



“The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”
(II Timothy 4,18).

Surviving Stress

Central Truth: God gives grace sufficient to bear life's trials.

L200. Date: September 1995. **Text:** II Timothy 4:9-18. **Topic:** Stress.

I asked members of my church to write on a slip of paper and hand to me an area of personal need on which they would like for me to preach. From the scores of responses, the primary area of concern was how to deal with stress. I was surprised. I know we are living in a “rat race,” but I did not realize it affected so many of my people.

Pressures are a normal part of life (John 16:33). There are benefits to be received from trials if they are handled correctly, but harmful stress comes from a wrong response.

Medical specialists report that about 70 percent of the patients who seek out a physician would be healed without medical help if they could get rid of stress caused by fear, worries, guilt, anger, etc. Long-term stress can cause many types of sicknesses: asthma, rheumatism, ulcers, colds, arthritis, migraine headaches, and a host of stomach disorders. God has designed us so that we cannot operate under undue stress. Trials will come, but He has given us a way to survive them without injury.

The Nature of Stress

Stress comes from within. No one can put you under stress. It is your response to external circumstances. Do not blame your associates, your work, your marriage partner, or any other person or thing for the stress you feel. They can create a stressful situation, but you are responsible for the stress you feel. Stress is like anger in that another person can create a

condition to arouse anger, but only you can put anger in your spirit. No one can make you mad, and no one can make you stressful. Assume responsibility for yourself.

Stress is not the result of your having “too much to do.” Many people with no more ability than you accomplish much more without the problem of stress. It is not your workload, but your response to it, that determines whether or not you feel stress.

Stress is essentially a spiritual problem which is manifested physically. That is why you cannot deal successfully with stress apart from God. Secular counselors can help you work on the symptoms, but only God can enable you to root out the cause of the problem.

An Example of a Stressful Situation

Here is a situation in Paul's life that was ready made to fill him with stress. Let's examine it and see how a man of God dealt with it. Restriction of activity may cause stress. Some people feel stress because they are confined in their employment or on a sick bed. But it should not be so.

Paul spent nearly thirty years in world missionary evangelism. But certain fanatical Jews stirred up a mob against him in Jerusalem. He would have been killed by mob violence if the Roman soldiers had not rescued him. For the next few years he was in prison, first in Caesarea and then in Rome. (Read of it in Acts 21:14—28:31.) He was such an active man to be confined to a small room. What an occasion for stress that was; but he was not stressful.

Desertion by your friends may cause stress. What do you do when you are in trouble and do not have one person on whom you can lean for help? Is it proper to feel stress when you have been deserted? Does your friends' absence justify your stress?

Paul stood before Caesar, on trial for his life. But not a Christian in Rome stood with him (II Timothy 4:9-12). Instead of feeling stress, Paul prayed that God would forgive them; then he left the situation with Him.

Opposition by those who would destroy you may cause stress. Someone is after your job. Someone starts a malicious, false rumor to hurt you. A person you considered to be your dearest friend turns against you with vengeance. Is that a sufficient justification for stress? No.

Alexander the coppersmith opposed Paul. He was such a dangerous man that Timothy was warned to beware of him (II Timothy 4:13-15). But Paul did not despair. Even standing in the Caesar's court before an unsympathetic and pagan judge, he did not suffer stress.

Is it possible that you should not feel stress in your difficult situations? Yes! You should live without suffering from stress and its related problems. There is no question but that it is God's will for you to live above it. That is why the Bible says, "*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God*" (Philippians 4:6). But that raises the question of how a person can live free from stress.

Relief From Stress

Here are some biblical guidelines on how to be free from stress. Study them carefully; embrace them sincerely; review them periodically; and apply them regularly. Then be at peace.

Realize God's presence with you. Paul faced the Roman emperor in a trial for his life. Not a Christian in Rome identified with him in that hour of need. But he was not alone. He wrote, "*No man stood with me, but all men forsook me. . . . Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; . . . and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion*" (II Timothy 4:16,17).

Stand without the conscious help of God and stress will overwhelm you. But reckon on His promise, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*" (Hebrews 13:5), and you will find relief.

Expect God's deliverance. Listen again to Paul: "*The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; . . . and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen*" (II Timothy 4:17, 18). That assurance is based upon three things.

(1) God is fully aware of your situation. He knows your condition, your opponents, and your resources; and He will deliver you.

(2) God sets limits on your situation. He will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability to bear it, but will make a way for you to escape from the trial (I Corinthians 10:13).

(3) God will bring deliverance to you in the midst of the trial. Believe it and rejoice. Your stress will vanish in the presence of your joy in the Lord.

Follow God's wisdom. Common sense tells you what to do to relieve your distress. Think upon these biblical and practical suggestions.

(1) Take some time off. Even Jesus took His disciples away from the pressures of ministry that they might rest awhile (Mark 6:31). The world will not cease rotation, neither will your business go bankrupt, if you take a "breather" now and again.

(2) Budget your time. Much stress comes from overload. Many of us

find it difficult to say no when our help is requested. But it is better to do a few things well than to do many things poorly. There are only twenty-four hours in a day, and your fretting will not change that. Let go of the good for the sake of doing the better.

(3) Overcome your inadequacy. Learn what your duties are and train to do them to the best of your ability. God has given us both natural talents and spiritual gifts. Thus we have the capacity for work in both the natural and spiritual realms. That should be a great relief to the tension we would feel otherwise. Become a specialist in the one thing, and adequate worker in other things, and let the rest go without worry.

(4) Live one day at a time. Guard against worry. Never borrow worries from tomorrow or hold to those of yesterday. (Think about this saying: "I know worry works because 90 percent of the things I worry about never happen!") Jesus said we are to live without fretting (Matthew 6:34). Approach each day with this spirit: "*This is the day which the LORD hath made, we will rejoice and be glad in it*" (Psalm 118:24). Begin the day in that spirit and remind yourself of it all through the day. Stress cannot survive in that atmosphere.

(5) Wait for God to provide. Do not assume responsibility for what you cannot do. The disciples could not provide food for the multitude, but Jesus could (Mark 6:37). They waited for Him to act and then distributed what He provided. Learn to live in the strength of the Lord, not under the load of your problem (II Corinthians 12:9). Much of our stress is relieved when we look to God's resources rather than our own. "*Wait on the LORD, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD*" (Psalm 27:14).

(6) Discipline your mind. The spiritual battle is fought in the mind. If your mind is filled with fretting, your emotions will be filled with stress. You are as you think in your heart (Proverbs 23:7); therefore, discipline your mind to think of God's presence, God's provision, and God's personal involvement with you in your situation. That is not a form of self-hypnosis. It is laying hold on your divine resource of relationship with God. Worry and stress are mental/emotional problems. Keep your mind on God, and the problems will disappear.

(7) Practice relaxation. Remember that Jesus took His disciples aside so that they might rest and be refreshed (Mark 6:31). When you work, work hard. When you rest, relax completely. (That is very difficult to do when listening to some types of music or watching some types of television shows.) Be quiet.

(8) Vary your activities. Solomon was a king, sage, musician, and poet

(I Kings 4:32, 33). But he did not try to do all those things at the same time or complete them by five o'clock in the afternoon. Just a change of the type of work will often relieve the distress you feel.

(9) Center your thoughts on God. “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*” (I Corinthians 10:31). Keeping your thoughts on yourself always results in anxiety. Learn to be content with your present circumstances and lean on Him. The Bible says, “*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee*” (Isaiah 26:3). Try it for relief from stress.

(10) Take everything to God in prayer. A paraphrase of Philippians 4:6 reads, “Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God your needs and don't forget to thank Him for His answers.” What a blessed remedy that is for all stress! Take your burden (stress) to the Lord and leave it there.

(11) Turn your attention to serving others in Jesus' name. You will forget about your troubles when you bear the burdens of others. Paul was concerned about the Christians in Philippi; so he wrote them a letter. His most rejoicing epistle (Philippians) was written while he was in prison in Rome. You can cultivate enthusiasm and joy when your concern is for others.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you define stress?
2. In what situations do you experience stress?
3. How are you responsible for your own stress?
4. How does Paul demonstrate the way to handle stressful situations?
5. How does God's presence relieve your stress?
6. What does I Corinthians 10:13 teach about handling stress?
7. How can Psalm 118:24 help you live without stress?
8. What does Philippians 4:8 say about relief from stress?