

20 Days of Trouble

Topic #14 – Stress

Textbook Def:

A condition of extreme difficulty, pressure, or strain. A condition of psychological strain occurring in people and animals, usually in response to adverse events and capable of causing symptoms and signs such as increased blood pressure, insomnia, and irritability.*

Real-Life Look:

Jackie's test results were back and the doctor wanted to see her first thing Monday morning. He could have dismissed any sense of urgency and said, "Why don't you make an appointment for some time next week," but nope, that wasn't the message he left. Trying to function and hold it together all weekend long was going to be nearly impossible. If she didn't die from whatever was ailing her, a heart attack was surely going to kill her first anyway.

The bills were stacking up and there was nothing Don could do to stop the rising sea of debt. The unexpected salary cut hit hard and fast. He was looking for another job elsewhere, but even with the cut, he was still making a fair wage for his experience and title. He didn't have much reason to anticipate finding anything more lucrative in the near future. The family budget, however, was based on his previous income and the difference was substantial. Now he and his wife were fighting over every dollar and every decision. The financial strain on both of them was taking a huge toll.

Wendy turned off the television in disgust. The state of the world's affairs was heavy on her heart. Life as she knew it was changing, and not for the better. What would the future be like for her kids and grandkids? She shuddered to think. As she lay in bed that night, the stress pressed heavy on her chest. She felt hopeless and scared.

"Sure, give me one more stinkin' thing to do please," Brent thought sarcastically. Work was taxing enough, and the after work routine was already insanity, and now errands before work too? Was there no end to the demands of life? He was trying to juggle and balance it all but knew he couldn't keep up the pace. And he had no desire to. Go, go, go, go, go. The tension in his head made his brain feel like it was going to explode.

The phone rang and it was Dylan's teacher. Maria's son had been acting up again and she was listening to the same litany of complaints. She'd exhausted all efforts to find help for her son and didn't know where else to turn. If Dylan didn't shape up, he would be expelled. The anxiety rose higher in her chest with every word the teacher barked.

Sword of the Spirit:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Phil 4:6

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." 1 Peter 5:7

"Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble." Matt 6:34

"Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up." Proverbs 12:25

Breaking It Down:

I didn't believe that emotional stress could actually cause physical problems. I'd been experiencing some troublesome health issues and after a good 'once over', my doctor announced that he thought I was suffering from stress. No way was I buying that. I wasn't one to let stress stop me or get me down. I was concerned that by chalking it up to stress he would completely overlook some serious health condition. I asked him to run some tests to reassure me his diagnosis was correct. He did and he was.

So began my journey towards less stress and better health. The correlation between the two was undeniable and the more I learned, the more I felt responsible to make positive changes. The end result? A happier, healthier, less stressed me!

How did I do this? *Here are a few of my best tips for success:*

Ask questions before reacting – Kneejerk reactions are not only often wrong, but can send our blood pressure through the roof. When facing a stressful situation, resist the urge to spit out the first thing you think of and instead ask thoughtful questions to gain a better understanding of exactly what's transpiring.

Steer clear of drama – If you don't embrace or engage in drama, you don't have to worry about your response! Draw clear boundary lines and stand firm in guarding against invaders.

Stay calm – Screaming, rushing spastically about, slamming doors and drawers, and waving your arms wildly in disgust only amps up an already challenging situation. Make an effort not to overreact, yet instead, try a quiet, calm, cool, and collected approach.

Acknowledge what's within your control and what isn't – It's easier to eliminate stress when you have a clear understanding of the part you play in any given situation. While difficult to relinquish control, if you really don't have it to begin with, why waste time and energy stressing over what isn't yours anyway.

Learn when to say NO – Taking on more than you can or want to handle will inevitably breed anxiety, regret, obligation, etc., all of which will increase your stress level. The awkwardness of the initial 'NO' isn't nearly as difficult to manage as the ill-effects of a high stress level.

Take breaks – It's almost impossible to feel stressed out when taking a brisk walk, watching a great movie, enjoying a quiet dinner with your honey, or burying your nose in a good book. So the question isn't IF breaks work, but rather IF you will discipline yourself enough to take them.

Pray – Not only is it a good idea to lay your stress at the feet of the One who can truly make a difference, but praying has a calming, tension-reducing, joy-creating effect.

The Benefit in Decluttering Trouble:

Stress spells trouble with a capital T. Decluttering it will only serve to improve both your emotional and physical health. Studies have shown that a reduction in your stress level will lead to improved:

- Heart health
- Sleep patterns
- Home life
- Relationships
- Communication skills
- Job performance
- Joy

Among many, many other wonderful things...

Declutter stress and embrace the best that life has to offer!

*www.thefreedictionary.com

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