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Managing Stress



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Managing Stress

Since stress in our lives cannot be avoided, it is necessary to learn how to manage it. Inevitable changes in life will bring with them some amount of stress. God's Word repeatedly encourages us to give our cares to Him but doing that is often difficult.

Stress is briefly defined as mental or physical tension or pressure. All of us have some level of stress in our lives which is very normal and helps us to feel energized and challenged while promoting health and growth. In fact, not enough stress leaves us feeling bored and unfulfilled. Also very normal are short intervals of increased stress such as beginning a new job, having a baby, and many other situations in life. These require extra time and effort which increases stress temporarily. The problem with excessive stress begins when daily tasks, duties, and challenges become overwhelming, causing stress levels to increase regularly. The negative fallout from continual high stress is manifested in every area of our lives: spiritually, physically, emotionally, and in our relationships with others. Failure to properly manage stress can eventually lead to serious health issues as well as compassion fatigue and burnout.

A number of good reference materials are available that give instruction on how to reduce stress in our lives. Much has to do with how we allow actions of others to influence us and how well we are maintaining boundaries within our lives. Are we able to say "no" to more work or to an unhealthy request? We sometimes forget our first duty is to serve God and to maintain a right relationship with Him. Often the stress we feel comes from our lack of knowing who we are and the limits of our time, skills, and abilities. Occasionally our pride gets in the way and we begrudgingly accept more tasks in our already busy day because we don't want others to know we have limitations. By accepting more tasks, we may also be doing someone else's work and thereby enable them to shirk their responsibilities. Certainly, we can assist others in their labors as long as they realize they still retain the responsibility for completion.

Galatians 6:2-5 "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. ³For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. ⁴But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. ⁵For every man shall bear his own burden."

The Bible makes it clear we are to recognize what our personal responsibilities are and to own them. But, it also is very clear we are to have boundaries within our life and not do our neighbor, co-worker, or spouse's job for them. This only enables them in failing to hold up their end and increases our stress. Instead of helping them to see their lack of commitment to responsibility, we often become angry our job now includes theirs which only serves to increase our stress. This cycle can continue to escalate to the point where we are doing all of someone else's work and they suffer no consequences from their lack of service or accountability because we have covered for them.

God is sovereign and knows our every need in peaceful times as well as in times of stress. Where we often fail is in giving everything over to Him and resting in Him. Instead, we sometimes let our minds wander and begin to think all sorts of negative thoughts and outlandish imaginations not based on fact. This only compounds the stress we are experiencing.

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The number seven is often used in the Bible to indicate completeness and below are seven basic principles in God's Word that apply to stress and how to reduce it.

1. We are called to **love God's Word** and therein to find peace and a barrier to offense.

Psalm 119:165 "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."

2. If we can **keep our mind firmly fixed upon the Lord**, He will keep us in peace.

Isaiah 26:3 "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."

3. We need to **know and obey God's Word** to find peace in abundance. On the opposite side, it is implied failure to do so results in turmoil.

Isaiah 48:18 "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea:"

4. We are also instructed to **not be overly burdened with the cares of life** but bring them to Christ who cares for us and will provide us with everything we need.

Matthew 6:31-34 "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ³² (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. ³³ But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. ³⁴ Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

5. Jesus tells us to **come to Him with our heavy burdens** and He will yoke us to Himself and give us rest.

Matthew 11:28-30 "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

6. The Lord specifically asks us to **not worry so much** but to give all to Him in prayer and His peace will keep us.

Philippians 4:6-7 "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

7. Finally, we are reminded to **cast all our burdens upon Him** because He cares for us and has our best interest at heart.

1 Peter 5:7 "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."