That's All I Need!

The Effects of Stress

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Course III – Unit 10, Lesson 2

(New Life Behavior English Edition)

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"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature..."

(2 Corinthians 5:17)

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The Effects of Stress

This lesson will study the effects that stress has on our bodies. Before continuing, please write three or four sentences describing how you think stress affects us. **Write your thoughts on the enclosed Response Sheet and then 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 part of living. There is no way we can escape it. It is part of our daily lives. Stress is not what hurts us. The harmful effects are caused by our attitude toward stress. If we view stress as part of living and do not let it control us, there will be little or no harmful effects. On the other hand, if we view stress as dangerous and always negative, it will control us, and its effects will be extremely harmful.

II. Stress and Illness

A. Physical Problems

Socrates (540 B.C.) stated, "There is no illness of the body apart from the mind." Too often we see the mind and body separated. Nothing could be further from the truth. We function as a unit. What affects the body, affects the mind. What affects the mind, affects the body. For all our scientific and medical advances in the past hundred years, the mind and body are still great mysteries to man. For every discovery made, a hundred new questions arise. As David once wrote, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Thy works." (Psalms 139:14)

A look at how we died in the last decade of the 20th Century shows the relationship between the mind and body. In 1900 the ten leading causes of death in America were different types of viral diseases. Today, death due to viral diseases is extremely low. The leading causes of death today are different types of heart diseases, cancer, and cerebrovascular diseases (strokes).

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Heart disease is responsible for almost half of the top ten causes of death today. There are about half as many deaths from cancer as there are deaths from heart disease. Strokes follow closely behind cancer.

The relationship between stress and heart and cerebrovascular diseases has been proven. There is no question; stress is the major cause of heart disease and strokes. Diet and heredity play a part, but most researchers believe that stress is the major cause of these diseases. Some stress related problems are exhaustion, insomnia, migraines, ulcers, colitis, high blood pressure, asthma, allergies, and alcoholism.

In 1974, Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman published their findings in *Type A Behavior and Your Heart.* They define Type A behavior as "an action-emotion complex that can be observed in any person who is aggressively involved in a chronic, incessant struggle to achieve more and more in less and less time, and if required to do so, against the opposing efforts of other things or other persons." Type A people have a highly stressful life style. They also have higher incidences of heart disease than other people. Stress is real. Stress kills.

Cancer is the second greatest killer in modern America. The exact relationship between stress and cancer is unknown, but it is believed by most researchers that stress somehow triggers the body's cells to "to go wild," turning cancerous. Developed countries have a much higher cancer rate than undeveloped countries. America has the highest cancer rate in the world.

Death by accident is the fourth greatest cause of death today. This is up from seventh place in 1900. Although death by accident has risen from seventh to fourth place as a leading cause of death, the actual number has slightly decreased.

Also, it would be interesting to try to determine how many of these accidental deaths are a result of stress. How often are auto accidents caused by angry, worried, stressed out workers on their way to or from work? How many household accidents are caused because a person comes home stressed out and through inattention to what he or she is doing causes an "accident?"

There may be no such thing as an "accident." Observations seem to indicate that accidents are the result of somebody doing something wrong or stupid. Whether it is the manufacturer or the user, *somebody* did something wrong. If people do what they are supposed to do and pay attention to what they are doing, accidents usually do not happen.

B. Mental and Emotional Problems

Stress also affects us mentally and emotionally. Stress can cause us to become depressed, have post-traumatic stress disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, panic attacks and other emotional illnesses.

Karl Albrecht in his book, **Stress and the Manager,** describes four categories of emotional stress:

1. *Time stress*

   This is the anxiety reaction to the idea or feeling that we must do something within a deadline. There is also a feeling that time is running out and that something dreadful will happen if we have not completed our something by the deadline.

2. *Anticipatory stress*

   This is worrying. We have a feeling of anxiety about some upcoming event. There are times when we worry about no particular event but about something vague. It can cause feelings of dread or fear that some horrible catastrophe is about to happen.

3. *Situational stress*

   This is the fear of being in a situation that is threatening and beyond our control. The fear is that we can be physically hurt, lose status, significance, or be rejected by someone.

4. *Encounter stress*

   This is an intense feeling of dread about having to deal with specific people whom we find unpleasant and unpredictable.

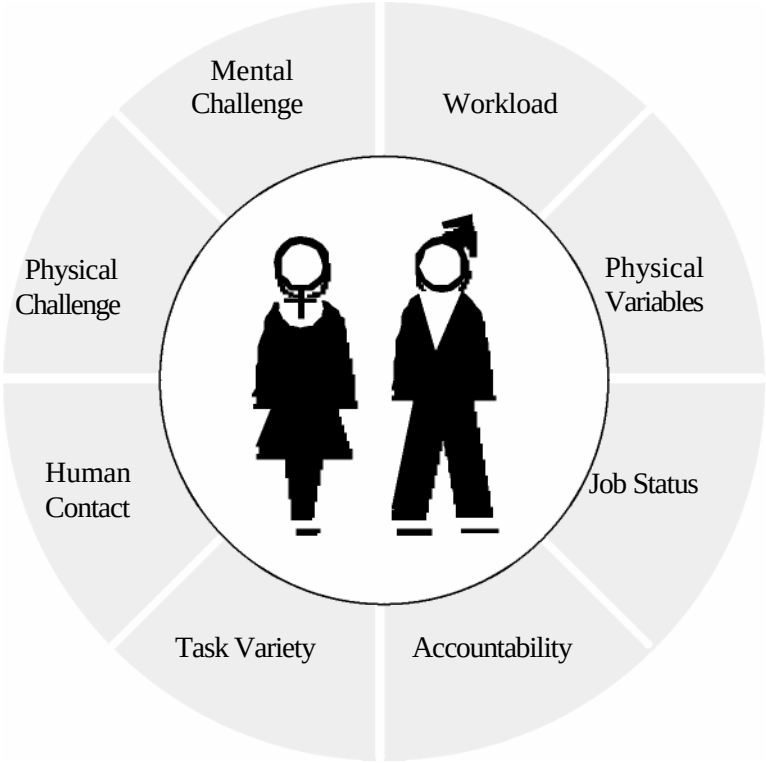
C. Problems

Stress turns us inward. We concentrate on ourselves. We forget about or ignore others. The nature of stress makes us see only our problems and how they affect us.

Stress also makes us inactive. We seek only our own needs and will. We have no time or energy to do God's will (Proverbs 17:22; Romans 8:6).

D. Workplace Problems

Peggy Lawless, project director for a study on workplace stress and burnout conducted by the Northwestern National Life Insurance Co., said, “American companies have become pressure cookers. Over stressed employees are less able to perform their jobs and more afraid to leave them.... Stress may have become the No. 1 debilitator of the American workplace.” The following picture shows some stressors a worker faces each day that he or she goes to work.



Reprinted from **Stress and the Manager**

As in our personal and spiritual relationships, stress in our work affects us emotionally, mentally, behaviorally, socially, and biologically.

Emotional factors are those abstract aspects of our workplace that lead to anxiety, frustration, apprehension, anger, and sadness. These stress factors include deadlines, perceived risk of physical injury, personal financial risk, extreme accountability for high-risk tasks, fear of loss of status or self-esteem, expectation of failure, and expectation of disapproval from important others.

Mental factors are those aspects of the workplace, either abstract or concrete, that affect our concentration, judgment, and creativity. These stress factors include fear of failure, fear of the boss, loss of confidence in self, fear of trying anything new, and fear of making decisions.

Behavioral changes occur when the social, emotional, mental, and physical factors overwhelm us. Stress can lead to alcoholism, drug addiction, overeating, starvation, failure to show up for work, and sloppy work.

Social factors are those related to transactions with other people in the workplace. Relationships become strained; fights errupt; vicious gossiping occurs; even attempts to sabotage a fellow worker's work or standing in the company can occur. These stress factors include the boss, co-workers, customers or clients, dangerous or potentially dangerous people, public scrutiny of one's activities, and committee or groups to which one must report.

Work-related stress can make us physically sick. When we allow stress to overwhelm us, we can become physically sick with muscle pain, headaches, insomnia, respiratory illnesses, ulcers, and high blood pressure.

In her research, Lawless discovered that between 1982 and 1990 stress related disabilities increased from 6 to 13 percent. What was even more serious was that in 1982 while 88 percent of those workers with a stress-related disability were successfully rehabilitated; by 1990 it had dropped to only 33 percent.

Is stress getting worse? Lawless' research seems to show that it is. What does this say about the need to reduce and control stress in our lives? A great deal. If we cannot limit the amount of stress in our lives or control how we handle stress, we are setting ourselves up to have major physical and emotional problems soon.

III. Stress Breeds Stress Plus...

A. Fear

Isaac had a run in with the Philistines. In an act of revenge they had filled in all the wells that Abraham had dug. Then they told him they feared him and wanted him to leave their region of Canaan, and he moved to Gerar in the Negeb Desert. Things did not go smoothly for Isaac there, either. When he dug two wells there, the men of

Gerar quarreled with Isaac over the ownership. This was a time of stress for Isaac (Genesis 26). In verse 27, Isaac asked Philistine king who had come to visit him, "Why have you come to me since you hate me and have sent me away from you?" These are not the words of a happy, courageous person. Isaac seemed to think that everybody was out to get him. He feared for his life. Isaac was not only suffering from stress and fear but also lack of faith. In verse 24, God appeared to him in a dream. God told Isaac not to be afraid because He was with him and would protect him. Even God's personal revelation to Isaac was not enough to make him feel safe (Psalm 27:1, 1 John 4:16-18).

B. Anger

Anger is one of the negative ways stress controls our emotions and behavior. It is usually frustration expressed in a hostile, violent outburst. It destroys relationships, our sense of well-being, and often our reputation. Although all anger is born in frustration, all anger does not have to be expressed in a negative way. Paul in Ephesians 4:26-27 writes that it is o.k. to be angry as long as you do not sin and as long as it is short lived (Proverbs 29:11, Ecclesiastes 7:8-9).

C. Impatience

When we are under a great deal of stress, we want to get rid of it, and we want to get rid of it *immediately*. We do not want to wait for it to go away or work through it. We want to get rid of the pain and frustration *immediately*. We want a little peace and happiness in our lives. We do not want to wait. It would be nice if things worked that way, but they do not. Pain, suffering, and frustration are a part of our lives. Because we live in a fallen world, they will always be with us (Exodus 16, Mark 4:7,18-19, 1 Corinthians 13:4).

D. Rigidity

Stress leads us to be rigid in how we think and behave. It is easier to be rigid than to try to be flexible in our thinking and behaving. Rigidity keeps us locked in our high stress pattern. Flexibility allows us to look for other ways of thinking and behaving that will free us from a high stress pattern (Luke 11:46, 52).

E. Perfectionism

When we are stressed out, often we think that one escape is to make sure that we do everything right. There is no room for error. If we do everything right, the boss will praise us; our wives and children will love us, and on and on. It sounds good, but it's not true! Once we get in the perfectionist mode, the stress level raises. Errors happen, and our stress level goes through the roof. We need to accept the fact that we are imperfect and live in an imperfect world. When we accept this fact, we can effectively deal with stress. Perfectionism also leads to excessive competition. We all need a little competition from time to time. But when we think everything must be perfect, we cannot allow anyone else to look more perfect than us. Therefore, we have to work harder to keep the competition down. Again, all this does is raise the level of stress.

F. Chronic Worrying

1 Samuel 18 tells the story of Saul's jealousy and anxiety over losing his throne to David. Saul became so obsessed with it, that he worried about it constantly. He even demanded that his son, Jonathan, worry about it. Saul's worrying about David led him to make bad decisions for the kingdom, turned the people against him, and made him try to kill David. Chronic worrying is not only dangerous, usually it is foolish. It is like the story of the man who said that he knew worrying worked because 90 percent of the things he worried about never happened!

G. Mental Depression

Stress leads to depression. Stress weighs us down and makes us think that life is hopeless. We feel trapped. There is no escape. David seemed to have felt this way when he wrote Psalms 22 and 142. Eventually, he realized there was a way out. It was trusting in God.

IV. Conclusion

Stress is part of our daily lives. Whether it is helpful or harmful depends upon us. Our attitude about stress makes the difference. We can either control stress or let it control us. It is our decision (Proverbs 14:14; Isaiah 26:3; Ezekiel 34:25-26; John 14:27).

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.**