

CHRISTIAN STRESS MANAGEMENT
“SECRETS TO DISCOVERING THE PEACE THAT PASSES ALL
UNDERSTANDING”

LESSON 1

Introduction

Stress is an epidemic in today’s world.
Sleeplessness is the number one complaint from doctor’s patients.

Physicians are giving out prescriptions for pills that promise to anesthetize our brains against the stress of the world and give us a ‘time out’ from our troubles.

But it’s a temporary fix with little promise.
And it often leads to the need for more and more pill intervention.

God wants to manage your stress for you.

This Christian Stress Management Bible lesson will reveal the secrets hidden in God’s Word that you can use to stomp out stress for good.

“IN IT BUT NOT OF IT”

Even though we live in this world, the Scriptures make it clear that we are not of this world. We are sojourners, passing through.

In John 17:16, Jesus says, *"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."*

God does not want us to experience the same pressures and worries that everyone else does.

We are encouraged to rise above our concerns for safety, security, and success by placing all of our cares on the Lord and trusting that He will provide what we need.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says in Matthew 6:31-32, *"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? For after all these things do the Gentiles*

seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

Instead of being consumed by the pressures of this world, God has another plan for us.

The Word says that we should concentrate on seeking the Kingdom of God above all else, and focus on living righteously, and God will give us everything we need.

It sounds like a great promise, but many Christians wonder why they do not see the manifestation of this promise in their lives.

They are quick to condemn the covenant promise, but they fail to admit that they have not kept up their end of the contract.

Question: Do you spend the majority of your energy seeking a) God's kingdom, or b) the things of this present life? Be honest with yourself.

"THE PEACE THAT PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING"

Jesus asks us, *"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?"* (Matthew 6:27).

Science proves that stress can take years off of your life. The overwhelming pressures of trying to keep up with the Joneses, raising your children in a fallen world, maintaining a household budget, and gaining financial stability can certainly be overwhelming.

These are things that worldly people struggle with every day. And so do most Christians.

But there is a secret weapon in Christian Stress Management that the world misses out on.

We serve a God of Love. He has made provisions so that we do not have to carry all of these stresses.

He says that we should mentally be *"Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you."* (1 Peter 5:7 NIV).

Instead of your stress, God wants us to have His peace!

Philippians 4:7 says, *"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."*

But how do we obtain this peace?

God often works in covenants or contracts with us...."If you do this, then I will do that." The issue is that many Christians run around claiming the promise, but they have not fulfilled their half of the agreement.

Before we receive God's Holy peace, there are two important things that we have to do:

- Worry about nothing; pray about everything. Tell God what you need (Philippians 4:6a).
- Thank God for all He has already done (Philippians 4:6b)

Many people pray, but they forget the second step.

Whenever we are in a stressful situation, it is so refreshing to stop and think of all of the things God has *already* done for us.

Recounting His blessings is spiritually therapeutic. It reinforces our belief that God will come through for us this time too!

And praising Him for what He has already done also develops an attitude of thankfulness in our heart. That thankfulness will begin to develop God's joy and peace inside of us.

Exercise: Make a list of your blessings. Include the solutions from the Lord that miraculously arrived right on time, but also include those daily blessings that are so commonplace that we tend to view them as 'rights' rather than rescues.

Question: Now answer this question – “Has God been good to you?”

“GUARDING THE PEACE IN YOUR HEART”

We have all had those emotional experiences where we realize God will take care of us.

Suddenly, we feel His peace and security, and all is well with the world.

But, how do you keep that feeling from waning when the world comes up with a new attack?

Read Philippians 4:8. Right after Paul tells us how to receive God's peace, he tells us how to keep it.

"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things [are] honest, whatsoever things [are] just, whatsoever things [are] pure, whatsoever things [are] lovely, whatsoever things [are] of good report; if [there be] any virtue, and if [there be] any praise, think on these things."

Where do your thoughts dwell throughout the day?

Do you meditate on the negative news you saw this morning in the newspaper or on the television?

Do you stress over all the things on your ‘to do’ list?

God wants Christians to practice the spiritual art of allowing your thoughts to be dominated by the promises of God.

Controlling your thoughts is one of the most difficult things to do. But, Paul says that it is a must if you are planning to walk in peace.

Joyce Meyer has actually written an excellent book that can guide you in learning how to take any thought captive that goes against God's promises (2 Corinthians 10:5). It is called the **“BATTLEFIELD OF THE MIND.”**

If you are ever going to walk in the peace of God, you have to learn not to let negative, fearful thoughts run through your mind unhindered.

Even a fleeting thought that is contrary to God's Word is a threat to your peace, and must be taken captive.

Once you allow negative thoughts to take root in your mind, they will bear fruit like stress, worry, and fear.

The mind, like the body, has to be brought into submission to God, and given spiritual parameters in which to operate.

Did you know that you can refuse to worry?

You can refuse to allow Satan to plant seeds of doubt in your mind and your heart.

You can refuse to let Satan control your day, by following the steps we have already discussed – **pray, meditate, and thank God for His intervention. THEN TRUST HIM!**

Exercise: It takes practice to trust God.

In preparation for the next lesson, begin each day with at least 15 minutes of quiet time with the Lord.

Read encouraging Scriptures from the Psalms.

Pray and thank the Lord for His watchful eye over you, and ask Him to guide you in your daily decisions.

In the evening, thank the Lord.

Read a few verses of Scripture before you go to sleep. Let the Word of God be the last thought on your mind before you close your eyes.

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LESSON 2

INTRODUCTION

In Lesson 1, we learned the secrets to Christian stress management. In this lesson, we are going to begin putting one of those secrets to work: **Focusing your thoughts on things that are of good report.**

Your last exercise was to develop a habit of prayer and meditation. Later, we will talk about the impact that habit has on the life of a Christian.

“YOU ARE IMPORTANT TO GOD”

Jesus asks us in Matthew 6:30 *“Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, [shall he] not much more [clothe] you, O ye of little faith?”*

In this verse, Jesus is trying to tell us that we should not be concerned about material things. Our fear is demonstration of our lack of faith.

When God told Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to a land He had never seen, Abraham did not question how he would make a living. He knew if God told him to go, and that God would provide for him.

When a person is called to a higher level of service in the Kingdom of God, it seems the first thing that happens is financial problems. That’s because God wants us to realize that He is our Source.

One stock market crash can wipe out all the care and planning that we do, and in the end, we have to depend on God, anyway. Why not just start out that way and save time?

Romans 10:17 says that *“faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God”*. The more you hear and read God's promises to you, the more your faith will reign over your worries.

Discussion: How did developing a habit of prayer and meditation every morning and evening change your stress levels?

FINANCIAL STRESS

The first thing you have to realize in times of financial stress is that God won't forsake you. Psalm 37:25 says: *"I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread"*.

God **WILL** see to the needs of His people. He will not help us with our greed. But He will not let us go hungry, if we belong to Him.

Remember, how He miraculously fed Elijah twice a day with a timely raven-delivery of food?

He also fed the rebellious Israelites 40 years in the desert.

Christians who are now seniors should be able to say like David, *"I have been young, and now am old, but I, too, have never seen God's people begging bread."*

Even those who are spiritual immature will not suffer. Psalm 34:10 says, *"The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good [thing]."*

A lion is always hungry. A young lion is even hungrier because it is in the growth process.

God knows that the new Christian has greater spiritual needs, and God promises to provide. In Matthew 5:6, Jesus says, *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."*

Question: How is our stress management different from the world's approach?

STRESSED OVER TRYING TO SUCCEED

As a Christian, you are destined for success. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "**For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.**"

Deuteronomy 30:9a says "**And the LORD thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand...**"

God loves us, and wants to bless us.

It reminds me of the parable that Jesus told of the prodigal son. When the prodigal son repented and came home, his father gave a big party for him in celebration. God will sustain you in lean times and restore you at harvest times.

God will open doors for you. Revelations 3:8 says "**I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My Name.**"

But notice that this promise is participatory...in other words, we have to hold up our end of the contract. We have to keep God's Word and witness for Him.

Jesus is aware of everything the Church is doing. He has firsthand knowledge, because He walks in the Church.

Jesus is the door through which we pass to heaven. A door that opens can also be closed. Our right relationship with Christ keeps the door ajar!

What's interesting here is that Jesus says the church has "**a little strength**". This is very true of all strong believers.

In our weakness, Jesus is strong. The strength that sustains us and sees us through is His, not our own.

Our job is to keep His Word. We have to guard the Word of God. The Bible is our instruction book for living. If we change it in any way, the instructions won't work.

So many churches have watered down the Word until it has been short circuited and lost its power. We must not tamper with God's power.

Question: How do our fleshly desires add to our stress?

TOO MANY RESPONSIBILITIES

God will give you the strength to endure.

Isaiah 40:31 says, *"But they that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They will run and not be weary. And they shall walk and not faint."*

Don't place limits on God ability to sustain you. Christians must learn to trust God when we are stretched to the end of our rope!

You can accomplish more than you think! Romans 8:37 says *"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."*

A true follower of Jesus Christ will not turn back, but instead press forward.

We know that Jesus has won the victory. These little battles we face are nothing, because Jesus has already won the war at Calvary. Our strength is in Jesus Christ.

God's indwelling spirit is greater than your tasks. 1 John 4:4 says *"Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world."*

John is writing this to true Christians. The **HE** that is in us is Christ.

Galatians 2:20 says *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

With Christ in me, I can do all things. It is Christ in me that overcomes the enemy; not my own strength.

Question: Think of a time when you took on too much. How did you feel?
Who is to blame?

STRESSED OUT OVER YOUR CHILDREN

God promises they will always return to Him. Proverbs 22:6 says *"Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."*

Children who are trained to go to church when they are young, will generally be church goers all of their lives. You are here, aren't you?

Many who survived being captured during war time will tell you that what kept them from losing their minds was remembering the Scriptures they had learned as children in Sunday school.

Many parents have seen a child that was raised in church wander away from God for a period of time, but when they have families of their own, they understand the value of spiritual training.

Question: Are you teaching your children to have a close relationship with the Lord, or are you leaving that training to the Sunday School teacher alone?

GENERAL CHRISTIAN STRESS RELIEF

Don't give up! Galatians 6:9 says *"And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."*

Have you noticed that Christians never seem to get tired of doing good? That is what separates us from the rest of the world.

The world is selfish. Christians are thoughtful of others, and we are content to work until Christ returns.

When the Lord returns for His own, we must be found working.

God will be your strength and courage. Habakkuk 3:19 says *“The LORD God [is] my strength, and He will make my feet like hinds' [feet], and He will make me to walk upon mine high places.”*

What this verse teaches is that God will cause us to rise above our immediate problems. It is not our own strength that we depend upon. It is the strength that God gives us, when Christ dwells within us.

The strongest Christian is the one who knows that he cannot do anything on his own. It is God who brings success to our endeavors. And there is no obstacle too large for God to overcome.

Question: What cause you to give up?

CONCLUSION

Christian stress management is all a matter of obedience to God. If we follow God's instructions, He will remove our stress and replace it with His peace.

The next time you are stressing over something, turn it over to the Lord...He'll work it out!

FOUR SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLES THAT NEED CONSTANT REFRESHING

“A BIBLE STUDY TO REFRESH THE INNER MAN AND SUPPRESS THE FLESH!”

INTRODUCTION

Every Christian is encouraged to study God’s Word for the edification of our spirit-man.

But it is important to know that unlike other books of knowledge, the Bible must be read over and over again if it is to continually transform and renew us.

God designed His plan of salvation like a bridge, to take us from one degree of grace to another.

In our Savior’s earthly ministry, He laid the groundwork for our Christian walk. S. D. Gordon said, *“Jesus is God spelling Himself out in language that man can understand.”*

Yet, as easy as Jesus is to understand, God’s penetrating power can only be felt when we keep our daily focus on the Word.

There are four spiritual principles we cannot ignore. We must allow God to continuously reinforce them within us.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE #1 - DON’T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU THINK

We all have a mental illness. It’s called sin.

This means we can’t trust what we ourselves even think.

We like to think we have mental telepathy, and we can figure out another person better than he can understand himself. But the truth is that the only one you really know that well is YOU.

And even that’s sometimes questionable.

The Word says that “*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*” (Jeremiah 17:9).

We have an amazing ability to lie to ourselves. We see it in our judgment of others, and our lack of judgment of ourselves. 1 John 1:8 says, “*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*”

Every NEXT generation places great value on authenticity. They go through a season of rejection, convinced they know more about life than their senior counterparts.

But you’re not authentic or REAL until you can publicly admit how inauthentic you are most of the time.

Here are just a few reasons why we can’t trust ourselves:

- We all have blind spots.
- We don’t stop to really think.
- We fail to notice important details.
- We have background biases.
- We jump to conclusions.
- We get trapped by categories.
- We miss the big picture.
- We see what we want to see.

Our thought process is clouded by our sin nature and the external influences Satan throws at us in an attempt to separate us from God.

If you want to be real for God, it’s a good idea to think **TWICE** before you speak **ONCE**. Give God a chance to form your opinions before you open your mouth.

Question: How can we become less judgmental and more forgiving of others?

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE #2 - GUARD YOUR MINDS AGAINST GARBAGE

Proverbs 15:14 says, *“A wise person is hungry for truth, while the fool feeds on trash.”* (NLT)

Nutritionists will tell you that there are three kinds of food: brain food, junk food, and toxic food.

The same is true of what you see and hear. God wants us to fill our minds with the right things.

Psalm 101:3 says, *“I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.”*

Gossip, pornography, X-rated movies and music,...these are just some of the tools Satan uses to take our focus off God and fill us with the trash of Satan’s realm.

So how do you guard your mind against garbage? Philippians 4:6-8 gives us two ways:

- **CONVERSATIONAL PRAYER** (“pray about everything”)
- **CONCENTRATED FOCUSING** (“fix your thoughts”)

It’s useless to worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done, is doing, and is going to do.

If you do this you will experience God’s peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand.

His peace will guard your hearts and minds *as* you live in Christ Jesus....

Fix your thoughts on what is true and honorable and right. Think about things that are pure and lovely and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

The key to overcoming temptation is not to resist it, but instead to replace it. It's the expulsion power of a new affection that helps you overcome temptation.

Exercise: Write down the things you need to REPLACE in your life. What will you replace them with?

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE #3 - NEVER STOP LEARNING

Growing churches require growing saints. Proverbs 18:15 says, *“The mind of a smart person is eager to acquire knowledge. A wise person listens in order to learn more.”*

We learn by listening. Too many Christians concentrate on finding ways to be HEARD rather than on LISTENING. But Proverbs 10:14 says, *“Wise men store up knowledge ...”*

One of the ways you can store up knowledge is to start a Christian family library and leave it as a legacy to your next generation.

A good place to begin building your Bible knowledge library is to have at least three translations of the Scriptures, two commentaries, several self-help books in areas of your choosing (be sure they are Scripturally based), and an Exhaustive Bible Dictionary.

Of course, you will never acquire knowledge of their contents unless you READ them. Choose a time in the day when you have little interruption, and read for at least one-half hour.

Allow the Spirit of God to penetrate your heart, your mind, and your soul, as you seek to comprehend the depth of His wisdom. Proverbs 19:8 says, *“Those who get wisdom do themselves a favor, and those who love learning will succeed.”*

There are five levels of learning:

- **KNOWLEDGE** - *“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.”* (Hosea 4:6)
- **PERSPECTIVE (WISDOM)** - *“I don’t think the way you think, and the way you work isn’t the way I work.”* (Isaiah 55:8)
- **CONVICTION** - *“Our Gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.”* (1 Thessalonians 1:5).
- **CHARACTER** - *“As the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him and reflect His glory even more.”* (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- **SKILL** - *“If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed. But skill will bring success.”* (Ecclesiastes 10:10)

We say we believe the WHOLE BIBLE. But a person only believes the part that he is willing to emulate or copy.

In other words, you believe what you actually DO. We’re supposed to be doers of the word and not hearers only.

It is okay to diligently study the Word, but our knowledge is useless if we do not take the same amount of time to practice what we have learned.

Jesus said, *“...It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4).

People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every Word of God.

As God’s ambassadors, we are called to keep ourselves well prepared to be kingdom builders. Isaiah said, *“Thou will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in Thee!”* (Isaiah 26:3).

Exercise: Choose one verse of Scripture that you have difficulty applying to your spiritual walk. How will you overcome your resistance to God’s instruction?

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE #4 - LET GOD STRETCH YOUR IMAGINATION

Nothing ever happens until somebody starts dreaming. What we need today are great dreamers for the Kingdom. Proverbs 29:8 says, *“Where there is no vision, the people perish.”*

As Christians, we often get stuck in the same habitual understanding and belief we see and hear exhibited in other Christians...whether right or wrong.

We often see this staleness demonstrated in our worship, our teaching methods, and in our evangelism outreach.

And what’s worse, we fight against those who imagine or try to apply a more liberal grace.

God needs explorers...Christians who are willing to think outside of the box...Christians who are not afraid to venture out into His infinite realm of understanding.

We must never change the Word and its meaning. But our methods of delivery ought to be creative and culturally appropriate.

You cannot grow the Kingdom of God where you are, if you speak a foreign language. Let God use you to break down the barriers that deter unbelievers.

In the last days, God says, *“I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, and your old men will dream dreams”* (Acts 2:17).

What is your dream for your next ten years? For your church? Your family?

Innovators see what everyone else sees but they ask questions that no one else asks.

Why do we do this? We do it for the glory of God.

Exercise: Read Ephesians 3:20-21. Describe how God applies His master plan of salvation throughout the ages.

CONCLUSION

Some Christians are naturally great thinkers. Some are naturally great doers.

If you are a thinker for God, THINK...and share what you are thinking.

If you are a doer...WORK...work effectively and willing with others who share the same calling.

The growth of God's Kingdom depends upon us all. You can't win this race for God unless you are in it.

Let's covenant together that we will allow God to work in us and through us, to mold us and shape us according to His desires and His power.

If we are willing vessels, God will make us great missionaries for Christ.