

HANDLING STRESS



Handling Stress

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Handling Stress

Lesson One

The Lord is my shepherd

One or two stats:

- 1) 74% of the population in the UK last year felt overwhelmed or unable to cope.
- 2) It is now the single biggest cause of sickness absence in the UK.
- 3) 17.9 million working days were lost due to work related stress.
- 4) 70-90% of all visits to the doctor are stress related.
- 5) Stress is linked to six leading causes of death.
 - Heart disease
 - Cancer
 - Lung ailments
 - Accidents
 - Cirrhosis of the liver
 - Suicide

God knows this, that is why the most publicised passage of Scripture in the world is:

Psalm 23

“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul.”

Do you know more familiar words in Scripture?

You will experience stress in every avenue of your life:

- Relationships
- Health
- Place of work
- When studying
- Home
- Local community
- The world generally

Stress can be **ONGOING** or **QUICKLY RESOLVED**

Stress can be **MILD** or **SEVERE**
Stress can be carried in **THE BODY** or **THE MIND**

SO! Part of life is “MANAGING STRESS”

Your ability to cope is related in part to the **RESOURCES** you have:

RESOURCES like:

- Money
- Education
- Intelligence
- Power
- Self confidence

And other **INTERNAL** and **EXTERNAL** qualities.

As Christians the most important **RESOURCE** we possess is “Our relationship with Jesus Christ”

Psalm 23 “A psalm for living not dying”

What tremendous confidence David had:

“I shall not be in want”.
“I shall not lack”.

- There will never arise a need in my life for which I shall not have the supply.
- Spiritual - Physical - Financial - “I shall not lack”.
- He did not stipulate the need:- money, food, health, clothes.
- He left it unlimited.

Depleted resources

Over time your resources can be depleted.

When stress is chronic and seems unending your resources are taxed.

For Example: You become redundant, you have some money saved, but over time the money runs out.

Resources are usually limited:

- But God is an unlimited resource that can be accessed continuously.
- His promises never run out.
- His presence is always with you.

Psalm 23: What was the secret of David's assurance?
Is it possible for you and me to share that assurance?
David's secret is very simple, very clear.
"The Lord is My Shepherd".

That was the sole and sufficient basis of David's assurance.

It is not a statement of doctrine.
But a statement of relationship.

An intimate personal relationship with the Lord.

1. There is much you can do to manage stress.
2. You can even eliminate some of it.
3. But your best resource is your Shepherd the Lord.

God never intended you to handle life's problems alone!

The church body

Elders, brothers and sisters - are there to help you.

Their job is - to point you to the GREAT SHEPHERD
to open up the scriptures to you.
the church is to be a resource for you.

Positive and negative stress

Some stress can activate and energise us others cause: fatigue, irritability and depression.

Both positive and negative needs to be managed.

Positive stress

- You sit on the top of a roller coaster - the feeling is terror mixed with excitement.
- You prepare for an exam - anticipating and dreading to know if you can answer the questions,
- Preparing for marriage - how will the biggest day of your life work out.
- Having a baby.
- Moving house.

In all these, stress comes and goes.

It makes life exciting, fun and challenging.
It taxes our bodies but we quickly recover and move on.

Negative stress

- Too much or over a long period it becomes negative.
- Leads to physical exhaustion and emotional despair.
- You have all experienced negative stress that taxed your resources.

Understanding stress

In order to break free it is important to understand how stress operates in your life.

1. Identify the stress, what are you stressing over?
 - An event: divorce, death, break-in
 - A change: a move, promotion
 - The environment: traffic, overcrowding
 - Development: marriage, parenting
 - Perceptions: worrier, distrustful
 - Personality: organiser, perfectionist
2. How much stress is in your life at one time?
1 or 2 small problems; 5 or 6 major problems
Have you taken on too many responsibilities?
3. Is the stress major or minor?
Do you turn mole hills into mountains?
4. Is the stress predictable or unpredictable?
Acute - happens regularly - repair man fails to turn up.
Chronic - fighting long term illness.

The Importance of resources

Resources are critical.

When you have used them up you are in trouble:

1. Relationships - family, friends, church community, fellowship groups.
2. Finances - God gives us the ability to make wealth.
3. Status and Power - Need to know who we are - where we are seated.
4. Character - characteristics, positive optimism, patience, long-suffering, the fruit of the Spirit.
5. A Positive attitude - "As a man thinks so he is".

6. Health - *“though I walk through the valley I will not fear”*
7. Talents and ability.
8. Organisation

How do you build up your resources?

How do you expand your resources?

Through your relationship with Christ and his Word.

Paul says:

Romans 7:24: “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death. Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord”.

Being a Christian NO WAY excludes you from stress.

In fact if ‘persecuted’ and ‘ridiculed’ your stress increases.

***Psalm 23: “The Lord is My Shepherd” ‘not was’ or ‘will be’
“here and now” “The Lord is MY Shepherd”.***

My personal Saviour who promises to meet all my needs.

Handling Stress

Lesson Two

I will fear no evil

Recap

Stress is part of life.

We cannot eliminate it but we must manage it.

David lived a really troubled life but learnt an important lesson.

His answer is found in the 23rd Psalm.

Some stress is positive - some stress is negative.

Some stress is acute - some stress is chronic.

We must understand what stresses us.

We must recognise what resources we have to handle stress.

Last week we discovered the Christian's greatest resource.

Psalm 23: 1,2,3 **“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures,
He leads me besides quiet waters,
He restores my soul.”**

Today David takes us a step further:

Psalm 23: 4 **“Even though I walk through the valley of the
shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for
you will be with me; your rod and your staff
they comfort me.”**

Stress is walking through valleys, they come to all of us.

Not only death but many other valleys.

Bereavement, loneliness, sickness, persecution, discouragement.

As in verse 1 he made a promise never to leave us in want.

In verse 4 he makes 2 further promises.

- 1). He promises to be with us.
- 2). He promises to make his rod and staff available to us.

Note: the rod comes before the staff.

Rod = discipline Staff = support

If we want God's support we must submit to his discipline.
On that basis his presence is guaranteed.

"For you will be with me"

Here is love, vast as the ocean,
Loving-kindness as the flood,
When the Prince of Life, our ransom,
Shed for us His precious blood.
Who His love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing His praise?
He can never be forgotten,
Throughout heaven's eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion,
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God's mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
And heaven's peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love.

Let me, all Thy love accepting,
Love Thee, ever all my days;
Let me seek Thy kingdom only,
And my life be to Thy praise;
Thou alone shalt be my glory,
Nothing in the world I see;
Thou hast cleansed and sanctified me,
Thou Thyself hast set me free.

- God desires intimacy - relationship with you,
- He wants you to get to know him,
- Jesus said when you pray - "Our Father"
- The more intimate your relationship the greater the RESOURCE.
- Before God became your greatest resource - you trusted in your own ability and strength.

Romans teaches us: Before Christ saved us we were dead to God and lived according to our sinful nature.

Salvation requires us to: Consider our old nature dead and offer ourselves to God.

Because of his great love for us he will be with us, direct our life, strengthen us and never leave us.

Often we pray and do what we want INSTEAD OF praying and letting God do what he wants.

Two aspects of stress management as a Christian

1) Are you doing things that bring stress into your life?

We bring stress into our lives by the choices we make.

- So
1. Take an inventory of your life.
 2. Make better choices.
 3. Make changes where you can.

Are you struggling with things that control you?

- An addiction: Food, alcohol, cigarettes, TV, sport.
- Sexual sin: lust, images, thought life.
- Out of balance at work: escaping home, family and church.
- Prideful ambition: success, money, appearance.

You are adding stress to your life.

Repent and get help

Line your behaviour up with biblical principles.

Following God's direction brings supernatural peace.

2) Stop relying on your ability to get through

God has designed us to be dependent on others.

God has designed us to be dependent on HIM.

HE is the source of our strength and the strength in our lives.

Act as if the situation depends on you but know that God is in control.

When we depend on God to champion our cause:

- He will fight our battles
- Deliver or walk us through a fire
- We are relieved from carrying the weight of such burdens.

Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened ...For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Don't fight daily stress alone.

Not all situations in our lives resolve quickly.

Christians call this "REFINING FIRE" OR "PRUNING"

Stressful times are moments to practice what you know to be true of God.

- Conforming to his image
- Renewing your mind
- Standing firm
- Confessing his promises

God wants to show you his LOVE and COMPASSION as you walk through difficult times.

As well as his POWER when he delivers you from them.

God does not always heal those we pray for, in those times he wants us to stand with them and love them.

God is your REFUGE you must go to him.

Biblical prescription for worry and anxiety related to stress

Philippians 4: 6-9

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

- 1) Thank God - not for the stress you are experiencing, thank him for who he is. Talk to God and tell him your requests.
- 2) Meditate on good and positive things - good results.
- 3) RESULT - The peace of God will be with you.

GOD: Wants to help you
 Wants to be with you
 Wants to bring you peace

Handling Stress

Lesson Three

You prepare a table before me

Recap

Lesson 1 Stress is part of life

Positive makes life exciting, fun and challenging.

Negative chronic situations that tax your resources

You can't totally eliminate but "learn to manage."

We looked at "resources to manage stress"

Your greatest resource is 'Jesus the Good Shepherd'

Lesson 2 Trusting God to shepherd you is essential.

Using God's rod and staff, discipline and support is essential, no rod no support.

In this lesson we move on to step 3

***Psalm 23: 5. "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."***

A prepared table

Your enemies: Problems, hardships, difficulties, enemies, (the unavoidable stress of life).

- 1) Jesus said: ***Luke 6:48. "When the flood came and the torrent struck."***
- 2) James said : ***James 1:2. "Whenever you face trials of many kinds."***
- 3) Paul said: ***Ephesians 6:10 "Put on the full armour so you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."***
- 4) David said: ***Psalm 2. "Why do the nations conspire."
Psalm 3. "How many rise up against me."
Psalm 4. "Give me relief from my distress."***

David's reassurance

God has prepared a table before you in the presence of your enemies.
Can you see it?

Last week an “invisible highway” this week an “invisible table”.

Isaiah 35:8 “And a highway will be there, it will be called the Highway of Holiness.”

What is it that is causing stress and worry?

- Something material - money, home, car.
- Something spiritual. - faith, hope, grace
- Something emotional - love, joy, peace
- Something physical. - strength, healing, relief from pain.

The Good Shepherd says.

- “Come to the table”.
- “Let’s fellowship together”.
- “Talk it over with me”.
- “Can I meet your need”.

What was in David’s mind when he wrote this?

Psalm 78: 19-29. “They spoke against God saying, “Can God spread a table in the desert? When he struck the rock, water gushed out, and streams flowed abundantly. But can he also give us food? Can he supply meat for his people?” When the Lord heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance. Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat. He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power. He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore. He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents. They ate till they had more than enough for he had given them what they craved.”

We will confine ourselves to the simple fact.

God was able to spread a table before them in the desert.

- It consisted of. - abundant water from the rock.
- the grain of heaven.
- bread of angels.
- all the food they could eat.
- fresh quail in abundance.

And it came in abundance despite their unbelief!

Some things to note from Psalm 23

- 1) God provides for you in the presence of your enemies.
God did not have problems with the desert but his people.
- 2) Your enemies cannot prevent you from enjoying God's provision.
The desert did not stop God providing water and food in abundance.
Our impossibilities are God's possibilities.
God asks Abraham "Is there anything too hard for God?"
- 3) In fact, God delights in being God in such situations.
Stress builds when we go to the 'tree of good and evil'. Act independent of God. Demonstrating his power and providing in abundance when the devil thinks he has you beaten.
- 4) Then he says to your enemies. "This is my provision for my children." They will enjoy it right before your eyes." "You will not be able to harm them or take it from them."
- 5) The problem is we take our eyes off the virtual table and place them on our problem.
Result, we worry and get stressed.
But the problem is virtual and the table is real in the Spirit.

Then we say:

"If it were not for my enemies I know God would bless and provide for me".

His name is Saviour, he is saving all the time.

For Jesus to be your Saviour you must need saving daily!

Instead our attitude should be:

"Because of my enemies I'm expecting God's best".

Joy in the midst of trials

Psalm 23: 5 "You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

What does this anointing represent?

Psalm 45: 7 "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

What is the overflowing cup?

God's provision of abundance.

A special message for the worriers amongst us!

- 1) Don't worry about the past you cannot change.
Don't worry about the future you cannot control.
Jesus only allows us to worry about today "or live for today" = No worries.
- 2) Will you worry in heaven? No Why not?
Nothing to worry about. You still have a past and a future.
But Jesus will be there! Is he not here?

God might just let you worry until you learn to TRUST HIM.

Paradise now Learn to live for today

Metaphorically - Jesus is crucified between two thieves who represented
"YESTERDAY" and "TOMORROW"

One robber was in bondage to his past and all of the evil he had done.

The other had his attention on the future saying: "Lord when you come into your kingdom remember me".

The Lord corrected his emphasis when he said: "*Today you will be with me in Paradise*".

What did Jesus mean?

Yesterday does not exist
Tomorrow does not exist

THE ONLY THING THAT EXISTS IS THE PRESENT.

Moses asked God what name he would know him by.
God said his name was "I AM" not "I WAS" or "I WILL BE".

It does not matter how you failed yesterday or how many you have led to Christ in the past.

Tomorrow is beyond your control.

TODAY if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

GOD IS THE GOD OF TODAY WORRY AND STRESS ARE PART OF YESTERDAY AND TOMORROW.

Handling Stress

Lesson Four

Surely goodness and love will follow me

Recap Looking at Psalm 23 to handle and reduce stress.

Verse 1 ***“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.”*** Learn to trust the Lord in all situations.

Verse 4 ***“I will fear no evil for you will be with me: your rod and your staff they comfort me.”*** Learn to apply the rod of discipline and lean upon the staff of the Lord.

Verse 5 ***“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”*** Learn to visit God’s table when in danger and take what you need.

Finally step 4 ***Psalm 23:6 “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life.”***

Three clear promises or assurances

- 1). “Surely” Not ‘maybe’ or ‘I might’
“SURELY” an INDISPUTABLE FACT.”
- 2). SURELY WHAT? ***“Goodness and love will follow me.”***
- 3). WHEN? ***“All the days of my life.”***

We need like the Psalmist to take an ‘OVERVIEW’ of our life.

Any single PARAGRAPH or CHAPTER when dismantled from the whole can be dire. The life and ministry of Jesus was perfect but there were many dark chapters.

•Jesus through the darkest day of his life could see through the shame and the pain the joy set before him.

•Though the jars were empty at the marriage in Cana the best wine was yet to come.

•Paul considering his hardship and ours said: ***Romans 8:18 “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”***

Let's focus on "the goodness and love that will follow us".

3 applications:

1) God's dealings with us

As we journey through life we will get some things right and some things wrong.

When we act righteously God smiles upon us.

"Basking in the sunshine of a lovely summers day".

When we act UNRIGHTEOUSLY we should attract his WRATH.

"Depressed because of a dreary, overcast winters day.

But because of his mercy, he sent Jesus, who through faith in him deflects God's wrath from us onto him.

So his goodness and love (forgiveness) follow us all the days of our life.

GOD IS ALWAYS DIRECTING HIS GOODNESS AND LOVE TOWARDS US.

GOD KEEPS NO RECORD OF OUR WRONGS ONLY OUR RIGHTS.

2). God's angelic protection for us

On this journey you will come under enemy (Satanic) attack.

We need some assistance.

CAN YOU SEE THEM? WHO? GOODNESS AND LOVE

Two enormous angels on each shoulder.

Goodness will 'carry you through' - Love will 'lift you up'.

3). The aftermath of your presence

As you look behind on your journey, what have you left in your train - broken relationships, tragedy, criticism OR a trail of goodness and love.

The more goodness and love you leave behind the less stress you create for yourself and others.

Happiness

Unhappiness is an important part of life

BUT so is happiness.

To reduce the stress levels in your life do all you can to generate happiness.

Some helpful tips

- 1) When you are with others THINK of their point of view.
As you do many conflicts will disappear.

For example: I have some very definite ideas about church and ministry but not everybody agrees with me. In yielding, God still has his way. Whether I am right or wrong.

- 2) Do not only THINK about the immediate consequences of your choice but the short, medium and long term consequences.

For example: Borrow now, pay later: Invest today for a brighter future.

- 3) THINK of happiness as a natural state and unhappiness as an intrusion, like you do a cold to health.

For example: Think of six good reasons why you should be happy: Heaven, Jesus, Family, Church, Health, Prosperity, Future hope.

- 4) Learn to adjust to the present situation: Failure to adjust has no advantage.

For example: I don't like the fact I can't park outside my front door. I need to be happy I can park within three streets.

- 5) If you are in the habit of focusing attention on the negative aspects you will always be unhappy. If you learn to focus on the positive you can learn to be happy.

For example: The media tend to celebrate disaster, criticism, wrongdoing and scandal because it is an easy way to arouse interest. It requires more skill to arouse interest from happiness. News about a person's weakness is always more interesting than hearing about his strength.

- 6) Most of our thinking is judgement based.
Argument - Logical deduction - Proving a point.
All is good but not the whole picture.

We also need to think: Creatively - Inventively - Objectively.

Judgement: brings the past into the present.

Creative thinking: brings the future into the present.

For example: If our relationship got off on the wrong foot and you always see me like that our friendship is doomed. If you can see us getting along okay in the future you will be able to bring that into the present.

Creating or reducing stress at point of contact

At every point of contact: a greeting, a word, a conversation, or a discussion.

You deposit: happiness, goodness mercy : positive blessing
Or sadness, unkindness, judgement : negative experience

Let's think about reducing stress for ourselves and others by making sure
"goodness and love follow us every day of our lives".

