# *That's All I Need!*

## *Effective Stress Management*

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Course III – Unit 10, Lesson 3

(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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# Effective Stress Management

This lesson we will study how to manage stress in our lives. Before continuing please write three or four sentences telling how you control stress in your life. **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 comparing your Response Sheet.

## I. Introduction

As we go through life we will face different types of situations. Since we cannot do anything about them, we must learn to accept them. Others we can change for better or worse. Some are unimportant and should be ignored. The problem for many people is knowing the difference. In 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 Paul tells of his "thorn in the flesh." He thought that he could do something about it and prayed to God to remove it. God told Paul to learn to live with it, "My grace is all you need."

There are times when we need to listen to God's advice to Paul. We need to learn to rely on God's grace and power to live with situations over which we have no control. Some of these might be our families. When we are born, we have no choice of who our parents, brothers, sisters, or other relatives are. For better or worse, we are stuck with them.

Other situations over which we have no control are the economy, wars, famines, floods, and earthquakes. They will happen; we must learn to accept them as part of our world.

Another situation over which we have no control is how other people behave. This is an extremely dangerous area because too often we think that we *can* control others' behavior. God gave us all free will do as we please. It might not be according to His will or the will of family or friends, but people do as they please. If we disapprove of their actions, we might let them know of a better way to live, but only they can decide how to live their lives. We cannot live for them. When we try to, it creates stress in both us and them.

## II. Ineffective (Unhealthy) Stress Management

When we talk about handling stress effectively, we are also saying there is an ineffective way to handle it. Knowing what some of these ineffective ways are is as important as knowing what are the effective ones. In this lesson, effective ways of handling stress are healthy ways of handling it, and ineffective ways of handling stress are unhealthy ways.

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Some unhealthy ways of handling stress are:

Daydreaming - Stress is unpleasant; we try to escape from it by allowing our minds to create pleasant fantasy situations. This is counterproductive because instead of trying to solve our stress related problems, we are trying to escape from them.

Rationalization - Instead of trying to change our thoughts and actions to rid ourselves of stress, we make up "good" reasons to justify them.

Regression - This is an extremely unhealthy way of handling stress. We see the situation as so threatening that we escape from it by trying to return (regress) to an earlier time when the stress did not exist. This is usually temporary, but even then it is extremely dangerous for our mental and spiritual well-being.

Fixation - This is the idea of developing our personalities to a certain point and then stopping. We think that we have become static. This is not true; life is constantly changing. If we are not progressing, we are regressing (going backwards, declining).

Displacement - This is transferring our problems and frustrations to someone or something else. This really does not get rid of the problems because deep down inside we know that they are still with us.

Projection\Scapegoating - These are similar in that we try to shift the blame for our problems to someone or something else. We try to deny who and what we are. As much as we might try, we cannot.

Suppression - In suppression we try to control our behavior and feelings by building rigid walls around them. We believe that if we keep them under control, nothing bad will happen.

Repression - Repression is similar to suppression, but instead of doing it consciously, we do it subconsciously. We bury our unacceptable feelings and thoughts in our subconscious. This is dangerous to our mental well-being because feelings just do not sit there. They are constantly working to break down our barriers and move into our conscious mind. Also, they are like a pool of stagnant water; they corrupt everything that comes in contact with them.
Identification - This is the idea that we so dislike ourselves and are so unsure of ourselves that we associate our identity with someone we admire. Therefore we do not have to face

ourselves. This is different than trying to develop certain characteristics of people we

admire.

Reaction formation - This is when we do the opposite of what we really feel like doing. Often, we do it to extremes.

## III. Things You Can Do About Stress

You will always have stress, but there are some things you can do that will reduce the amount of stress. Some of these are the following:

Reframe the way you think - *Change your thought processes. Be postive, not negative* [Psalm 103:1-6; Proverbs 23:7; 12 (KJV); 23 (NIV)].

Respond more effectively to others - Build others up; do not put them down. Help them be the best people they can be, and by so doing, you will be the best you can be (Luke 18:18-22; Galatians 6:2-3; Philippians 2:3-4).

Replenish your energy supply - You cannot help others if you have neither the energy nor the desire. Keep your energy level high. This means there will be times when you will have to get away from it all and take care of yourself. This is not being selfish. It is preparing yourself to be of greater help in the future (2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6).

Renew your mind daily - Allow God to reaffirm you and renew your mind daily so that you can live the type of life He wants you to live (Romans 12:2; Philippians 3:13-14).

Rebound from your failures - Do not allow your failures to dominate your life. At some point in life you will fail. The key to success is to learn from failure and then rise above it.

Reinforce success - Remember the adage, "Nothing succeeds like success." When you are on a roll, stay on it. Do not start questioning your right to be successful (Philippians 4:13, 16).

Resolve your conflicts - Conflict keep your stress level high. The fewer conflicts you have, the less stress. There will be times in which you cannot resolve a conflict because the other person does not want to resolve it. At times like these you must learn to live with it and try to keep it to a minimum [Galatians 6, Philippians 4:12-13 (NIV)].

## IV. Effective (Healthy) Stress Management

There is no one magic way to manage stress effectively. Almost any book you read on the subject of stress will have a five to a twelve step program for it. The reason for this is

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that stress is subjective. What might be stressful for one person, might not be stressful

for another. In this section we will look at several different ways you might use to manage stress in your life. The principle is to control your stress; do not let it control you!

A. Fit Yourself to Your Job.

Get a job that you enjoy. Sounds simple? Research shows that most Americans do not like their jobs. The reasons can be everything from the boss, to fellow workers, to the physical environment, to just not liking what they do. When this happens, stress will result.

You have several choices. One is that you can stay there and suffer through the dislike and stress. Another, is to stay but to change your attitude about it. This will lower your stress level. A third is to get a new job, one you like. Most employment agencies, colleges, and career counselors have tests that will show you what types of jobs you would be good at and would enjoy. Take advantage of this service. Discover what you want to do, and if necessary, get the training/education needed.

B Assume Responsibility for Your Thoughts.

How you see yourself, your experiences, your expectations, your responsibilities, your goals, and others has a great deal to do with stress. Usually, when those thoughts are negative, you develop a high level of stress. Reshape those thoughts. Make them positive. If you have to, change what you think and feel about yourself and others. When you change to positive thoughts and feelings, your stress level will decrease.

C. Use Stress Rather Than Letting it Use You.

Gary Packer in his book, *Creative Tensions: Personal Growth Through Stress*, presents stress as a tool to help us develop strength of character, create a more positive personality and become more assertive.

The positive use of stress is emphasized in many speaking clubs. If the speaker allows stress to control him, he will become frustrated, frightened, and forget his speech. If, however, he uses his stress, it will help him to become a good, if not great, speaker.

D. Use the Eleven Step Stress Management Program

The National Association for Mental Health suggests eleven positive ways to manage your stress.

1. *Talk it out.*

   When something bothers you, talk about it. Do not bottle it up.

2. *Escape for a while.*

   Do something that will get your mind off your stressor. According to Georgia Witkin, professor of psychiatry at Mount Sinai Medical College, men are better at this than women. A man who becomes stressed while working will more often than not take a few minutes' break. He will go to the water fountain, walk around, tell a few jokes and relieve some of his stress. Men feel that they have earned the right to take a break. Women, on the other hand, will keep on working while their stress level rises. They feel that they have to take care of everything before they take care of themselves.

   Regarding men's way of stress reduction, Witkin says, "they're right to be doing all of this. It is the correct thing to do. It's wonderful for stress management."

3. *Work off your anger.*

   The best way to work off your anger and stress is through hard physical work or exercise. Anger and stress trigger the "fight or flight" syndrome. You can either suppress your anger and let the poisonous chemicals remain in your body or work them out through physical labor. Control your stress and anger long enough so that you can work it off.

   Not only does hard physical work and exercise get rid of your anger and stress, it also helps you build up a resistance to it. It allows you to face larger amounts of stress than previously, without it bothering you. Also, it makes you physically healthier.

4. *Give in occasionally.*

   We do not always have to be right. If you find yourself getting into frequent arguments with people, and feeling obstinate and defiant, remember that is the way children act.

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Every issue we argue over is not a matter of life and death. Choose your issues.

Stand firm on the important ones. On those less important, give in occasionally. It will not hurt anybody and will make people think favorably of you.

5. *Do something for others.*

Helping others shifts the emphasis from us to them. When we see the problems that others have, it makes our problems shrink. We become thankful for what we have. It gives us an entirely new outlook on life.

6. *Take one thing at a time.*

One of the biggest causes of stress is trying to do too many things at once. There are only so many hours in a day, and there is only so much that we can do in those hours. When we feel that we should have done more, we have fallen into the trap of the Pharisees. They believed that God's favor was obtained through the performance of works of merits. The more you do, the more God blesses you. Jesus told them, NO. You can never do enough to gain God's blessings. God wants you to believe in Him and accept His grace.

7. *Shun the superman urge.*

This ties in with taking one thing at a time. Some people expect too much from themselves. They get into a constant state of worry and anxiety because they think they are not doing enough. Decide what is important, and then do it well. Remember, even Superman could not do everything. He did what he could.

8. *Go easy with criticism.*

Do not expect too much of others. We all have our limits. Also, our limits change from time to time. They will depend on our age, mental and physical health, education, and attitudes.

When we expect others to exceed their limits, we create stress in both them and us. We feel frustrated and let down when others do not live up to our expectations of them. Also, if they have accepted our expectations of them, they also will feel disappointed. Be realistic in expectations of self and others.

9. *Give the other fellow a break.*

   When we are under emotional tension, we often feel that we have to be first all the time. Everybody else has to lose sometime. Be gracious with others when they lose. One day, we will be in their place. Also, when we recognize that we all lose sometimes, we won't be as disappointed when it happens to us.

10. *Make yourself available.*

    Many people feel slighted, neglected, or rejected when they are left out. It is necessary to pay attention to others and make them feel they are important.

11. *Schedule your recreation.*

    Many people drive themselves so hard that they do not allow time for recreation. Recreation is important for stress management. When we do not take time for it, our stress level rises. The best way to ensure we get enough recreation is to schedule it.

## V. Conclusion

The best way to control stress is by following the teachings of Proverbs 3:5-6. It tells us to trust in the Lord; do not lean on ourselves; acknowledge God's leadership, and He will make our paths straight.

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.**