

Learning to Deal With Stress In A Positive Way

April 3, 2005

Luke 12:22-31 (NLT)

Then turning to his disciples, Jesus said, "So I tell you, don't worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or clothes to wear. [23] For life consists of far more than food and clothing. [24] Look at the ravens. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than any birds! [25] Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not! [26] And if worry can't do little things like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things?

[27] "Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. [28] And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith! [29] And don't worry about food—what to eat and drink. Don't worry whether God will provide it for you. [30] These things dominate the thoughts of most people, but your Father already knows your needs. [31] He will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern.

I want to talk to you today about learning to deal with stress in a positive way.

I think by now everybody knows how bad stress can be for your health. Recently, a research team at the University of California in San Francisco found that chronic stress appears to shorten the life span of cells and that in turn shortens a person's life span. One of the common factors found among people who live to be 100 or more is their ability to handle stress.

We all have to deal with stress. There is no way to live a stress free life. It is true that some jobs and some circumstances are more stressful than others, but everyone has to deal with stressful situations. There's no way to avoid it.

Therefore, the key is not to try to eliminate stress from our lives, that's impossible. What we have to do is learn how to deal with stress in a positive way.

Stedman's Medical Dictionary defines stress like this:

“**The reactions of the body** to forces of a deleterious nature, infections, and various abnormal states that end to disturb its normal physiologic equilibrium.”

Dr. Hans Selye, the man who is credited with bringing the idea of stress to the forefront of awareness defined stress as “the nonspecific **response of the body** to any demand made upon it.”

Notice that stress is defined as “**the reactions of the body**” and “**the response of the body**” to certain negative forces, not the negative forces themselves.

Since we cannot eliminate stress from our lives, we must learn to manage our reaction to the things and events that cause stress.

The Apostle Paul had evidently learned to deal with stressful situations in his life in a positive way. He said.....

Philip. 4:11-13 (NLT)

..... for I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. [12] I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. [13] For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.

Wow! That's an incredible statement! Paul said, "I have learned the secret of living "stress free" in every situation."

None of us knows when we will be faced with a stressful situation. But you can be sure that sooner or later we all will.

I received a letter a few weeks ago from a lady in our church who has had more than her share of stressful situations recently.

Her husband has had diabetes for sixteen years. Two years ago he lost circulation in his foot. He went through four operations before finally losing his toe. He has been unable to work for over two years. Last October he

went into the hospital with a bad staff infection. He went back in December. The infection was so bad that he almost died. His kidneys have almost quit working. They are working at only 14 %.

Last year her daughter gave birth to a little baby girl. When I say little, I mean tiny. She was four months premature, weighed 1lb. 4 ounces and was 11 inches long. She stayed in the neo-natal intensive care unit for four months. She is home now but faces several other problems with her health.

I gave you all that background to help you appreciate the letter I am about to read to you.

Pastor,

I could go on and on about the things that God has put in my path but seeing these things in my life showed me how to walk in faith when I got laid off at my job. I hope this will help someone to not give up. Hold on; walk by faith and not by sight, don't let the flesh take over. Keep in prayer, tell your church and church family.

Testimony of Debbie Martinez:

Faith:

For the third time now I have been laid off. On January 28, 2005, after five years at my job, I was called into the office and told that I was being laid off. As I was talking to the girl in the office, I could see her and hear her but something in my spirit was talking to me louder than she was. I could feel the presence of God all around me. I could feel Him on my shoulders and hear Him saying very clearly, "I am here! Lean on Me! Let me carry you. I have been caring for you all this time."

He continued to talk to me and said, "Have faith in Me and let me show you how I will take care of you and your family."

I left the company with a smile on my face and told some friends goodbye. The girl in the office told me that I was handling the news better than she expected. I did take the news better than she expected because I knew that this layoff was coming. God prepared me by going to church and learning about Jesus in my life. Listening to you Pastor has helped me grow so much.

When I got home I told Gilbert (my husband) about the news and finished by saying, “God is in control of what is to come and I am going to live by faith and not by sight.”

I called the prayer line for prayer. I am going to look for work but first I am going to take care of the things that need to be done at home and help Deborah with Aria and her needs. I took Gilbert to Strawberry Clinic because when I got laid off I lost my insurance so I had to get him a gold card. He needs so much medicine that I knew we were not going to be able to afford it any other way. I had no insurance, no food, no money and I went to get emergency assistance with the Department of Human Services or Food Stamps. I was able to get Gilbert his medicine and food stamps.

Once I did that, I went to file for unemployment and started to look for some kind of work. When Sunday came, I went to Sunday school and asked for prayer and support. I felt God’s Spirit so strong with me. I could feel Him working in my life. My church friends came through again, my Sunday school came through again and my family and friends came through again. I know that God’s Spirit came through again.

There were one or two days during all of this that I will say that my flesh had doubt. But my faith, my teaching, my growth, my mentors, and my walk with the Lord are stronger and bolder than FLESH. I am walking by faith this time and not by sight.

On Friday, February 21st, I was called in for an interview by the temporary agency that I was registered with. I was so restless the night before the interview but God confirmed in my spirit that it was going to go well and it did.

That Sunday, I told my Sunday school teacher, “I know I got the job in my spirit, now I am going to wait for the call.”

Monday, the temporary agency called at 9:00 a.m. and asked me, “When can you start?” Not only did I get the job, but they gave me more money than I was expecting. I told her that I could start now and I went in at noon.

I hung up the phone and said, “Thank you God for taking care of me and for giving me the faith to let You handle my life.” I know You are always there.

I have had to be the head of my household. I am the only one bringing in any income, but I know through my faith that You are the head of my household. You control me in and out and I walk by faith and not by sight.”

From January 28th through February 21st God lead me to this job. God took care of me. He carried me through the storm. I walked by faith. I wrote this to tell someone or to help someone to walk by faith and not by sight. Don't pick up the cross, let Jesus carry you. “He's got your back”. Our flesh is weak but our faith is strong.

Thank you Lord. Thank you Jesus. Thank you Pastor. Thank you church family. Thank you Family and Friends. Thank you my three girls. Thank you for all the prayers. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

That is a wonderful testimony!

Debbie had every opportunity to be depressed. A lot of people having to deal with all those problems would have been discouraged, critical, negative, and ready to give up. But you don't hear that in Debbie's letter. She's not bitter. She's not critical. She's thankful! She has learned to deal with stress in a positive way.

In his book, “Your Best Life Now”, Joel Osteen writes.....

In my life, I've discovered two kinds of faith.....a **delivering** faith and a **sustaining** faith. Delivering faith is when God instantly turns your situation around. When that happens, it's great. But I believe it takes a greater faith and a deeper walk with God to have sustaining faith. That's when circumstances don't change immediately, but you say, “God, I don't care what comes against me, I don't care how long it takes, this thing is not going to defeat me. It's not going to get me down. I know You're on my side. And as long as You are for me, that's all that matters.”

Sustaining faith is what gets you through those dark nights of the soul when you don't know where to go or what to do, and it seems that you can't last another day...but because of your faith in God, you do.

When you have that kind of attitude, the adversary doesn't have a chance with you. Besides, it's not usually adversaries that cause our problems; it's how we respond to our adversaries. You can have a little, bitty problem and it can defeat you.

On the other hand, I've seen people dealing with huge problems....tragic deaths in the family, incurable diseases, divorce, bankruptcy, and all sorts of other calamities....yet they are happy and at peace. They are determined to live in victory!"

I have read a lot of suggestions from experts about how to manage stress.

Keith W. Schnert, M.D., has listed seven rules for good health: never smoke cigarettes, avoid alcohol or use it moderately, get regular physical activity, sleep 7 to 8 hours regularly, maintain proper weight, eat breakfast, and don't snack between meals.

He has also developed what he refers to as the "**secret seven**" for effectively managing stress: accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, fill your cup with good will, do what you like, accept your flaws, collect people not things, find wisdom for living in Bible study and church."

Dr. Schnert has given some wonderful advice. He has made it about as simple as you can make it. The last one is especially important.... "find wisdom for living in Bible study and church".

The greatest lesson I've learned in dealing with stress is that God is faithful. Things may look hopeless but if I will just be patient, do my part, and trust in Him, He will bring me through.

Stress is really the product of worry. Worry produces stress.

That's why Jesus specific told us not to worry. He said.....

Luke 12:25-26 (NLT)

[25] Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? Of course not!
[26] And if worry can't do little things like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things?

Paul put it like this.....

Philip. 4:6-7 (NLT)

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. [7] If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Don't worry about anything. Pray about everything. Tell God what you need. Thank Him for all He has done.

That's Paul's prescription for peace. Does it work? You bet it does!

Another way of saying that is "Learn to worship God regardless of your situation. Paul said....."

Philip. 4:4 (NKJV)

Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!

Let me tell you one more story. This seems to be a day for telling stories.

This story was told by a young man named Brian Doerksen.

He wrote the song, **"Come, Now is the Time For Worship"**. That song is sung in churches throughout the world.

He said, "That song came to me at the end of the darkest and lowest season of my life, the summer of 1977. We had tried a major ministry project that had failed. A group working with me, and I, lost over one million dollars. I lost our home.

I moved to England and became the Worship Pastor of Southwest London Viveyard, meeting in Elliot School. I had no other place to live and no job offers. I felt as if I was barely hanging on to my faith in God. We were severely tested both with our losses and with finding out that three of our six children had a condition called Fragile X Syndrome, a form of mental retardation.”

“One morning, within months of moving to London, I went for an exercise and prayer walk, as I often did. I walked just to clear my head, to pray, to give my day to God, and to pour out some of my pain and my dreams. As I was walking through southwest London, very close to Wembleton Stadium, I heard this line as clear as a bell, floating through the air, **“Come, now is the time for worship...”**”

I thought, Wow!, the call of worship is being sounded all of the time and in all kinds of ways. God is reaching out to us as His creation, inviting us to come to do the very best. I was sweating, and walking, and singing that line over and over again, just sensing the nearness and the presence of God.”

“When I arrived back at home I ran upstairs-- I think the kids were getting ready for school and for breakfast. I sat down at the piano and found the key of the song I had just heard and began to playing it over and over again, trying to unlock, ‘What is that song? I took a pad and began to write down everything I could think of concerning a call to worship. How is He inviting us? Is He saying, ‘Come, just as you are, come to me?’ Suddenly I realized that I was in my own dark time, and that **His call to worship doesn’t come only to those who have it all together, that have no doubts, that have no darkness or hard experiences, but it comes to all of us, across the board..**”

The time to worship is when everything is going well and the time to worship is when everything is not going well. If you want to deal with stress in a positive way learn to worship God everyday regardless of your circumstances.

Remember the encouragement of this old hymn.....

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of Earth with grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

We all have to deal with stressful situations. We can either let them overcome us or we can overcome them. I choose to do my part in dealing with whatever circumstances may arise. But I also choose to trust God to handle the things that are out of my control and to work things out for me.

He is faithful.

Philip. 1:6 (NKJV)

being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

Give invitation!