That's All I Need!

Stress Is a Part of Living

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Course III – Unit 10, Lesson 1
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"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature..."
(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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In this unit we will study stress. This lesson will consider what stress is and what causes it. Lesson 2 will look at how it affects us and Lesson 3 with how to control it.

Before continuing, please write three or four sentences describing what you think causes stress. **Write your thoughts on the enclosed Response Sheet and put it out of your sight until the end of this lesson.** Next, we recommend that you read the entire lesson through once without looking up any scriptures. Finally, go back for a more in-depth study before completing the Response Sheet.

I. Introduction

Stress is a term that is continually thrown about these days. Usually, it is used in a negative way. Stress, however, is neutral. Whether you see it as negative or positive, depends on you. Your attitude about the stressor (whatever causes you stress) causes you to believe it is positive or negative.

Stress is extremely situational. In a way, it is all in the mind. What might cause you stress, might not affect another person. What might cause you stress in one situation, will not cause you stress in another.

Whether stress is positive or negative, it is necessary for living. When we are confronted by a stressor, we become anxious. There are several types of anxiety. Normal anxiety is a proper reaction to some situation. Neurotic anxiety is a reaction that is totally out of proportion to some situation. Neurotic anxiety is normally associated with negative stress.

A third type of anxiety is existential anxiety. According to Gerald Core, existential anxiety "can be a stimulus for growth in that we experience it as we become increasingly aware of our freedom and the consequence of accepting or rejecting that freedom." In other words, it is a call to action for us to become who we have the potential to become.

II. What Is Stress?

A. Stress is...

Like any idea that is fuzzy, almost everybody has a definition of stress. The book **StressMap** provides a definition of stress that focuses on the commonly held negative view of stress. It says that stress is "the everyday wear and tear on your body as you respond to the people, places, and things in your life." Although this meets the modern negative definition of stress, it ignores the positive aspects of stress.

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B. The Effects of Stress

Most people think of chronic stress when the subject of stress is mentioned. It is that stress caused when we allow our jobs, families, or some other relationship to control and dominate our lives to the extent that we feel trapped. It is as though we have lost control of our lives. We feel like we are living in a pressure cooker just waiting for the steam to build up enough to explode.

Chronic stress is always negative. It is caused by our fear that something dangerous or harmful is going to happen to us. This danger may be real or a figment of our imagination. One point to remember is that whether it is real or imaginary, the effect on us is still the same (Job 15:24; Proverbs 19:23, 29:25).

Another point to remember is that chronic stress can either last a long time or a short time (Psalm 30:5, Hebrews 12:9-11). It really depends upon us. All stress is a combination of the situation and our attitude toward the situation. If we are in a potentially harmful situation and we allow our minds to run away thinking about all the damage that can be done to us, our stress level will increase in intensity and last longer. If we view it as a passing problem that we can control, the intensity will be low and only last a short time. It is all in the mind.

Stress is caused by the way we react internally to a situation or a potential situation (Joshua 7:5; 1 Corinthians 4:10-16). A potential situation is one in which there is a possibility that something will happen. An example is that something happens on the job. It has the potential to hurt us. Instead of waiting and seeing what will happen, we begin to think about it and all the harm that it can cause. In other words, we start worrying about it. The more we worry, the more stressful it becomes. It is not long before it controls our every thought and action. It so eats at us that we lose control.

Stress is not always negative. It can be useful. Useful or good stress results when we do something we know is wrong. We feel guilty. It helps us focus on living the kind of life that God wants us to live (Exodus 20:20; Proverbs 29:25, Isaiah 8:13).

Stress affects us not only physically but also mentally and spiritually. It reduces our ability to function and to develop. When we are physically stressed out, we have no time for the spiritual. We are so consumed by just trying to function physically that we lose sight of everything else (Proverbs 4:23; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 2:20-23). Stress is not a weakness, nor does it cause weakness. It displays our strengths and weaknesses. In a way, stress is like fear. If we are in a life threatening situation (either for us or someone else), we have some amount of fear. If we allow the fear to overpower us, we become cowards (weakness). If we control and use it,

we are heroes (strength). It is the same with stress. It is neutral; we make it either a strength or a weakness (Judges 7:1 -7, Proverbs 24:10).

C. Three Principles for Managing Stress

Since our attitude about a situation determines the intensity of our stress, if we change our attitude, our stress level lessens.

1. *Don't sweat the small stuff.*

   Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount told the crowd not to worry about the problems of life because God would supply all their needs (Matthew 6:25-34). We normally think of food, clothing, and housing as the most important needs of life. Jesus says yes, but they are not the most important. What is the most important? It is seeking God. It is living a life of righteousness. It is having faith in God. If we do this, God will provide the necessities of life.

2. *It's all small stuff.*

   If food, clothing, and housing are considered small stuff, where does this leave everything else that causes us stress? When we look for importance, we need to look beyond the mere physical/earthly. We need to look at the eternal. When the earthly is contrasted with the eternal, that which is earthly becomes totally unimportant. It is all small stuff (Luke 9:5762).

3. *If you can't fight it and you can't flee, then float above it.*

   Jacob could not fight the stress caused by his father-in-law's shady business dealings so he decided to return to his own homeland (Genesis 30-31). Joseph, on the other hand, was a slave in a foreign land. When he was faced with the stress of his master's wife's sexual overtures, he could not flee from his master's house. He rejected her sexual overtures, but it resulted in his being put in jail (Genesis 39). Joseph could neither fight or flee so he placed his trust in God and rose above the situation (1 Peter 5:6-7).

III. Stress Is A Part of Living

As mentioned earlier, stress is a normal part of living. Stress within itself is neither good nor bad. Value (whether good or bad) is attached to stress by our attitude about the stressor. It can be anything from becoming engaged, a pay raise, death in the family, or the loss of a job.

The effects of good stress are the same as effects of bad stress. Stress causes certain chemical changes in our body. It gets the adrenalin flowing which causes the “flight” or

"flight response," a feeling of either power or strength or fear or weakness. We have to do something to get rid of the adrenalin, so we do something physical, fight or flee.

Our modern society tells us to be "cool," "hang loose," so we stifle our stress. When this happens, the adrenalin stays in our body. You say, "So what?" Well, adrenalin is poisonous. When it stays in our bloodstream for any length of time, it starts causing us problems. When this happens time after time for years, it can trigger a variety of diseases.

Two men, Holmes and Rahe, conducted extensive research on the causes and effects of stress. One important thing they discovered was that good events can be as damaging as bad ones. From this they developed the following inventory.

Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory

Instructions: Check off each of these life events that has happened to you during the previous year. Total the associated points. A score of 150 or less means a relatively low amount of life change and a low susceptibility to stress-induced health breakdown. A score of 150 to 300 points implies about a 50% chance of a major health breakdown in the next two years. A score above 300 raises the odds to about 80%.

Life Event	Mean Value
1. Death of spouse	100
2. Divorce	73
3. Marital separation from mate	65
4. Detention in jail or other institution	63
5. Death of a close family member	63
6. Major personal injury or illness	53
7. Marriage	50
8. Being fired at work	47
9. Marital reconciliation with mate	45
10. Retirement from work	45
11. Major change in the health or behavior of a family member	44
12. Pregnancy	40

13. Sexual difficulties ---------- 39

14. Gaining a new family member (e.g. through birth, adoptions, oldster moving in, etc.) ---------- 39

15. Major business readjustment (e.g. merger, reorganization, bankruptcy, etc.) ---------- 39

16. Major change in financial state (e.g. much worse off or much better off than usual) ---------- 38

17. Death of a close friend ---------- 37
18. Changing to a different line of work ---------- 36
19. Major change in the number of arguments with spouse (e.g. either a lot more or much less than usual regarding child-rearing, personal habits, etc.) -------- 35
20. Taking on a mortgage greater that $10,000 (e.g. purchasing a home, business, etc.) ---------- 31
21. Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan ---------- 30
22. Major change in responsibilities at work (e.g. promotion, demotion, lateral transfer) ---------- 29
23. Son or daughter leaving home (e.g. marriage, attending college, etc.) ---------- 29
24. In-law troubles ---------- 29
25. Outstanding personal achievement ---------- 28
26. Wife beginning or ceasing work outside the home ---------- 26
27. Beginning or ceasing formal schooling ---------- 26
28. Major change in living conditions (e.g. building a new home, remodeling, deterioration of home or neighborhood) ---------- 25
29. Revision of personal habits (dress, manners, associations, etc.) ---------- 24
30. Troubles with the boss ---------- 23
31. Major change in working hours or conditions ---------- 20
32. Change in residence ---------- 20
33. Changing to a new school ---------- 20
34. Major change in usual type and/or amount of recreation ---------- 19
35. Major change in church activities (e.g. much more or much less than usual) ------- 19
36. Major change in social activities (e.g. clubs, dancing, movies, visiting, etc.) ------- 18
37. Taking on a mortgage or loan less than $10,000 (e.g. purchasing a car, TV, freezer, etc.) ---------- 17

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38. Major change in sleeping habits (much more or much less sleep, or a change in time of day when sleeping) ---------- 16

39. Major change in number of family get-togethers (e.g. a lot more or much less than usual) ---------- 15

40. Major change in eating habits (much more or much less food intake, or very different meals, hours or surroundings) ---------- 15

41. Vacation ---------- 13

42. Christmas ---------- 12

43. Minor violations of the law (e.g. traffic tickets, jaywalking, disturbing the peace, etc.) ---------- 11

TOTAL SCORE: _____

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IV. Stressful Biblical Situations

Holmes and Rahe did a good job in covering all areas of human life except the spiritual. They did cover amount of time spent in church activities; unfortunately, they are not signs of spirituality. More and more people are starting to view church as another social club, just another place to make friends, have parties, raise children in a wholesome atmosphere, and so forth. Contrary to the Gospel of Prosperity and Well-being, being a servant of God does cause stress. God does promise to care for our needs, but he also promises that evil and ungodly men will persecute His servants (Proverbs 3:11-12; Isaiah 59:15; Matthew 5:10, 24:9–13; John 15:2; 2Timothy 3:12; 1Peter 5:2). Some examples follow.

A. Abraham's Offering of Isaac

Genesis 22 tells the story of God's ordering Abraham to offer Isaac, his only son, as a sacrifice. Movies portray Abraham as fighting a great battle of faith, almost challenging God, before he obeyed. The Bible, on the other hand, does not. It shows a man whose faith was so great that he obeyed without questioning God. Hebrews 11:17-19 tells us that Abraham's faith was so great that he believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead. This does not mean that Abraham did not suffer great stress; he probably did. However, his faith was greater than the stress he suffered.

B. Joseph and Potiphar's Wife

Joseph was a handsome young man, who happened to be a slave in a foreign country. He was away from his family, friends, and some would have said, forsaken by his God. It would have been easy for him to give in to the sexual advances of his master's wife. Joseph did not see it that way. To him, sin was sin regardless of who knew about it. The Bible (Genesis 39) tells us that Mrs. Potiphar tried again and again to seduce Joseph. Talk about stress! He was caught between the proverbial rock and the hard place. If he gave into Mrs. Potiphar, there was the possibility that eventually Potiphar would have discovered them. If he did not give into her, she might lie to Potiphar about it, which she eventually did. Whichever way, Potiphar could have him killed. Also, stress was created by his struggle to overcome his sexual needs. Joseph decided to remain faithful to his belief in God. He could not fight or flee from his stress so he turned his problems over to God.

C. Pilate Washing His Hands

Pilate had all kinds of problems. He could execute an innocent man. He could let a convicted murderer and rebel go free. He could have a riot on his hands. He could be reported to the emperor as being soft on rebels and traitors. His wife was interfering

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in his job. Whatever he did would be wrong. He could be recalled to Rome and face charges of wrongdoing in office. He was trapped. His stress level was intense. He had to have a way out. Like so many people, instead of standing for principle and right, he caved in to his enemies. Pilate used a ploy to try to escape the responsibility for caving in; he washed his hands of the entire affair. He allowed the Jewish leaders to do whatever they wanted to do. He allowed his fear to overcome him. Instead of being a hero, he went down in history as a coward.

Other stories where Biblical characters faced stress are Jacob's working for Rachel (Genesis 29), Moses' and Jethro's advice (Exodus 18:13-18), David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), Peter's denial of Jesus (Matthew 26), Judas' betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 26-27), Joseph and Mary (Matthew 1; Luke 1:29), and Mary and Martha (Luke 10:40-41). You might want to study these stories and see what kinds of stressors these people faced. How did they handle their stress? What was the result of the way they handled it?

V. Conclusion

Stress is something that we all face. It is part of living. We can look at it one of two ways. We can see it is as dangerous and harmful or as something that can help us grow. It is our choice.

Jesus' answer to stress is to remember that in the context of eternity, the stressors of this physical life are unimportant. What is really important is our relationship with God. That determines how we live this life and where we spend eternity (Matthew 6:25-34, John 14:14).

Now, please start over and study the lesson and the related scriptures. **When you finish your in-depth study, return to the enclosed Response Sheet and write your answers to the study questions about this lesson.**