

CONQUERING STRESS

Text: Matthew 6:34

Stress, tension, pressure, strain, and anxiety are all words that we can identify with in this "pressure cooker" world of ours. How many of us have recently felt as if we were being pushed, pressured, or weighed down by something in our lives? In short, we feel stressed out!

Symptoms of stress overload:

1. Decision-making becomes difficult (both major and minor kinds).
2. Excessive daydreaming or fantasizing about "getting away from it all."
3. Increased use of cigarettes and/or alcohol.
4. Increased use of tranquilizers and "uppers."
5. Thoughts trail off while speaking or writing.
6. Excessive worrying about all things.
7. Sudden outbursts of temper and hostility.
8. Paranoid ideas and mistrust of friends and family.
9. Forgetfulness for appointments, deadlines, dates.
10. Frequent spells of brooding and feeling of inadequacy.
11. Reversals in usual behavior.

[Keith W. Wehnert, Stress/Unstress, 1981, Augsburg.](#)

I think that some roll their eyes mentally when they read these words in our text, "Do not worry about tomorrow." If anyone but Jesus were saying this to us we would feel justified in responding, "What do you mean don't worry?" Don't you understand what I am going through?" But this is Jesus speaking. And, yes, He knows all about it.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus knows what we are going through and still He is says, "Don't worry." The reason? He sees what we do not. He knows the future. In fact, He is already there and he has already taken care of it!

So what do we do? We do what we should always do—look to the Word of God.

I. WE MUST FOCUS OUR MINDS ON THINGS THAT ARE PEACEFUL.

— Philippians 4:8, "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever

things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

A. This is not just positive thinking, this is spiritual thinking.

Whatever things are right

Whatever things that deserve praise

Whatever things that are true, honorable, fair, pure, acceptable or commendable.

What we set our minds on becomes the basis for our thoughts and to a point, the basis of our reality.

B. Refuse to dwell on things that “might be”.

__ Jesus said in our text, “*Therefore do not worry about tomorrow*, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Most of the events that “might be” are in the realm of tomorrow.

I. WE MUST MAINTAIN OUR CONFIDENCE IN THE LORD IN SPITE OF WHAT WE SEE.

__ Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

A. We should give events and circumstances beyond our control to God.

When God takes control of the situations that face us He can show us how to overcome the difficulty. Someone wrote a poem entitled

"The Oyster"

There once was an oyster whose story I tell,
Who found that sand had got under his shell;
Just one little grain, but it gave him much pain,
For oysters have feelings although they're so plain.
Now, did he berate the workings of Fate,

Which had led him to such a deplorable state?
Did he curse out the government, call for an election?
No; as he lay on the shelf, he said to himself:
"If I cannot remove it, I'll try to improve it."
So the years rolled by as the years always do,
And he came to his ultimate destiny -- stew.
And this small grain of sand which had bothered him so,
Was a beautiful pearl, all richly aglow.
Now this tale has a moral -- for isn't it grand
What an oyster can do with a morsel of sand;
What couldn't we do if we'd only begin
With all of the things that get under our skin. (Hewett, 19)

B. Allow God to live and work in tomorrow—concentrate on living today.

_ Jesus said, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, *for tomorrow will worry about itself*. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

We just have to remember our part is to (1) love God, and (2) remain dedicated to His purpose.

I. WE MUST DECIDE WHAT OUR REAL PRIORITIES ARE.

Luke 10:38-41 reads, "As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

A. Sometimes stress is brought on when we take too much on ourselves.

_ Note the traits that are characteristic of the stress-prone:

1. Plans day unrealistically
2. First to arrive, last to leave
3. Always in a hurry
4. Makes no plan for relaxation

5. Feels guilty about doing anything other than work
6. Sees unforeseen problem as a setback or disaster
7. Is always thinking about several other things when working
8. Feels need to be recognized and overextends because of this

What to do:

1. Recognize aggravating aspects of your job and accept them rather than fight them. Wisdom to discern what can and cannot be changed, attempt to change the first and accept the second.
2. Identify your emotional needs and find ways to meet them.
3. Practice listening—it is more relaxing than talking
4. Be sensitive to change—sense it coming and make adjustments. This makes change manageable rather than insurmountable.

From Leadership, V. 1, #3, p. 99.

- A. Feeling unduly responsible for the happiness or well being of others can add stress.

Responsibility for others is one of the chief causes of tension in executives. To prove this idea, an experiment was conducted some time ago with two monkeys. Scientists devised a method of giving one of the monkeys "executive" training under carefully controlled laboratory conditions.

The monkey chosen for executive training was strapped in a chair with his feet on a plate capable of giving him a minor electric shock. Then they put a light over the desk and turned the light on 20 seconds before each shock. A lever was placed by the monkey's chair. If he pulled the lever after the light came on, the light would go out and there would be no shock. The executive monkey learned to avoid the shock very quickly.

The scientists then placed another monkey across the room with the same setup, except that the second monkey's lever didn't work. However, the monkeys soon learned that the first monkey's lever would work for both, turning off the second monkey's light and protecting him from shock as well. This made the first monkey an executive, since he was now responsible for preventing shock for the second one.

The first monkey was intelligent. He quickly took over, protecting both himself and his colleague from shock, responding to both lights or either light without difficulty.

There was no outward change in either monkey as the experiment continued, but after awhile the executive monkey, responding to the stress of responsibility for another, developed stomach ulcers. The second monkey's health remained unchanged.

Unknown. www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/

Jesus is the only One able to help everyone. There is a limit to what we can do.

I. WE MUST ALLOW THE LORD TO BECOME OUR REFUGE.

_ Psalms 62:8, "Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us."

A. We have to do more than SAY we trust God.

_ This piece was heard on National Public Radio's Morning Edition on Nov. 2, 1988:

In 1958, America's first commercial jet air service began with the flight of the Boeing 707. A month after that first flight, a traveler on a piston-engine, propeller-driven DC-6 airliner struck up a conversation with a fellow passenger. The passenger happened to be a Boeing engineer. The traveler asked the engineer about the new jet aircraft, whereupon the engineer began speaking at length about the extensive testing Boeing had done on the jet engine before bringing it into commercial service. He recounted Boeing's experience with engines, from the B-17 to the B-52.

When his traveling companion asked him if he himself had yet flown on the new 707 jet airliner, the engineer replied, "I think I'll wait until it's been in service awhile."

Even enthusiastic talking about our faith doesn't mean much if we aren't willing to put our lives where our mouth is. (Larson, 79)

A. If we trust God we will give Him complete control.

Trust means "absolute certainty in the trustworthiness of another."

Only when we trust God with complete certainty can He give us rest. Remember, He is our Refuge!

_ Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen." (Mead, 448)

CONCLUSION

When it comes to dealing with stress and worry, it would be ridiculous to think that just by having a positive attitude we can overcome it all. And, of course,

that is not what the Word teaches. The Word teaches us we need the Spirit to help us.

I like what Jay Kesler writes in *Campus Life*:

There are two ways of handling pressure. One is illustrated by a bathysphere, the miniature submarine used to explore the ocean in places so deep that the water pressure would crush a conventional submarine like an aluminum can. Bathyspheres compensate with plate steel several inches thick, which keeps the water out but also makes them heavy and hard to maneuver. Inside they're cramped.

When these craft descend to the ocean floor, however, they find they're not alone. When their lights are turned on and you look through the tiny, plate-glass windows, what do you see? Fish!

These fish cope with extreme pressure in an entirely different way. They don't build thick skins: they remain supple and free. They compensate for the outside pressure through equal and opposite pressure inside themselves. Christians, likewise, don't have to be hard and thick skinned—as long as they appropriate God's power within to equal the pressure without. (Larson, 248)

References

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Larson, Craig B., Ed. *Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994.

Mead, Frank S., Ed. *12,00 Religious Quotations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1989.

** Sermon adapted loosely from --- Spray, Russell E. *Positive Sermon Outlines*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993.

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