

PART 54 – OVERCOMING STRESS, PART 3

In this part of our study on stress, I want to talk specifically about how to relieve stress. Please remember once again that the Scriptures do not use the actual word “stress”, but it does use similar words, or synonyms, like “**distress**” and “**anxiety**”. For instance, [1 Peter 5:7](#) seems to provide the obvious solution to stress. It is a simple solution and is probably too simple for many people to actually adopt in their life.

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

Even in the midst of very difficult circumstances, Jesus gave us the following instructions in [Matthew 11:28-30](#) when He said,

Mt 11:28 (NKJV) Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

So, what we have seen so far is that stress can be created in so many different ways and from so many different sources that it would be difficult to even try and name them all. The categories that we have mentioned, not studied, are things like your schedule, your finances, your physical health, your personal relationships, your decision-making skills (or lack thereof), your spiritual conflicts, marriage issues, issues with rebellious children, and unforeseen things that happen that are beyond your control. When you have multiple issues and incidents creating stress in your life, the buildup of that stress is magnified and can have an enormous negative effect on you emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Physiologically, stress impacts every cell in your body, and generally in a very negative way. I am convinced that Paul endured as much stress as you can endure. Everywhere that he went, people were trying to kill him. Listen to what he said in [2 Corinthians 4:8-10](#),

2Co 4:8 (NKJV) 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.

Brain Facts:

- 1. When the thinking center of your brain is maximized, then the feeling portion, or that area of your brain where stress is created, is greatly reduced.** I.e., there is a great connection between how you think in stressful situations and how you respond in stressful situations. If you were in a really bad automobile accident and were just hanging on for your life, the last thing that you would want to have would be an EMS responder who could not think quickly and objectively in that circumstance. You would want their thinking to override the stress that they may actually be experiencing so that they could do their job.
- 2. When you are experiencing high levels of stress like anger, anxiety, or fear that are deeply impacting your emotions, you have to learn to change your thinking during those moments.** Please remember that your emotions are normally a by-product of what you are thinking. What God wants to happen is for you to focus on His truth. What you want to happen is for the way

that you think to bring the emotions and stress that you may be feeling into alignment with the way that God thinks.¹ Jesus said it this way in [John 8:32](#),

Jn 8:32 (NKJV) And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

I.e., bring your thinking into alignment with God's truth, God's Word, how God thinks.

[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.

One of the clear and evident things that Paul is saying in the phrase “**Be anxious for nothing...**” is that God does not want the stressful emotions that you may be feeling at any given point in time to override the peace God wants to give to you. [Psalm 62:1](#) says,

Ps 62:1 (NKJV) Truly my soul silently *waits* for God; from Him *comes* my salvation.

Now, here is what we know. God does not want you to live under chronic stress. Why? It is because it simply is not good for your health and well-being. In [John 10:10](#), Jesus said,

Jn 10:10 (NKJV) The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

I love what [Proverbs 4:20-22](#) says,

Pr 4:20 (NKJV) My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. ²¹ Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; (WHY??)²² For they are life to those who find them, and health to all their flesh.

These verses are God's will for your life – to experience the abundance of life that Jesus is able to provide even in the midst of the most stressful circumstances possible. Unfortunately, chronic stress that is not dealt with places everything about your life, both physically and emotionally, under a strain that God does not want you to have to endure every day. Obviously, some stress is self-inflicted, but then there are other circumstances such as a hurricane or tornado destroying your home that are completely outside of your control. Just think for a moment about what happens to you physically when you become highly stressed out about something. Saying this in a spiritual way, the more stressed out you allow life to make you, the more difficult it will be for you to enjoy the life that God has for you. Stress can and will literally reduce your ability to be effective in what God wants you to do.

Stress Facts:

1. During periods of stress, your brain releases stress hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, that literally flow throughout your entire body. When that happens under very stressful circumstances, everything in your cardiovascular system gets elevated to very dangerous levels. It raises your heart rate and your blood pressure. Muscle tension increases throughout your body and especially in the head and neck area which can cause severe headaches. Your heart often races to where you feel like you are having a heart attack. You start to sweat. Your abdominal

¹ Hunt, 85

muscles begin to cramp. Nothing is working as intended. So, the more chronically stressed out that you are about different things happening in your life, the harder your entire cardiovascular system has to work. That leads to raising your blood pressure longer than you normally should.² This could easily lead to your having a stroke.

I remember one time when I got so stressed out in dealing with a very, very difficult situation that it literally took hours for my blood pressure to come down to normal – hours. I actually felt really bad for almost two days. I took my blood pressure and it was like 180/110 and it stayed that way for hours. I had the worst headache possible and could only lay down to rest, and even that did not help immediately. I felt so bad that I did not want to talk to anyone for fear of what I may have said. This is why doctors call stress “the silent killer”.

2. Stress puts an enormous strain on your immune system which lowers your resistance to sickness and infections. If you stay chronically stressed out in your life, you will find that you will most likely stay chronically sick. You will catch every cold and every flu that comes along.
3. Chronic stress increases your levels of anger and the eventual expressions of that anger. You can just imagine what all of that does to the relationships that you have with people in your life – especially your family members. They are generally the ones who receive the blunt of all that buildup of stress in your life and the forthcoming harsh, toxic, and negative words.
4. Chronic stress has an enormous impact on your digestive system. You are much more prone to experience stomach ailments like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), which can make you feel like you are having a heart attack.
5. People who are under chronic stress have difficulty sleeping. If you are not able to get the sleep that you need, you will become irritable and short with people. The next thing you know you will start taking some kind of drug just to go to sleep at night.
6. People experiencing chronic stress are prone to start taking a lot of over the counter (OTC) drugs to just get some relief. Many people start to drink to try and just relax.

Now, the picture here of someone who has never learned how to deal with stress, and especially chronic stress is not good. Obviously, life just by itself is stressful, so it is critical that we figure out how God wants us to think about stress so that we can live with it such that it is not harmful to us. What I want to do is to address several simple, obvious areas that can substantially help you lower the stress levels that you may be experiencing. They cannot reduce all of them. That is a given. Jesus sweat drops of blood as He was waiting for what He knew was the inevitable end of His life. For instance, if you have a child that is critically ill, that is a stressful situation that will be very difficult, so I do not want to minimize the obvious things that do create high levels of stress in a person’s life. I have a great friend who has a very handicapped child about 21-22 years old, still in diapers, cannot really go anywhere, and is a constant 24/7 effort for the family. For over 20 years, they have loved her, but still lived under constant levels of stress because of her handicap. I have heard the stress in his voice so often.

❖ SIMPLE WAYS TO RELIEVE STRESS:

² Jantz, 10-12.

All of these are obvious and should be intuitive, and it may not seem like I am teaching a Bible study – for which I apologize, but we must embrace the simple and obvious ways that God has provided for us to relieve stress in our life if we ever want to be effective for Him. If you are always stressed out in your life, you will never be effective doing what God wants you to do. You will literally miss His best for your life and not even know it.

1. **Simplify your life.**³ Do not overload yourself with more than you can handle. Take some time off. Take a vacation. Get the necessary rest that you need to function the way that God wants you to function. Some people are doing so many things, have so many places to be, so many obligations to meet, and so many responsibilities that they are personally responsible for that they have no time to relax. They are tired when they go to bed, tired when they wake up, tired when they get home, and it all starts over. If you are going to simplify your life, then there are just some things, some activities, some responsibilities that you probably need to stop doing. I would suggest that you take a careful look at your priorities and responsibilities and be honest about which ones are not really that necessary in your life. When you finally determine to simplify your life the way that God wants you to simplify it, I believe that there is one critical area, one specific question that you have to ask yourself – “*Is this really how God wants me to be spending my time, efforts, and resources.*” [1 Corinthians 10:31](#) defines the question this way,

1Co 10:31 (NKJV) Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Please remember that stress is not necessarily created by doing too many things as much as it is doing too much of the wrong things and not enough of the right things. I am convinced that you can be doing so many things in your life that are not what God really wants you to be doing that you completely miss out on life. We all know the story of Mary and Martha and when Jesus went to their home. Martha was so worried about cooking beans that she failed to see who was right in front of her. Listen to what Jesus said to her in [Luke 10:39-42](#),

Lk 10:39 (NKJV) And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." 41 And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

KEY PRINCIPLE 192: NOT EVERYTHING THAT SEEMS SO NECESSARY TO DO IS ACTUALLY NECESSARY TO DO AT ALL.

2. **Get better organized.**⁴ Learn how to manage your time so that you can genuinely have time for rest and relaxation. Learn how to manage your money so that when you come to the end of the month that you are not always wondering where the money went to before the end of the month

³ Jantz, 29.

⁴ Jantz, 43.

caught up with you. If you know that you have to buy some new tires for your car and you live on a tight budget, then you need to start putting some money up to do that. If you do not plan ahead for what you know is going to happen, then life will eventually catch up with you and overwhelm you, and that causes a great deal of stress.

3. **Downsize whenever you can.**⁵ So many people have so much stuff that their stuff is controlling their life. It should be intuitive that the more stuff that you acquire, the more that stuff will take up your time. The more that you attain, the more you have to maintain, and the problem with “stuff” is that it really cannot satisfy your life. Years ago, someone asked the richest man in the world what he wanted and this is what he said – “*Just a little bit more.*” How non-sensical is that. Jesus said these very important words in [Luke 12:15](#),

Lk 12:15 (NKJV) And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

We better get that right – right? Have you ever watched any of those shows on television where they bring in some professional organizer to help people get rid of their stuff. It is almost painful to watch, but they always have three rules to help. The first is only keep what is important. The second is to donate what you do not need to someone else who can use it. The third is to throw away what is left.⁶ All of this really requires a great deal of intentionality.

4. **Exercise more.** I love when I get to walk. There is just something about being outside and walking. Unfortunately, I love my wife’s chocolate cake just as much. When you start to exercise, please do not set your goals too high. One author that I read said, and I like this, “*Start so slowly that people make fun of you...*”⁷ I actually thought that was insightful. Why? It is because sticking to an exercise program is hard. It takes some hard choices to develop the mindset that helps you to be consistent. “*The weather is too hot or too cold or too rainy. I am too tired.*” However, when you get just moderate exercise on a consistent basis, it releases good chemicals in your body like dopamine and endorphins that actually reduce the bad chemicals like cortisol. Most exercise guidelines would encourage you to get at least 2 ½ hours of moderate intensity exercise each week. That really is not that much. If you walked 15 minutes twice a day for six days a week, you would exceed the 2 ½ hour goal. If that is too much, then just walk for 20 minutes 3 times each week (1 hour). I know exactly what you are thinking right now – “*Nope, not for me, don’t have the time, too much effort*”. Well, good luck with your chronic stress. I will leave it at that.
5. **Eat better.** This is torture to talk about, so I will keep it short. Eating healthy has got to be so difficult for most people. When you fail to eat properly, you are depriving your body of essential nutrients and that causes stress. I read one author who is a specialist in losing weight and he said that only 2% of the people who actually lose weight are able to maintain their projected weight loss goal. If I do the math, that means that only one out of every 50 people actually stick to their diet and achieve and maintain their goal. Here is what you have to do, so listen carefully. Avoid

⁵ Jantz, 50.

⁶ Jantz, 52.

⁷ Bailey, 89.

fast food restaurants, processed foods, too many sweets, and carbonated soft drinks like the plague. Right now, you are saying to yourself “*Sure Gary, no problem. I think I will attend another church.*” The caveat is that I think you can eat dark chocolate. Enough on food. It is very tough, but eating properly along with getting good exercise reduces stress tremendously.

6. **Just learn to be thankful.** Think of all of the good things that God has provided for you. You have a great Savior to begin with Who will never leave you or forsake you no matter what happens in your life. You are someone who has special gifts and talents that help make you the unique person that you are. Enjoy God’s blessings on your life, and never forget that you have the God-given capacity to become whatever God wants you to become. Live in the present and not the past. Learn to just be thankful for life itself. Paul said this in [Philippians 3:13-14](#),

Php 3:13 (NKJV) Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The most stressful place to try and live is in the past. Why is that? It is simply because you keep trying to change something that you cannot change. Forgive people who have hurt you. Forgiveness is the only way to resolve the hurts of the past. Please understand that God is very serious about forgiveness, so please do not take it lightly or make it optional in your life. Trust me, but the less you are willing to forgive, the greater stress you will experience in your life. You must stop withholding forgiveness until certain conditions are met. When you do that you are simply demanding payment for your forgiveness. Offer forgiveness to those who have hurt you in the same way that God provided forgiveness to you as a gift of His grace.⁸ [Ephesians 4:31-32](#) says,

Eph 4:31 (NKJV) Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. ³² And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.

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⁸ Jantz, 90,93.