the wrong time, as well as use words that are spoken in the wrong way and in the wrong tone – like anger, frustration, or irritation. Those words will never be effective, no matter how right what you are saying actually is. All of the information that you are giving someone may be 100% spot on, but the choice of your words, or the way that you said it, or when you said it will most likely completely negate what you were trying to accomplish. For instance, try not to talk about something stressful as soon as your marriage partner gets home from work. It is a bad time. They are mentally, physically, and emotionally tired. They do not have much gas left in their tank. Why am I talking about this? **It is because your words either relieve stress or intensify stress. To relieve stress, you have to start with always controlling what and how you say something, how you use words.**

You can build up and encourage, or you can tear down and discourage. Here is the first key to relieving stress in your life and in the relationships that you have with people, so listen carefully.

KEY PRINCIPLE 188: YOU HAVE TO BECOME VERY INTENTIONAL ABOUT OFFERING GRACE THROUGH YOUR WORDS.

To that principle I would add body language, facial expressions, and gestures. This is where you begin in eliminating stress in your life – by using words that are godly, encouraging, discerning, gracious, and kind. No one, absolutely no one is interested in talking with an angry, short tempered, or irritable person – no one. Here is the problem, and it really is a very simple observation.

KEY PRINCIPLE 189: IF YOU FAIL TO OFFER GRACE TO THE PEOPLE YOU ARE SPEAKING WITH, YOU NO LONGER HAVE AN AUDIENCE.

You can argue, curse, raise your voice, threaten, intimidate, accuse – whatever you want to do to achieve your purpose, but when that happens, you no longer have an audience – no matter if what you are communicating is 100% correct. It does not matter. How you express words can be more powerful than what you actually say to someone. **If you do not learn to speak to people with grace, they will not listen to you.** Throughout this series we have seen the value of [Colossians 4:6](#) that says, and this is super important,

Col 4:6 (NKJV) *Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*

The word “**always**” simply means always. Imagine that! It means at all times, in every situation you encounter, in the good moments and in the tense moments, at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day and everything in between, and with everyone that you meet.

Secondly, we know, without overstating the issue, that stress is certainly associated with having an “**anxious mind**” or maybe we should say an “**anxious mindset**” that is constantly worrying about anything and everything that is happening to you. I personally believe that some people are actually “addicted” to worrying. It is like they have programmed their brain to worry.

BRAIN FACT:

1. Neurological research indicates that 90% of your brain is operating in the subconscious level. What that means is that that subconscious level in your brain is helping you make decisions based on how you have been “programmed”. Over an extended period of time, your parents, your upbringing, your teachers, your friends, social media, the environment in which you live, the events of your life, and 1000 other things have been programmed to create neural pathways that subconsciously make you think the way that you do. The key to how the brain is programmed is summed up in one simple word – “repetition”. One obvious example would be teaching a child the alphabet. The only way that the child can learn the alphabet is by repeating their ABC’s over and over and over. When a child is born, they know nothing. They do not even know a language. They learn by someone else repeating information to them, programming them if you will.

So, with people who are chronic worriers, anything, literally anything, can cause them to become restless, worried, fretful, and anxious. Why? It is because they have programmed their brain to worry. I am not exactly sure how to say this, but it seems to pretty much be an impossibility to worry and be at peace at the same time. **It is counterintuitive to think that worry and peace can really co-exist at the same time.** [Galatians 5:22](#) says that “**peace**” is actually a fruit that is developed in your life by the abiding work of the Holy Spirit.

Gal 5:22 (NKJV) **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**

However, you have a part to play in that process, and it is called “**abiding**”. [John 15:4](#) identifies this when it says the following,

Jn 15:4 (NKJV) **Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.**

In the language of this study, [John 15:4](#) is all about re-programming your mind to think like God thinks. You meditate on His Word, you read His Word, you study His Word, you listen to His Word being taught, and over a period of time, your mind and your brain become programmed the way that God intends for you to think. What this means neurologically is that subconsciously when you find yourself in a stressful situation that you have the truths of God abiding in your mind and in your brain, and in your heart, and it becomes much easier for you to choose to do the right thing. In the case of what we are addressing, you choose not to worry when something stressful is taking place in your life.

The first word “**abide**” or “**remain**” in this verse is in that very unusual parsing called the aorist imperative. It is the verb in the passage that carries the most weight and dictates how everything else that follows and often has preceded is to be interpreted and understood. It is a verb that is as strong of an encouragement as you can have, except for the verses that use the word “**must**”. However, the verb is also in the active voice which simply means that this “**abiding**” is not something that God is going to do for you. He places that responsibility on your shoulders. No abiding, no bearing fruit. This is a mental decision that you must make, a neural pathway that you must develop in your brain – “*I will spend meaningful time with God*”. The more that you abide in God’s Word, the greater will be your peace. Listen to [John 14:27](#) which says it this way,

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. (YOU) Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.**

What this verse says is that this peace that God has for you in every situation that you face is something that Jesus has actually already given to you. It is a part of God’s initial life-transforming grace that He gave to you when you were born again. However, He also says in this same verse that you must **not** allow yourself to become stressed out and worried about what may be confronting you.

KEY PRINCIPLE 190: STRESS AND WORRY ALWAYS BEGIN WITH WRONG THINKING.

He simply says “**Do not let your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid**”. I know this may sound a little awkward in trying to interpret or understand a verse like this, but it is like Jesus is saying “*I have*

your back. Whatever it is that is troubling you, I am greater than any problem that you will ever face. You can trust Me.” When the trouble arises, however, you may not actually believe that. Your circumstances may overwhelm you, but that does not change the fact that Jesus has already given His peace to you. With the exception of John who was abandoned to the Isle of Patmos, Jesus is talking to men whom He knew would all be martyred for their faith.

God knows that stressors in your life are inevitable and unavoidable, so the issue is not that you can have a life without stressful circumstances, but one of how are you going to respond to the stressors. Will you allow them to overcome you, or will you overcome them? When Jesus says “**Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid**”, He is clearly saying that you are not to be worried and anxious and troubled and afraid in your life about all of the different things that can happen, they may happen, and are happening. He is telling you in this verse that His peace is greater than your difficult circumstances. His peace is what actually allows you to navigate through the stressful moments with great assurance and confidence that God is right there with you.

The phrase “**not...be troubled**” is in the present tense, imperative mood which means that it is a command that you are to continually be putting into practice in your life. You have to literally program your mind to think this way, to think like God thinks. However, and this is very important, it is in the passive voice. What that means is that God is the One who is working this into your life. He understands how many uncomfortable stressors that life can create for you, but His Word to you is to simply keep abiding in Him, and as you do, He will continually be giving you His peace. As you do your part, He is actively doing His part.

You have to develop a neural pathway in your brain that says that you will choose God’s peace over your fleshly worries and fears.

Do not forget that all of this is related to what and how you choose to think. You can choose to place the promises of God’s peace as being yours into your mind no matter what your circumstance may be, or you can choose to worry and become anxious and critical about anything and everything that may be happening in your life. I want to say all of this in a different way with a Key Principle.

KEY PRINCIPLE 191: WORRY IS THE OUTWARD EVIDENCE OF THE ENEMY’S INWARD ATTACK ON YOUR MIND.

You want to recognize the reality that when you are worrying and becoming stressed out about what is happening in your life that Satan is working overtime on your mind. That should be a spiritual alarm to begin intensely abiding in God’s Word until He transforms your mind with His peace. One of Satan’s key notions that he places into your mind is this – “*What am I going to do?*” or “*How in the world can I get through this?*” You hear this in your mind over and over and over, and it creates stress and worry and confusion in your mind. Please understand something that is very, very critical to your spiritual success. **It is the fact that you will often not have an immediate answer to a difficult circumstance.** Accept that reality. You may not know exactly what you should do in a stressful and ongoing circumstance, but God knows, and when He determines to give you His direction, He will do exactly that for you. If you are **willing to trust God** (and often that is a very big effort for many believers), He will always give you the exact direction you need to overcome stressful moments, but He will do it in

His timing. Remember, that He may choose not to remove the stressor, and if that is the case, then just learn to accept the outworking of His perfect will in your life. It may not be evident to you, but it is very real. So, just keep abiding. Just stay in His Word. Read His Word, meditate on His Word, write down your declarations of God's strength and power and constantly be reminding yourself of their life changing truth.

The following are two questions that every believer should be asking themselves when life becomes stressful for them. These are super important questions, so please take them seriously.

1. *When you encounter difficult circumstances and people, what do you experience – stress or peace?*
2. *When you begin to feel squeezed by the inevitable pressures of life, what comes out – anxiety, worry, fear, or peace?*¹

Now, at this point, I want to make a very important distinction. Genuine concern for yourself, your loved ones, someone else, or other legitimate issues is not wrong. In fact, I would say that you should have a genuine concern and care for your life, your loved ones, your circumstances, your job, your resources, and anything else in life that has importance and relevance in your life. It would be spiritually inappropriate to not be concerned about certain people or certain circumstances that have developed in your life. For instance, if someone's child becomes deathly ill and is in the hospital on life support, it would be unchristian and non-biblical to not be genuinely and sincerely concerned for that family. You are connected to people and when they hurt, you should hurt with them. [Romans 12:15](#) says it this way,

Ro 12:15 (NKJV) Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

To be concerned for those who are genuinely hurting in their life and who are experiencing very difficult circumstances is the right response. It is only natural. I would say that it is exactly how God has designed you. When Jesus approached Jerusalem, His heart was broken for the people. [Luke 19:41](#) says,

Lk 19:41 (NKJV) Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it,

Jesus was always full of compassion for people. His heart was broken for the spiritual condition of His people. There is a term that is often used to describe this level of concern. It is called having a "burden" for people and for where they are in their life. I think another term would be "compassion" or "compassionate caring". This is very legitimate. What the term "burden" is describing is the weight of what is happening in someone's life. We know that it is very heavy, very stressful, and your genuine concern for them is never outside of God's boundaries.

So, how does this relate to eliminating stress and obtaining God's peace? I think it is very simple. [1 Peter 5:6-7](#) says it this way,

1Pe 5:6 (NKJV) Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

The Greek Interlinear translates verse 7 as "**all the anxiety of you having cast upon Him, because to Him it matters concerning you.**" I love that. You matter to Jesus, you matter to God the Father, you

¹ Pitman, 29.

matter to the Holy Spirit. Your life has great value and worth and importance to the One who created you, and the way that He wants you to see that is by “**casting all of your cares on Him**”.

During the moments of stress and difficulty that you experience, you have to learn to cast yourself on God, on His mercy, on His grace, on His sovereignty, on His loving concern and care. You have to program your mind and heart to understand that there simply are very difficult circumstances that people will face for which you do not have the answers or the resources to help them. You know full well that God is their only answer and that you must cast your burdens and concerns on Him. There really is no other option that is available. It is not that you are neglecting your responsibilities, but that you are clearly recognizing your limitations. You do all that you can do to help, but there will always be a limit as to what you can do to help others. When you reach that place, you must cast yourself on God. If you do not, the end result will continue to be worry, stress, anxiety, and tension in your life. You have to reach a place of genuine peace where you know that what you can do will never be enough and that only God has the resources to help someone who has great needs in their life. It actually may be your life for which you have to do this.

The problem with worry is that it consumes you. It consumes your thought life. It actually creates stress and begins to pull you emotionally into many different directions. It will quickly destroy any peace that you have or even desired. It drains you of your physical, emotional, and spiritual strength. You cannot relieve stress if you are constantly worried about everything. Research has shown that anger or irritability is at the top of the list of stress symptoms in a person’s life at 37%. However, worry and anxiety are a close second at 35%.² So, if you see someone always anxious, you can be assured that they are stressed out on the inside.

I read a great little book called Don’t Give the Enemy a Seat at Your Table. The essence of the book in very simple terms was that your struggles are never really with people, even though it may seem that way most of the time. The struggles that you face are with “**principalities and powers of darkness**” as described in Ephesians 6:12. God does not make you afraid or paranoid or despairing or anxious. Those thoughts are always coming from another source – even though the enemy may be using someone else to create those reactions in your mind and heart. So, you have to learn how to control who you allow to “sit at your table” and who or what you allow to influence your life. Listen very carefully. Your mind does not have to be stressed out about everything that is taking place around you. Why? It is because you have been called to have an incredibly intimate relationship with the Creator of the universe, with the God who is called “The Almighty God” and He does not worry about anything.³ I want to provide a verse that means the world to me because as we navigate through this topic of overcoming stress, it challenges me greatly to always be trusting in the God who cares and I hope it will do the same for you. It is Habakkuk 3:17-18,

Hab 3:17 (NKJV) Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls--¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

² Jantz, 8.

³ Giglio, 5,11.

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