



Stress

The Bible provides practical relief from Stress

Note: Scripture used in this Bible Study is from the New King James Version.

Job stress has become such a universal problem that many medical professionals now classify it as an occupationally related disease, precipitating numerous other serious problems such as ulcers, depression, and even suicide. The believer's response to stress is critical if he is to emerge successfully. The Word of God reveals several fundamental principles that can bring us through tough times and even positively benefit our spiritual and emotional well-being in the process.

What causes stress in a person's life?

In our complex environment pressure on the job is just one of many causes of high tension and anxiety. Family trouble, financial difficulty, and other factors induce a great deal of turmoil.

How would you rank the most stressful circumstances in a person's life?

Experts say the most stressful event is the death of a spouse, next divorce, then marital separation, a jail term, death of another family member, and illness or injury. Stress at work falls after these but add to them.

What circumstances in a person's work environment cause stress?

Many of the stress producing agents at work include dismissal, retirement, business readjustment, change to a different kind of work, change in work responsibilities, trouble with supervision, and change in work hours or conditions.

Why is our job such a source of stress in our lives?

It is the nature of work in our fallen world...

Genesis 3:17-19 - Then to Adam He said, *"Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': 'Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."*

Why do we have a fallen world?

Because this is a consequence of Adam and Eve's sin which is acting in disobedience to God.

So if thorns and thistles are a result of Adam and Eve's sin, why are we still suffering today?

Because we have the same nature as them. We too have acted in disobedience to God...

Romans 3:23 - *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

How do the thorns and thistles of an agrarian society map to problems we face at work today?

Design commits that keep moving out, silicon bugs, poor yielding wafer lots, competitive misinformation, customers placing orders for delivery yesterday, the rapid pace of technological developments, etc...

Is the stress we have from the rapid pace of technological developments something that man has always had to contend with or is it a more recent factor in our day and age?

It is recent. Indeed, it is a prophetic sign that we are close to the return of the Messiah, Jesus...

Dan 12:4 - *But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase.*

Not only will people better understand the end-time prophecies but both travel and knowledge will increase. In fact, what we are seeing is an exponential growth of knowledge. For example, the performance of computers is doubling every 18 months now. It is easy to dismiss the rapid pace of change by thinking that developments only seem to be happening faster since I am getting older but you can not deny the statistics. It is also easy to be complacent about this when we are in the midst of it but developments will occur quickly, beyond our control like a rising flood...

Dan 9:26 - *The end of it shall be with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.*

Jesus made reference to the acceleration of end time events in His Olivet Discourse where He gave signs for which to watch and indicated that these signs *"are the beginning of sorrows"* (Matthew 24:7-8) which means birth pangs, increasing in frequency and intensity. Paul also describe the events leading to the return of the Lord this way...

1Thes 5:2-3 - *For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.*

God to listen to you more than to God, you judge... We ought to obey God rather than men.

What is the best way to deal with the stress resulting from living in a rapidly changing environment?

Set your foundation on the rock of Jesus Christ, not on the shifting sands of this world (Matthew 7:24-27)...

Hebrews 13:8 - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

If you have Jesus in your life, you don't have to worry about even the worst that this world can throw at you

How should an understanding of the fallen nature of this world help us in dealing with stress?

It helps us to remember that 'thorns and thistles happen.' Things happen that are beyond our control. It is helpful to remember that our difficulties are not always a result of something we did (or did not do). The thorns and thistles of life serve a grander purpose that we may not always understand.

Why is a person's supervisor often a source of stress at work?

Supervisors tend to make priority interrupts. It is human nature to put oneself ahead of the authorities in our life which can cause friction people.

How should we regard the authorities in our life?

As representatives of God...

Romans 13:1-2 - *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.*

How is it that the authorities that exist are appointed by God?

God is in control. Those who come into power do so because He allowed it to happen to serve His purpose.

If you resist the authority over you, what are you doing?

Resisting the ordinance of God and bringing judgment on yourselves.

Does this mean that we should obey an authority that causes us to disobey God?

- No, this passage assumes that the governing authorities are doing their duty to maintain order, justice and peace.
- If the authority over us causes us to go against the ordinances of God, we should resist or challenge the authority using legal means at our disposal. This is what Peter said when the governing authorities over him said that he could not preach Jesus...

Acts 4:19, 5:29 - But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of

Why does a flawed relationship with God exacerbate a flawed relationship with your supervisor?

Because you can't be your own boss, conflicts will result. Unless you have a correct relationship with God, you can't have a good relationship with anyone, much less your boss. This is the pattern described in Romans 1:18-32 where God turns people who reject Him over to their wicked ways which results in problems between people.

How does the Bible suggest we deal with our supervisors?

Work for them as you would work for Christ...

1 Cor 10:31 - whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Regard yourself as their servant.

Ephesians 6:5-8 - *Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.*

What does it mean to serve our supervisor with fear and trembling?

We should work with respect and recognition of their power over us as we would respect and recognize God.

What does it mean not with eyeservice or as men-pleasers?

- Our conduct should be genuine, honest work, not superficial activities done for show.
- We should anticipate what our supervisors really need from us.
- Recognize that our supervisors really do not need "yes-men" but someone who gives them the truth.

What is the benefit of our genuine service to the authorities in our life?

We will be rewarded by God both in this world and the next.

Why should we have a servant's attitude toward our supervisors?

Out of gratitude for what Jesus did for us. Indeed Jesus modeled the ultimate servant by paying the price for the sins of those who believe in Him...

Philippians 2:5-8 - *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself*

and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

What should our mind-set be regarding our call to serve?

We, like Christ, should be humble and obedient to the point of death.

What does it mean that Jesus being in the form of God did not consider it robbery to be equal with God?

He was God, is God, always has been God, and always will be God. Jesus is equal to the Father in all aspects except His role as Son. Being God is not something Jesus had to take because He already had this.

How was it that Jesus made Himself of no reputation?

Jesus came as all men enter the world and in the humblest of circumstances being born to a common working-class family.

How was it that Jesus was a “bondservant” ...Why not “servant”?

A bondservant implies a servant who is so by choice as part of a contract.

What is the contract in Jesus’ case?

Jesus promised eternal life... He came to make the way for us to spend eternity with Him by paying the penalty for our sin.

How do people generally react to stress?

Many try to flee the problem--changing jobs, bosses, or environment--in the hopes that the irritation will go away. Some internalize their duress, seeking to suppress it. However, it usually spills over into some other area, most often into the family life. Still others crumble emotionally, giving way to despair and depression. When I was in college, I internalized my stress and put a slogan over my desk that said, “THE ONLY ABSOLUTE IS SURVIVAL.” I was not saved yet and now know this is far short of the truth.

How should the Christian respond to stress?

Let’s take a look at three principles from the Bible: (1) Concentrate on today’s problems, not tomorrow’s, (2) Rely on God’s strength, not yours, (3) Thank God that He is at work using your stressful circumstances for good results.

(1) Concentrate on today’s problems, not tomorrow’s

Matthew 6:31-34 - *Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

Who are the Gentiles and what do they seek?

In this context, the Gentiles are unbelievers, those who are not part of the family of God.

Unbelievers worry about temporal things like, ‘*What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’*

Why is the seeking after temporal needs in vain?

God knows you need these things and will see that you get what you need to live according to His will.

Why do unbelievers concern themselves with basic, temporal things?

This is all they know, the material world (which is materialism). They don't understand that God is in control of the material world so they think the burden of providing for themselves is their responsibility alone.

- This is why some come to think that work is the most important thing in life and become workaholics...
Psalm 127:2 - It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep.

What should we do instead of worrying about our material well-being?

Seek first the Kingdom of God.

What does it mean to seek first the Kingdom of God?

Our priority should be to establish and grow in our relationship to God.

How does seeking first the Kingdom of God help relieve us from stress?

It helps us to see things from God's eternal perspective and trust in His sovereign control of all things. If we are trusting in Him for our eternal future, we should be able to trust in Him for our near future while we're still in the material world... *"I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly"* (John 10:10).

What else does Matthew 6:31-34 say we not worry about?

Tomorrow.

Why shouldn't we worry about tomorrow?

Tomorrow will worry about it's own things... the things we think we will be worrying about tomorrow and what we will actually be concerned with when tomorrow comes may not be the same.

What does it mean that, "Sufficient for the day is its own trouble"?

There are plenty of things that God is calling us to make a decision about today that will go neglected if we get absorbed in worrying about the future.

Does this verse say we should not plan ahead for contingencies since it says not to worry about tomorrow?

No, planning ahead and preparing for contingencies is not the same as worrying about them. Having a concern about something in the future that causes you to take action in preparation is not the same as worry which freezes a person into inaction by consuming all their resources ("analysis paralysis").

How does worry about the future cause stress?

All too often, we magnify our troubles beyond their significance and in so doing increase their pressure. We should look at our situation as with a telescope, not under a microscope. Seek the bigger picture which is God's perspective.

So what is the principle in Matthew 6:31-34 that if applied to our lives will reduce our stress?

Concentrate on today's problems, not tomorrow's. This does not mean we should not be concerned with the future, it just means that most of our creative efforts should be directed to today's issues, not what may or may not happen tomorrow.

(2) Rely on God's strength, not yours

Psalm 55:22 - *Cast your burden on the LORD, and He shall sustain you*

What does it mean to cast your burden on the Lord?

Rely on God's strength, not yours. Admit that your adverse situation is beyond your ability to bail yourself out, that you need God's intervention and help.

How do you cast your burden on the Lord?

Pray to God about your situation and ask Him for His help.

Why is it stressful if we do not lean on the Lord to be sustained during times of adversity?

Satan deceives us into thinking we can handle our strains in our own cleverness and abilities-- until we are almost at the breaking point. If Satan can tie up believers trying to save themselves from their situation, they are not available to be used by God to further His Kingdom.

What are we saying to God when we try to relieve our stress on our own?

That God is not sovereign, in control of all things and cares about the smallest details.

So how do you apply this knowledge to your life to reduce your stress when adversity comes?

Lean on God's might at the initial stage of the problem. Pray: give God an opportunity to work in this situation and grow your faith by answering your prayer.

Does this mean that God will always remove the burden in response to your prayer? What did God promise in Psalm 55:22?

No, God's promise is not to remove the burden but to sustain you through it. Yet God will sometimes totally remove the burden because He *"is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think"* (Ephesians 3:20).

So how should we regard prayer as a stress remover?

It should be the first thing we do when under stress.

Why would Charles Stanley refer to prayer as the greatest time saving activity we can do?

God can indeed and often does totally remove something that causes stress in your life...

Psalm 37:4 - *Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.*

How does God sustain us if He does not remove our stressful burden?

God's strength comes as He stabilizes our emotions with His peace, infuses our hearts with His joy, and provides us with His all-sufficient wisdom to deal with any hardship in life.

So what should we do if we have prayed and our burden persists?

Wait on God to sustain us expecting Him to deliver us...

Isaiah 40:31 - *Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

Is our waiting on God a passive or an active thing?

It is active because it begins by coming to Jesus...

Matthew 11:28-29 - *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

What is the promise here?

That Jesus will give rest to those who seek help from Him for their burdens.

How is being yoked with Christ and learning from Him a stress reliever?

Because it is Jesus who shoulders the greater part of the burden, we learn that life is easier as we learn to walk more closely with Him. The picture here is one of a new oxen being yoked together with a stronger and better trained older ox. The young ox learns from the older. Our hound dog pup is getting better at walking with us as she gets more experience.

What kind of rest is this verse talking about?

Rest for your souls - peace with God, knowing that you are in the will of your Creator, doing what you were created to do...

John 14:27 - *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

So when we feel the stress of life in this world, what should we do?

Pray and expect God to sustain us through the situation...

Philippians 4:6-7 - *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

(3) Thank God that He is at work using your stressful circumstances for good results

Psalms 34:19 - *Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all.*

Who are the righteous?

The children of God, those whose sins have been forgiven and have been justified by Christ...

Romans 5:19 - *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.*

Why should the righteous expect afflictions?

Because they are not exempt from the thorns and thistles of the world indeed they may even have more afflictions because most people in this world are allied with Satan who is the enemy of God.

John 15:20 - *If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.*

2 Tim 3:12 - *All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*

How does the promise God has given us in Psalm 34:19 help us through stressful times?

No matter how bad things get, God will deliver us from them. (This too shall pass.)

Romans 8:18 - *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

In the context of eternity, there is no amount of suffering in this world that can even begin to mar the wonders of life in the eternal state...

1 Corinthians 2:9 - *As it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

How will we regard the sufferings of this present time in eternity?

The sufferings of this present time will not be remembered. Not only will it be an insignificantly small period of time in comparison to eternity future, the current world as we know it today will be replaced with a new one...

Isaiah 65:17 - *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.*

Rev 21:4 - *"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*

If God is in control of all things, why does He allow bad things to happen to His children in the world?

Because as painful as our circumstances are, they are serving a purpose that God will use to make us better off in the long run...

Romans 8:28 - *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

So what attitude should we have about difficulties we face in life?

Rejoice that God is going to use your bad circumstance to bring about something wonderful, if not in this life, then the next...

James 1:2-4 - *My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

What are some good things that God could use stressful times to bring about good in your life in the here and now?

Make it possible for us to be an encourager of someone else in similar difficulties. Also. build our character and grow our faith...

Romans 5:3-4 - *Glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.*

What is the value of perseverance?

Perseverance builds character. God uses our stressful times as cleverly disguised opportunities for us to gain His perspective, lean on His strength, and develop steadfastness with which we can run life's course.

If God does not change our circumstances to relieve our stress, what will He do?

He will change us by dramatically altering our own emotions and responses as we turn to Him instead of running or exploding.

So how then should we regard our stressful situations?

Seek God's strength, wisdom, and presence recognizing that it will be sufficient for what you face. Remember that your stress will become a catalyst for spiritual stability, instead of an agent of destruction and despair.

What impact should stress have on our faith?

The pressure will reinforce your faith, not weaken it. We became steadfast Christians, able to endure and overcome through the power of Jesus Christ.

What is the key to appropriating the power of Christ in dealing with a stressful situation?

By being born again as a child of God into an everlasting relationship with Him by receiving Christ into your life...

John 1:12 - *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name*

Why is being born-again the most important prerequisite for relieving stress?

Unless you are a forgiven new creature in Christ, it is not possible to have a relationship with the One who can relieve your stress...

Proverbs 15:29 - *The LORD is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.*

What does it mean to receive Christ?

To believe Him and allow Him to direct your life by obeying Him.

What must you believe about your condition?

That you are as all people are a sinner due to your selfish nature that seeks to put yourself ahead of all others including God...

Romans 3:23 - *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*

And that the penalty for this sinful selfishness is spiritual death, which is called the second death in Revelation 20:14 where says that unbelievers will spend eternity in the lake of fire.

Romans 6:23 - *For the wages of sin is death*

But what is the good news that makes it possible for all people to be saved?

Jesus paid the price of the sins of those who trust in Him...

Romans 5:8 - *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

So what must you do to be saved?

You can't do anything yourself...

Ephesians 2:8-9 - *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Religions teach what you should do and not do to be saved. True Christianity is not a religion it is a relationship with the Creator-Savior. All you must do to be saved is respond to Him by believing Him and putting your trust in Him...

Romans 10:9 - *If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Why is confession part of it? Why must you make a public profession of faith in Jesus to be saved? Isn't this something you have to do which is what religions teach?

God has saved us for a purpose...

Ephesians 2:10 - *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

Yes confession is a work but it is not what saves us, it is acting in obedience to God and part of the natural response to being saved. If your belief is real, you will publicly acknowledge your faith.