

Overcoming Stress

INTRODUCTION:

- A. **Psalm 4:8** – “I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for You alone, LORD, make me live in safety.”
- B. There is a major enemy stalking our land.
1. It is not a respecter of persons.
 2. It seeks to Devour the peace and happiness of everyone it touches if not properly controlled.
 3. Each year
 - a. It causes billions of dollars to be lost in wages to workers.
 - b. It is a major contributor to heart attacks.
 - c. It plays a significant role in raising the blood pressure of millions of Americans.
 - d. It is suspected as a cause of cancer.
 - e. It produces sleepless nights.
 - f. It causes problems in the home.
 - g. It contributes to divorce.
 - h. It leads to depressions and anxiety.
 - i. It contributes to decisions to commit suicide.
 - j. It cause fatigue, headaches, backaches, allergies, nervousness, tiredness, dizziness, ulcers, and a host of other symptoms.
- C. That enemy is **stress!**
- D. **Illustration:**
1. Richard’s weekly routine consisted of some of the following things:
 - a. He worked 40 hours in a factory.
 - b. He got up at four each morning to deliver papers before he went to work.
 - c. He spent a minimum of two hours each day fighting the freeway traffic going to and from work.
 - d. On Saturdays he was taking a course in welding and blueprint reading at a local vocational technical school.
 - e. He stayed up late on Saturday nights preparing for his Bible class the next morning at church.
 - f. Sundays after lunch, he visited the hospitals and convalescent homes, then back to church Sunday night.
 2. Richard was “burning the candle at both ends.”
 - a. Everyone was surprised when Richard, at age 35, had a heart attack.
 - b. Stress was identified as one of the major causes of his attack.
 - c. He was living life in the fast lane . . . His body couldn’t handle all the stress placed upon it.
 - d. Another victim of burnout bites the dust.

- E. Each day thousands like Richard hit the streets in America promising themselves that today will be different.
1. Each day they feel:
 - a. Today I am going to slow down.
 - b. Today there will be less tension.
 - c. Today there will be no frustration or flurry.
 - d. Today there will be less stress.
 2. Instead they step into a world that once again challenges them to shift their pace into high gear.
 - a. Deadlines that must be met.
 - b. Rushing traffic and rude drivers.
 - c. Too many appointments in a limited amount of time.
 - d. Noise that seems to increase throughout the day.
 - e. Racing the clock.
 - f. And a host of other things tighten their neck and back muscles.
 3. Stress from the day is dragged home and into one's family relationships.
 4. Stress out of control is dangerous for the Christian. This is why we must learn to overcome it.
- F. Compared with workers in other countries, Americans work too much. We take little time off for rest and pleasure.
1. More than half of us don't use any vacation time at all, adding up to more than 421 million unused vacation days a year. We're workaholics.
 2. Most Americans only earn on average 14 vacation days a year, compared with
 - a. Our Italian counterparts (42 days a year).
 - b. The French (37),
 - c. Germans (35)
 - d. Canadians (26).
 - e. Even the Japanese--long considered the most over-worked people on Earth--average 25 vacation days a year.
 3. No wonder American job burnout is common from coast to coast.

WHAT IS STRESS?

A. Webster:

1. "Strain, pressure. Force exerted upon the body that tends to strain or deform its shape.
2. Urgency, importance.
3. Tension, strained exertion: as the stress of war."

B. Stress is the result of demands made upon the body.

C. In a paper called *For Your Good Health*, which is distributed by the Martin Luther Hospital Medical Center, Aneheim, California, we have an excellent description of stress: "We use the word stress to describe our reactions when

events or experiences cause mental tension or when our bodies strain to function normally. Stress is reflected as accelerated heartbeat, a rise in blood pressure, bowel or urinary changes, headache or other localized pain, cramped muscles or skin eruptions. It can also affect one's ability to think or behave rationally or appropriately. When mental or emotional stress results in changes in the body's normal physiological pattern or functions the condition is frequently described as psychosomatic in origin (*psyche*: mind . . . *soma*: body.)

- D. In simple terms stress is the wear and tear of life.
1. Some stress can be good for us. The key, however, is in how we adjust to it, and in its duration.
 2. It is long term stress that may kill us.
 - a. The damage comes when the adrenal flow is too long.
 - b. Prolonged stress can create disease and emotional problems.
 - c. Short-term stress is a normal function which is normally handled by glands and organs without any problem.
 - d. Man must have proper relief from stress.
- E. In essence, stress can be considered anything that tends to change the control that one would ordinarily have over their body and/or emotions.

STRESS ACCUMULATION

- A. The damage stress may cause seems to be determined by two factors:
1. The kind/type of stress.
 2. The frequency of the stress. Repeated severe stress makes it difficult for a person to escape emotional or physical problems as a result of it.
- B. Martin Cecil wrote these words entitled "Any Moment" about stress and its affect on our lives.

Any Moment

"Any moment of hating,
Any moment of lying,
Any moment of resentment,
Is a moment of dying.

Any moment of loving,
Any moment of giving,
Any moment of thankfulness,
Is a moment of living.

All our moments add together
Like the digits in a sum
And the answer tells us plain
Whether life or death shall come."

THE BIBLE & STRESS?

A. Moses

1. In Exodus 18 we see God's great leader trying to provide guidance for the nation of Israel . . . It was more than one man can do. 2. Moses' father-in-law Jethro arrives and gives his son-in-law some excellent advice that resulted in the first recorded example of administration.

a. **Exodus 18;14-26** – “When Moses' father-in-law saw everything he was doing for them he asked, ‘What is this thing you're doing for the people? Why are you alone sitting as judge, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?’ ¹⁵ Moses replied to his father-in-law, ‘Because the people come to me to inquire of God. ¹⁶ Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach [them] God's statutes and laws.’ ¹⁷ ‘What you're doing is not good,’ Moses' father-in-law said to him. ¹⁸ **‘You will certainly wear out both yourself and these people who are with you, because the task is too heavy for you. You can't do it alone.** ¹⁹ Now listen to me; I will give you some advice, and God be with you. You be the one to represent the people before God and bring their cases to Him. ²⁰ Instruct them about the statutes and laws, and teach them the way to live and what they must do. ²¹ But you should select from all the people able men, God-fearing, trustworthy, and hating bribes. Place [them] over the people as officials of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. ²² They should judge the people at all times. Then they can bring you every important case but judge every minor case themselves. **In this way you will lighten your load, and they will bear [it] with you.** ²³ If you do this, and God [so] directs you, **you will be able to endure**, and also all these people will be able to go home satisfied.’ ²⁴ Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. ²⁵ So Moses chose able men from all Israel and made them leaders over the people [as] officials of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. ²⁶ They judged the people at all times; the hard cases they would bring to Moses, but every minor case they would judge themselves.”

b. Through their help he would relieve himself of a tremendous stress load and the people from a stressful situation as well.

2. Moses learned a lesson that most people never learn You can't burn the candle at both ends without getting trapped in the middle.

B. David. His life was full of pressure, beginning with the challenge of Goliath and continuing through his reign as king. Some especially stressful events were:

1. When David was running from Saul in an effort to save his life (1 Samuel 21-27).

a. It was during this time that he wrote the timeless and beautiful 23rd

Psalm.

- b. This Psalm has provided more help for people during times of stress than perhaps any other set of words in the Bible.
- 2. David lamented over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. 2 Samuel 1:19-27
- 3. His sin with Bathsheba and the resulting pregnancy. 2 Samuel 11 – 12:24
- 4. The plot to cover up the pregnancy and the murder of Uriah. 2 Samuel 11.
- 5. His mourning over the death of the baby (2 Samuel 12) and later his third eldest son, Absalom. 2 Samuel 18:1-33

C. **Job.**

- 1. It is interesting to note that an article appearing in the July 3, 1981, Volume 246, No. 1 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, had this to say about Job's stress" "Physicians caring for crisis-ridden families have often searched world literature for guidance and wisdom. Outstanding is the story of Job with its three major themes: (1) the impact of concurrent cataclysmic events on one man, including a wracking illness . . . ; (2) the advice of well-meaning friends who do more harm than good; and (3) the inquiring but unrelenting faith of Job."
- 2. One has but to read the book of Job to see the great stress this man of God was under. Some of the major components of his stress are as follows.
 - a. Job was tried by the loss of all his wealth. Job 1:13-17
 - b. Job lost his ten children at one time. Job 1:13-17
 - c. Job was tried by the devices of Satan. Job 2:6
 - d. Job was tried by the loss of his physical health. Job 2:7-9
 - e. Job was rejected by his friends. He was lonely in his predicament. Job 2:11
 - f. Job was mentally distressed. Job 3:11
 - g. Job was tried by the conduct of his wife. Job 2:9
 - h. Job was in a constant state of frustration because he could not get his questions answered.
- 3. It should be noted that through all his stress, Job trusted God and patiently waited for vindication. In the end victory came. Job 42:10-17
- 4. Patience is a great balm for stress.

D. **Jesus Christ**

- 1. From the beginning of His public ministry until His death on the cross, Christ was in one stressful situation after another. In every case He was in control of Himself.
- 2. Some of His stressful situations include:
 - a. His own people (Jews) rejected Him. John 1:11
 - b. He was pressed by crowds. Mark 4:1-2
 - c. People tried to trap Him with questions. Luke 10:25
 - d. The Jews misunderstood Him. John 7:10-13

- e. They sought to kill Him. John 5:16
 - f. They called Him names. Matthew 11:19
 - g. He must have been frustrated at times with His disciples. Mark 4:38-41
 - h. People were constantly asking Him to do something for them.
John 6:15-21
 - i. He was arrested and kept up all night in a series of mock trials.
Mark 14:35 – 15:15
 - j. The beating and suffering before His death on the cross. Mark 15:19-35
- E. **Apostle Paul . . .** The man who went from being the persecutor to being the persecuted.
1. In addition to what Luke recorded in the Book of Acts, a number of times in his writings Paul shared with us some of the pressure points in his life as a Christian.
 - a. He had a burden for the salvation of his own countrymen. Romans 10:1-4
 - b. He was persecuted, but not forsaken, cast down, but not destroyed. 2 Corinthians 4:9
 - c. Read: **2 Corinthians 11:23-28**
23 different circumstances, many often repeated . . . Sources of great stress.
 - d. It is believed that Paul's conversion occurred in 36 A.D. and his death in Rome in 68 A.D. That would indicate a ministry of some 32 years. Since 2 Corinthians was written in 57 A.D. and recorded sufferings Paul had endured up to the time of the writing, **the list would encompass the first 21 years of Paul's 32-year ministry, but would not include the last 11 years of his life and work.** Thus, the list would not include:
 1. The 4th and final year of the 3rd missionary journey.
 2. Paul's arrest and treatment in Jerusalem.
 3. Paul's two-year imprisonment in Jerusalem.
 4. Paul's perilous journey from Caesarea to Rome that included:
 - a. Another shipwreck
 - b. A snakebite
 5. Paul's first Roman imprisonment in Caesarea.
 6. Paul's "house arrest" imprisonment in Rome.
 7. The three-to-four year period between the first and second Roman imprisonment.
 7. Paul's second Roman imprisonment which resulted in his execution.
 - c. Therefore, **the list of sufferings in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 would include Paul's sufferings during the first two-thirds of his 32-year ministry, but not include the final one-third.**
 2. How could one man endure so many life-changes?
 - a. The answer is Christ.

- b. Paul believed he could do all things through his Lord. Philippians 4:13
- c. This suffering saint had learned the fine art of being content in every situation. Philippians 4:11
- d. He had inner control regardless of the outer pressure.

OVERCOMING STRESS?

- A. Remember that we create tension by our inner response to our environment.
- B. Remember that a certain amount of stress is normal. The body has certain built-in responses to stress.
- C. Watch for signs and symptoms of stress, and examine the causes. Take control of your life by realizing your stress level.
- D. Be sure that you have made peace with God.
 - 1. We are promised all spiritual blessing through Christ (Ephesians 1:3) . . . And one of these blessings is peace.
 - 2. **John 14:27** – “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Your heart must not be troubled or fearful.”
 - 3. **John 16:33** – “I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.”
 - 4. **1 Peter 5:7** – “Casting all your care upon Him, because He cares about you.”
- E. In order to win over stress a person must learn to relax.
 - 1. Jesus, in the midst of busy activities, said to His apostles: “He said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a remote place and rest a while.” For many people were coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.” **Mark 6:31**
 - 2. Tim Hansel, in his book *When I Relax I Feel Guilty*, gives us some good remarks on real leisure. He writes: Leisure is more than just non-work. It is a point of contact with reality and a catalyst for new experiences, new ideas, new people, and new places.”
 - a. Be convinced of the importance of quality leisure time in your life.
 - b. Learn how to practice quality leisure.
 - c. We must act on what we know to be true.
 - 3. Even God rested on the seventh day.
- F. Exercise is another great way to relieve some of the daily stresses of life.
- G. Daily periods of meditation on God’s Word is a powerful medicine for stress.
 - 1. **Psalm 119:97** – “How I love Your teaching! It is my meditation all day long.”
 - 2. **Psalm 147:143** – “Trouble and distress have overtaken me, but Your commands are my delight.”
- H. Examine your schedule and remove the items that aren’t important.
 - 1. Most people are under stress because they have too much to do.

2. Learn to say no . . . rather than overload your schedule.
- I. Set aside a period each day and deeply relax all your muscles.
 1. Practice breathing slowly and deeply.
 2. Visualize that all of the stress draining out of your body.
- J. Try to cut down on excessive noise.
 1. Excessive noise can pay havoc on your nerves.
 2. Teach all your family members how to use the volume controls where applicable (TV, radios, Stereos, computers, etc.)
- K. Try to provide your body with a balanced diet.
 1. Such things as sugar and caffeine can cause stress.
 2. Be careful to avoid crash diets.
- L. Try not to be a perfectionist.
 1. Someone has suggested that “Do your best and forget about the rest” is a good motto for stress management.
 2. Be careful about self-created demands.
- M. Proper time management is a positive way to eliminate stress.
 1. Don’t become a slave to the clock.
 2. Life will run smoother when you manage your time wisely.
- N. Arrange some variety in your life . . . recreation and relaxation as well as work.
- O. If the problem of stress doesn’t go away with various self-help approaches, you may want to see your physician for a thorough physical examination.

CONCLUSION:

- A. Stress is an individual thing . . . No two persons react the same way to the pressures and tensions of life.
Illustration: Sunday, August 31, 2008 . . . Hurricane Gustav to make landfall west of New Orleans the following day . . . interview with man who would not evacuate . . . had rebuilt from Katrina three years before . . . During Katrina water began to rise rapidly . . . pull down ladder and sent the love of his life (his wife) up to the attic . . . Before he could climb up the water was up to his waist . . . He climbed up them water was standing nine feet in his house. His wife put her head over on his shoulder and in his arms and died. He was there with her for a day, day-and-a-half before help came. The official cause of her death was determined to be stress.
- B. Be careful about creating stress for others Be aware of others who create stress for you.
- C. Jesus Christ is the answer to all our needs.
 1. Peace is ours to possess . . . The challenge is to claim it.
 2. Work with Jesus to slow down . . . Work with Jesus to calm down . . . Work with Jesus to know His true peace.

D. Orin L. Crain has written, ***Slow Me Down, Lord***

Slow me down, Lord.

Ease the pounding of my heart by the quieting of my mind.

Steady my hurried pace with a vision of the eternal reach of time.

Give me, amid the confusion of the day the calmness of the everlasting hills.

Break the tensions of my nerves and muscles with soothing music of the singing streams that live in my memory.

Teach me the art of taking minute vacations—of slowing down to look at a flower, to chat with a friend, to pat a dog, to smile at a child, to read a few lines from a good book.

Slow me down, Lord, and inspire me to send my roots deep into the soil of life's enduring values, that I may grow toward my greater destiny.

Remind me each day that the race is not always to the swift; that there is more to life than increasing its speed.

Let me look upward to the towering oak and know that it grew great and strong because it grew slowly and well.

E. God's Plan for Man's Salvation