



## STRESS MANAGEMENT

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(2 Samuel 22)

A

t times, we all experience physical, emotional and spiritual exhaustion. One more interruption, delay, or problem may send us tumbling over the edge. Many of us try to get more done in less time with better results. We try to juggle the demands of home, church, work, and family life. Living on the ragged edge, we become worn out, stressed out, and eventually we can burn out.

Stress not only dampens our spirits and frazzles our nerves, but the constant rush of adrenaline overstimulates the heart and can weaken the immune system, leaving us prone to more illnesses and stress-related problems.

In our time-driven culture, stress is an inevitable part of life, so we have to learn to manage it. Let's look at what God says about stress and how Christians are to handle the reality of a stress-filled life and still maintain that inner peace that God promises.

### **GOD'S REMEDY FOR STRESS**

*Consider What God Is Doing—James 1:2-4*

One of the best antidotes to stress is seeing God's purposes in the difficulties He allows in our lives. James counsels that we are to consider it all joy when we face trials of various kinds, because these will produce something good in us. The "good" God wants to do is to conform us to the image of Christ. He may use certain situations to develop one of the fruits of the Spirit in us. Knowing that God uses every situation, even the petty, irritating situations of life, to teach us to become more like Jesus helps us to feel less stressed by things we cannot control.

The apostle Paul experienced many life stresses that would put most of us over the edge. Yet he did not get discouraged or overwhelmed. By focusing on God's eternal perspective, Paul was able to endure all

kinds of difficulties with inner peace and joy (2 Cor. 4:16-18).

*Take Time Each Day to Be Alone with God—Psalm 46:10*

Planned times of quiet and solitude are a good balance to a busy life. Cultivating a heart of prayer helps us see God's perspective and to more fully experience His presence throughout the day (Ps. 16:8-11). Many of us use prayer as a way to change a stressful situation. Although this is not a bad idea, prayer often does not change the situation as much as it changes us. As we purposely quiet our hearts each day, the Holy Spirit has a chance to change the way we see our difficulties. That may be just what we need in order to better cope with our situation.

*Guard Our Hearts—Proverbs 4:23*

Jesus tells us not to let our hearts be troubled or afraid (John 14:27). Stress has a way of orienting us toward the things that are wrong in our lives. We need to guard our hearts and minds against negativity and pessimism. There are times when we will not understand God or His ways (Is. 55:8), but He gives us enough information about His character that even when we do not understand or are confused, we can rest in His faithfulness and His holy goodness. He delights in us when we trust Him, even when we do not understand (Hab. 3:17-19). We must take time each day to check our thinking and take every thought cap-

tive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

*Number Our Days and Live Intentionally—Psalm 90:12*

Sometimes we get stressed out because we are **majoring in minor things**. At the end of our life, many of us will realize that we have spent most of our time on what matters least, and the least time on those things that matter most. We need to decide what is really important, choose our priorities, and live for them. Life is full of choices. When we become more intentional about the way we spend our time and energy, we learn to say no to things that are just not that important.

*Remember Our Limits—Psalm 103:14*

Often our lives become filled with stress because we refuse to accept our limits. We are not God. We are not all-knowing or able to assume total control. We are human beings. We need to sleep, eat, and relax. Yet, at times we live our lives in a way that ignores these realities, which can result in a host of stress-related ailments. When we are feeling overwhelmed, perhaps that is a reminder that we are not living within the limits and boundaries that God has created for us. It may be time to reevaluate, cut back, say no, or slow down.

*Cultivate a Thankful Heart—*

*1 Thessalonians 5:18*

We must learn to count our blessings every day. Many of us must work to see the good in life and to cultivate a grateful heart. As we do this, we will feel more positive and the little things that go wrong will cease to look so important.

**FINAL TIPS**

Stress can affect the body, mind, and spirit. We must pay attention to each area to reduce the effects of stress on our overall well-being. If we do not learn to control stress, it will eventually control us. To pro-

tect our bodies, we need to get adequate rest, exercise regularly, eat well, and learn to breathe deeply. To protect our minds, we should think truthfully, refuse to make mountains out of molehills, and set priorities. Finally, to protect our spirits, we need to meditate on God and His Word, learn to trust God, and pray without ceasing.

**FURTHER MEDITATION:**

Other passages to study about the issue of stress include:

- > Psalms 46; 55:22
- > Isaiah 26:3; 40:28-31
- > Matthew 11:28-30
- > Galatians 6:9, 10

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To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on stress at 2 Corinthians 4:9 on page 1522. See also the personality profile of James on page 1641.

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ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart.

**THE SPIRIT, NOT THE LETTER**

<sup>4</sup>And we have such trust through Christ toward God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, <sup>6</sup>who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit;<sup>4</sup> for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

**GLORY OF THE NEW COVENANT**

<sup>7</sup>But if the ministry of death, written *and* engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory* was passing away, <sup>8</sup>how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? <sup>9</sup>For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. <sup>10</sup>For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. <sup>11</sup>For if what is passing away *was* glorious, what remains *is* much more glorious.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—<sup>13</sup>unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. <sup>14</sup>But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. <sup>15</sup>But even to this day, when

Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. <sup>16</sup>Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. <sup>17</sup>Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

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**2 CORINTHIANS 3:17**

<sup>18</sup>But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

**THE LIGHT OF CHRIST'S GOSPEL**

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we have this ministry, as <sup>2</sup>we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. <sup>3</sup>But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight

3:6 <sup>a</sup>Or *spirit*

**KEY PASSAGE**

**STRESS TEST**

(4:9)



Stress

Paul knew about stress. Hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, abandoned—these situations were part of Paul's everyday life.

For us, each day is filled with different levels of stress. Regardless of occupation, age, social status, or lifestyle, we experience stress. Some we bring on ourselves—from poor planning, saying “yes” too often, or being disorganized. Hopefully we learn our lesson so it won't happen again. Stress also arises from factors outside our control—the weather, a broken computer, an unexpected difficulty or sorrow. At those times, we can control only our reactions to the stress. Our reactions reveal our character and our trust in God.

We should not be swallowed up or “lose heart” in the stresses of life, because God can renew us on the inside day by day (2 Cor. 4:16). This life is temporary. Our home in heaven is eternal. In the meantime, we can lean on God. He promises peace in the midst of the stress.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about stress on pages 422, 423. See also the personality profile of James on page 1641

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**CAST DOWN**

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## GREETING TO THE TWELVE TRIBES

**1** James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad:

Greetings.

## PROFITING FROM TRIALS

**2** My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, **3** knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. **4** But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. **5** If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives

to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. **6** But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. **7** For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; **8** he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

## THE PERSPECTIVE OF RICH AND POOR

**9** Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, **10** but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. **11** For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

## PERSONALITY PROFILE



Stress

## JAMES: GRACE UNDER FIRE

(JAMES 1)

Older brothers often influence their younger brothers profoundly, and it can be stressful on a younger brother if the older brother has many skills and abilities.

Imagine the stress of having a *perfect* older brother—literally. James did, and His name was Jesus.

Jesus apparently had several brothers, none of whom believed in Him during His ministry (John 7:5). Eventually, however, Jesus' brothers came around and were present at Pentecost (Acts 1:14). (Jesus' brother James is not to be confused with the two disciples of the same name.)

James received a special resurrection appearance from his Brother (1 Cor. 15:7). Clearly, Jesus had special work for James to do: Leading the newborn Christian church in Jerusalem. James became one of the "pillars" of that fellowship, along with Peter and John (Gal. 2:9). With leadership, however, comes stress, and leading the large church in Jerusalem was no exception.

The record in the Book of Acts describes conflict, persecution, martyrdom, imprisonment, famine, and many other painful trials for the Jerusalem believers. Fortunately, the church had clearheaded leaders to handle these stresses wisely and to help the believers remain faithful. James's wisdom showed as he handled one of the most difficult conflicts the young church would face—the issue of whether Jews and Gentiles could be Christians together and worship together. His logical thinking and godly wisdom revealed in his decision about this matter unified the young church, making it stronger than ever (Acts 15).

Therefore, James knew what he was talking about when he wrote, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience" (James 1:2, 3). His advice for dealing with the stresses of life was apparently advice he himself followed—ask God for wisdom, and don't doubt that He will give it.

Stress cannot be avoided, but it can become a teaching tool in our lives when we let God have control. Ask Him for wisdom, trust Him for guidance, and love Him no matter what.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about stress on pages 422, 423. See also the key passage note at 2 Corinthians 4:9 on page 1522.

**LOVING GOD UNDER TRIALS**

<sup>12</sup>Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. <sup>13</sup>Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor

does He Himself tempt anyone. <sup>14</sup>But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. <sup>15</sup>Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

<sup>16</sup>Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. <sup>17</sup>Every good gift and every perfect gift is from



**SOUL NOTE**

**Joy-Full (1:2-4)** James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, advised believers to be joyful during trials and troubles. Everyone faces trials in one form or another. We cannot control what we will encounter, but we can control the stress level that situations cause. Instead of being stressed, we can try being joyful. This is not a natural reaction, but one that the Holy Spirit can provide. It means choosing an attitude that looks expectantly to the lessons God will teach and the wisdom He will provide. There's no better prescription for dealing with stress! **Topic: Stress**



**KEY PASSAGE**

**ASKING FOR IT**

(1:5)

**Wisdom**

People admire wisdom in others. Wise people have the proper perspective and can make sensible and sensitive decisions. Such people seem to be few and far between. Among believers, however, the percentage of wise people should be high, for James writes, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God . . . and it will be given to him."

Wisdom begins with God, who is its source. The first step to being wise is to have proper awe and reverence for God, and then to trust Him with one's life. We become wiser as we become more and more like Christ. God's wisdom is "pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). As we study and apply God's Word, yielding our lives daily to Christ, we need only ask God to give us His wisdom, and He promises He will.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about wisdom on pages 436, 437. See also the personality profile of Solomon on page 435.



**SOUL NOTE**

**Make Up Your Mind (1:5)** Life is full of choices: The "right" choice is not always clear, and the enemy of the better is often the good. Sometimes we must choose between two good options. Whatever the choice, we need God's wisdom to see life from His perspective and make good decisions in difficult circumstances.

Fortunately, wisdom is fairly easy to obtain: James says to ask God and He will freely give it. God will generously supply all the wisdom we need for every decision we face. But when we ask, we need to be willing to do what He says! **Topic: Decision Making**