



Christian Counseling

Equipping People for Life...

STRESS

Stress affects every one of us, and a fruitful life depends on effective skills for handling it well. [See Scripture reference (a) at the end of the article.]

STRESS: our response to any events which require adaptation on the part of the total person.

1. Stress is a normal part of life. Up to a point, stress is helpful and healthy; an optimum amount of stress stimulates, invigorates and motivates. Only when it overloads the total person or any part does it become destructive.
2. The total amount of stress experienced at any given time adds up, and the total amount may cause a breakdown of some kind if it is overwhelming. Some Christians seem to believe that there is no limit to the amount of stress they can handle. But each of us must learn to recognize our own danger point, and do everything possible to prevent stress from going beyond the point of coping.
3. It's true that the effects of stress do accumulate when it is unresolved. The Bible encourages us with the fact that heavy stress can actually be constructive for those who resolve it in God's strength. Stress has the potential of producing more endurance and maturity of character, resulting in a greater ability to cope. (b)
4. Spiritual resources provide great potential for adequately resolving stress. This is a common theme in the Word. (c)
5. Even when handled well, stress situations often cause distress. The unresolved mental and emotional stress can cause us to over- react to the everyday stress in our lives.

DISTRESS: Direct, specific emotional responses consciously linked to the source of stress.

We must lay to rest the myth of the "spiritual giant" who feels no emotional pain or upset when under stress. This is contrary to the Word as seen, for example, in the lives of Paul, David, and Jesus Himself. The fact is that the spiritual person will experience distress when under intense stress.

INTERNAL STRESS: Internal stress is the burden of unresolved mental and emotional stress we carry with us at a given time, and bring to the new stress situation. Internal stress can easily make up more than half the total stress experienced in a difficult situation.

Three Types of Internal Stress

1. Unrealistic Expectations- are usually held tightly and you may not even realize the conflict between what you believe 'should' happen and what is happening.(d)

Twelve common beliefs which can cause additional distress when added to our already hectic lives:

- I should be perfect.
- I should be the best.
- I should win.
- I should succeed.
- I should always be in control.
- I should please everyone.
- I should be right.
- I should make a good impression.
- People should give me my own way.
- People should recognize my contribution.
- Life should be fair.
- Life should be easy.

If you hold some of these beliefs, you may see negative events as catastrophes rather than simple annoyances. Instead of believing that you, others, and life are worthwhile, you may blame yourself or life for negative situations. You will tend to think you can't handle a situation, even though a more useful belief would be that you can handle it, even if you don't like it.

The key to changing these negative patterns of thinking is to decide there's no reason why things should be as we want them. If we recognize and believe this, we're less likely to become overly upset. We may feel annoyed or disappointed, but we won't feel that each disappointment is a catastrophe.

2. Destructive Attitudes- Habitual patterns associated with certain people, situations, or success/failure. (e)

Destructive Attitudes are often:

- Self-perpetuating
- Contagious
- Unconscious

• Self-deceiving Looking at this list we can see that it can be very hard to recognize the destructive attitudes that we carry into certain situations. It may prove helpful to journal our thoughts, feelings, and reactions to stressful situations. We may then spot a pattern that fits into one of these four categories above.

3. Sore Spots- Sore spots are unhealed, unresolved emotional pain from the past. They are like old wounds that have never healed. They are the griefs, sorrows, hurts, fears, resentments or guilts which have yet to be resolved through Christ's healing power. They may be conscious or unconscious. If not healed, sore spots fester and tend to generalize beyond the original pain. They can cause terrible internal stress, making it difficult to handle new external stress situations. (f)

Internal stress can cause us to "see" and "feel" the new stress situation to be worse than it really is. Through distorted perception, problems are amplified in our minds, and we react, not to reality, but to our distorted view of the situation. Spiritually, mentally, and physically we react as if the situation were worse than it actually is. When stressful situations happen one right after another, the cumulative internal stress can be overwhelming.

Go through the information above again and make a list of the things outside of yourself that cause stress such as health, life stage change, unrealistic expectations, and/or sore spots. Make a list of the external stressors in your life right now, such as work situation, financial problems, etc.

Next we'll look at ways to begin resolving internal stress.

RENEWING OF THE MIND: All three causes of internal stress are functions of the mind and God's Word clearly provides solutions for these.

1. The Word of God- demonstrates the intense power of God's Word to pierce the human soul, mind, and spirit. As the Word penetrates the innermost being, it brings revival, wisdom, joy and enlightenment. (g)(h)
2. Prayer- Prayer brings gracious help from our sympathetic High Priest to deal with weaknesses (including attitudes and expectations which need renewing). (i)
3. Faith- Moses is but one example of a renewing of the mind through faith. (j)
4. Action- Based on the Word, prayer and faith. We are to actively lay aside weights and sins, and in so doing allow God to renew our minds. (k)

HEALING OF SORE SPOTS: Remember, sore spots are unhealed emotions from the recent or remote past, which are still tender. Ask God to show you your sore spots. Journal any tender spots you're aware of right now. Share the pain of these with God, asking Him to heal you in this area. Forgive if others caused it. Fix your eyes on the Lord and accept God's grace in place of weakness. (l)

Many times the healing of sore spots or the recognition of destructive attitudes can be difficult on your own. Please seek a mental health professional so you can move beyond the past and be all that God created you to be.

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| a- Rom. 15:4 | b- Rom. 5:34 | c- 2 Cor. 4:7-11, 16-18 | d- Luke 24:19-24 |
| e- Mark 10:13 | f- Prov. 15:13 | g- Heb. 4:12,13 | h- Psalm 19:7,8 |
| i- Heb. 4:14-16 | j- Heb. 11:23-26 | k- Heb. 12:1 | l- 2 Cor. 1:3-5 |

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