

DEALING WELL WITH STRESS

Life With God In Recovery

RELAPSE PREVENTION: Dealing Well With Stress



Stress has become a universal problem and many medical professionals consider it an underlying cause of numerous health problems. In our personal lives, pressure and stress are attributable to a variety of reasons including, family trouble, financial difficulty, job pressure, health issues and other factors.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4 NIV)

There are a variety of lists that detail stress factors and assign points to its various sources. For example, the most stressful events are: death of a spouse, divorce, marital separation, a jail term, death of a close family member, illness or injury. These events cause legitimate stress and sometimes require lifestyle changes to be dealt with while we are still in emotional pain and feeling distraught. These are not times to isolate! We need to rely on God's promises to us and seek comfort and help from family members and friends.

Don't panic. I'm with you. There's no need to fear for I'm your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you. (Isaiah 41:10 MSG)

Some of us obsess over past events which cannot be changed and allow those events to control our present and future wellbeing. Endlessly we replay the sound of unkind words said to us, or envision the painful incidents which caused us shame. Others are concerned about future events which they feel unable to cope with. Some are fearful about meeting their own physical needs, or the needs of their family, and feel overwhelmed by their responsibilities.

God says: *"Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you. I've called your name. You're mine. When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end—Because I am God, your personal God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior.* (Isaiah 43:1-3 MSG)

There are many reactions to everyday stresses. Some people try to flee the problem in the hope that the irritation will go away. Some internalize the pressure, seeking to suppress it. However, the compression usually spills over into some other area of their lives. Others crumble emotionally, giving way to despair and depression or addictive behaviour.

One of the best responses we can have to stress is to pray. This one seems obvious, but sometimes it's harder than it seems. Praying requires us to focus on who God is and what God is doing rather than obsessing on the problem.

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. (Philippians 4:6 NLT)

God will never permit circumstances to break or shatter us. He knows our frame and will not allow us to be overloaded beyond what we can bear. Rather, He seeks to use our stressful times as opportunities for us to gain His perspective, lean on His strength, and develop perseverance with which we can endure life's ups and downs. God may not change the circumstance that is pressing on us. He may not remove the person who seriously bothers us. He may not heal the condition that daily grates away at our body and soul. But God will dramatically alter our emotions and responses as we turn to Him instead of running or exploding in anger. As we trust in God's power and wisdom to support us and show us new solutions, we gain new spiritual maturity and hardness of spirit.

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. (Psalm 56:3 NIV)

There are a number of practical things we can do to help minimize stress.

1. ***Admit we're stressed.*** As long as we tell ourselves we don't have a problem we're not positioning ourselves to seek a solution.
2. ***Make a list of what's causing stress right now.*** There are some things that cannot be changed and others that can be dealt with. Sorting those out, and taking action where possible, often has a dramatic effect on the level of pressure we are experiencing.
3. ***Review our list with someone we trust.*** If it's stress from being too busy, we need to seek help in setting priorities. If there are situations that require boundaries or some other action, a wise person can help sort out a reasonable path forward. Just knowing someone else cares reduces stress levels as well.
4. ***Ask for help from God, family, friends, or co-workers.*** We have a limited amount of strength and wisdom. As we do all that we can, God will give, and bring alongside us, support and help.
5. ***Think about our use of time.*** Maybe procrastination or poor organization is the root of the problem. We can start using a diary or daytimer, or talk to a counselor or organized friend for tips on how to use our time better.

When we are under stress from an event in our lives, we need to take a more focused approach to all that is going on. We need to be careful not to project into the situation things that don't exist, but are based on our worries or fears.

We need to look realistically at the whole situation and not let the problem become bigger than it actually is. We need to allow past events and hurts to go, and only concentrate on today's challenges, thanking God for His grace as He sustains us. God knows the end from the beginning and has promised to provide love and strength and everything we need for today's challenges.

The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, "The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!" (Lamentations 3:22-24 NLT)

The key to handling stress is to lean on God's power at the initial stage of any problem. God's strength comes as He stabilizes our emotions with His peace, infuses our hearts with His joy, and provides us with His all-sufficient wisdom to deal with any hardship in life. "This too shall pass" is a helpful principle to remember. Good days will return! Even in our worst day of trouble we can get through, get the rest we need, and face each new day with fresh resources.

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-30 NLT)

Questions For Reflection and Discussion

1. In what areas am I particularly vulnerable to allowing stress and anxiety to control my life?
2. What strategies am I willing to implement to help me deal with stress in a healthy way?

Heavenly Father, Thank You for always being there. When my daily life has lots of stressful events and some days feel overwhelming, I invite You to come and strengthen me in the midst of my circumstances. Help me to see things from Your perspective. Help me to rest in Your promise to make a way through each situation, even when I think there is no possible way. Lord, in stressful times, help me to draw close to You and choose to honour You in everything I say and do. Tonight I open my heart to receive Your wisdom, comfort and strength. Amen