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EMOJI - STRESS

Dealing with the stress we will all face in life.



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Story about Making an Archery Bow

I am a traditional archer; I like using stick and wood. Over this past year, I decided that I would learn how to make a bow that I could use in the field. Last year, I made one out of Osage wood; and I even had a chance to hunt with it. However, this year, I decided to work with a different kind of wood, hickory, and a different kind of wood for the handle, bloodwood. I spent many hours working on this bow. I had over ten hours in this particular piece of wood.

I had worked it and worked it, and sanded and shaved, and tillered the bow. Tilling is a process where you put a tillering string on it in order to “teach” the wood how to turn into a bow by stretching it. The bow limbs have tension and the goal is to bring it down to about your draw length; mine is 28 inches. I had worked on this bow for quite some time and it had made it. In fact, I was in the process of thinking about putting on some tip overlays and maybe putting some different backing on it. With staining, that would complete the bow.

Then, I decided to add the handle. That took several hours of shaping, because it was made from a rectangular block of wood. I glued it and began to shape and sand it, but I did not take into account that the handle added a little bit more wood to the bow. I began to tiller it and pull the string down and stretch the limbs. Suddenly, when I got to the draw length I wanted, I heard “whack” and the thing exploded! And my response was, “Oh, well.” Then I remembered what I was studying – “Stress.” In fact, that’s how you make a bow. You have to create stress in it, so it bounces back.

Stress in our lives

Many of us who have a lot of stress in our lives are right on the edge of breakage. There have been several medical studies, which indicate stress and certain diseases are very connected. These include: Heart disease, diabetes, obesity, Alzheimer’s, premature aging, gastrointestinal problems and more.

It seems like everything is somewhat connected to stress. Here are a couple of thoughts. As long as you live on this planet, you will have stress. Some of us experience a great deal of stress in our homes on Sunday mornings before we even make it to church. There was stress driving to church and finding a place to park. When you listen to the sermon, it may create some stress. When you leave church, it might be stressful. In fact, some days you might not even make it to church because you’re stressed out.

Let’s look at a Scripture passage that follows one of the greatest victories in the Old Testament. At Mount Carmel, Elijah called fire down from heaven, completely consuming the sacrifice.³⁶ At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: “Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command.³⁷ Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again.”³⁸ Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.³⁹ When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!” (1 Kings 18:36–39)

It was a showdown between the priests of Baal and the one true God; and God raised up Elijah. This was a turning point where Israel began to turn back to the Lord. After the prophets of Baal were destroyed, King Ahab told his wife Jezebel what had happened on Mount Carmel. She responded, “You need to make sure he knows that I’m going to take his life before the end of the day.” Then in 1 Kings 19:3, it says this,

³Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, (1 Kings 19:3)

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. This is the same man who had approached King Ahab earlier.

¹⁷When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, “Is it you, you troubler of Israel?”¹⁸ And he answered, “I have not

troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals. (1 Kings 18:17–18)

Elijah stood boldly to represent the Lord, and he was victorious on top of Mount Carmel.

All it took was one woman who uttered one sentence about threatening his life; and he became afraid and ran for his life. Slowly but surely, Elijah's life was spinning out of control to the point where he said to the Lord, "Take my life. I want to die."

Stress is a very powerful thing! We need to understand that we will have stress all of our lives. It is not that you and I should avoid stress, but how we handle it is everything. Before we go too deeply into this, I want to mention three things that we talk about in handling this powerful emotion, this emoji of stress. Some of us may be experiencing this powerful emotion of stress because of our job, our health, and our relationships.

GET TRANSPARENTLY HONEST ABOUT HOW YOU HANDLE STRESS.

You and I need to: "Get transparently honest about how we handle stress." I don't care how long you've walked with God. I don't care how long you've served Jesus.

There is going to be stress.

There will be problems that you have to deal with. Many people come to church and act like nothing is going on; they smile and put on a plastic smile. They say, "How are you doing?" "Fine brother." On the inside, they are not fine, and they don't let anyone else know. Dealing with stress is part of our life's dilemma; therefore, we need to understand how to deal with it.

We live in denial.

With some of us, we live in denial. We say, "I'm not stressed. I've never had stress. I don't know what people are talking about. I'm not stressed." Some of the people who deny it are probably more stressed over things than they could ever imagine. They may not call it stress, but they are dealing with it. Many of us don't like to talk about stress; we think if we don't talk about it, we don't have it. For example, when you have chicken pox, you might think that if you don't mention, "chicken or pox," that it is okay; but you are still going to itch! Many of us need to understand that is exactly what is happening in our lives. God does not want us to live in denial; we need to get honest with ourselves.

Some of us live with distraction.

Some of us live with distraction and we get busy here and busy there. We spin this plate and spin that plate; this increases the pressure in our lives, and we

get stressed more and more. However, we like the distractions because we don't have to deal with the issue that is causing the stress.

Some of us live on the edge of detonation.

Some of us live right on the edge of detonation. We are close to being stressed out and no one knows it. We put a plastic smile on our face and don't show any emotion whatsoever. In reality, we are about ready to come undone.

God may have directed you to read this because He wants you to deal directly with your stress. He does not want you to live on the edge of detonation. Do you know what will happen? If you live on the edge of detonation, you will not be very pleasant to be around. People will not be thinking happy thoughts when they are around you because you are stressed out. You snap at them and you are short with them.

Have you ever thought about this? Sometimes, our children don't want to talk to us because they know how we will answer them? We can be sharp and almost condescending, and we try to avoid the conversation. Consequently, they move to the place where they don't even talk to us anymore; and that is a difficult place to be. Sometimes, we do that with our family and our spouses, friends, and even people we work with. It is because we are living right on that edge of detonation.

Some of us live resisting our personal description.

I would also tell you that some of us are resisting our personal description.

Questions someone should ask to see how you are handling stress:

Let me ask you interesting questions. These are some interesting questions that someone should ask to determine how you are handling stress right now. (Since I'm a doctor, let me ask you some probing questions.) Here they are:

1. *Are you irritable most of the time?*
2. *Is there a dryness in your throat and mouth?*
3. *Do you feel your heart pounding?*
4. *Do you have impulsive behavior?*
5. *Do you have emotional instability?*
6. *Do you want to cry or run away?*
7. *Are you just looking for an exit door?*
8. *Are you having problems concentrating?*
9. *Are you often swept away by thoughts?*
10. *Are you getting tired easily?*
11. *Are there feelings of anxiety that come and go?*

We live resisting that personal description. Stress is a reality and God wants us to learn how to deal with it. Some of us live without a diagnosis whatsoever. If you are wrestling with this, ask someone close to you, “Do I act stressed?” Listen and they will tell you. They might say something has to change. Maybe they have already told you, but often like an ostrich, we stick our head in the sand and we try to move forward.

I don’t care how long you have been a believer, stress is a reality and learning how to deal with it is important. Knowing how He made us, do you think God would give us an example in Scripture about how to handle stress? The answer is, “Yes.”

GET SERIOUSLY DISCIPLINED WITH A DAILY QUIET TIME.

That leads me to the second thing I want to share with you; and that is this: “Get seriously disciplined with a daily quiet time.” I don’t want to take for granted that you know what a daily quiet time is. A daily quiet time is a time that you take every day in order to spend intimate time alone with God. You might say, “I’m too busy to do that.” This is the key to your stress relief; if you want to get rid of stress, you need to understand this.

Look at the life of Jesus; for three and a half years, He publicly ministered all over Israel. Not one time was He ever stressed out. You don’t ever find Him wringing His hands. He was never sharp with the disciples. He was never rude, but He was always direct. Jesus was not stressed out at all!

In that public ministry period of three and a half years, He walked from peace to peace to peace; and the path between where He went was paved with peace. How did He do that? You might say, “He is God.” Yes, but He was also man. He was very God of very God and very man of very man! He lived in a skin suit like you and me, and He had to deal with all of the issues that you and I deal with.

There are some of you (maybe like me) who have a little ADD, maybe even a little ADHD. This is a very common diagnosis today. Do you know what that is? It means that you are responding to all kinds of stimuli; it is like you have multiple antennas. Someone who doesn’t have ADD probably has only one antenna. Whereas, people with ADD have about 20 antennas. They are picking up AM-FM. They have the television on at the same time that they have a conversation over here. They’re all over the place.

If you are in church and you have ADD, you are not only listening to what the pastor is saying, but you are thinking about that woman who is sitting in front of you. She is turning the pages in her Bible and you are wondering, what page is she on? Or you’re thinking about someone behind you and you feel their eyes

staring at you; and you are thinking, “Maybe I should have used a different hair product today.” Your mind is all over the place. When you sang and worshiped the Lord, your mind went to Walmart and back. You are processing a lot of different things.

Many of us get stressed out because there are a lot of things happening in our lives, and we just don’t know how to handle it. Therefore, we just duck our head and push on through.

God wants us to learn how to handle stress.

God wants us to come to the place where we learn how to handle stress. Jesus is the greatest example of that; here is a great Scripture passage from Mark:

³⁵ Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶ Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷ and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!” ³⁸ Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. (Mark 1:35–39)

I will give you a sentence, which will describe this passage. If you live by this sentence, your life will be on the path to handling all kinds of stress in a positive way.

Here is the sentence:

1. *When you practice the right disciplines:*

“When you practice the right disciplines, people will want what you have to give, and you will be ready to give of yourself.”

This is very important. I’ve just given you a sentence describing these verses and now we’re going to break it down and make it come alive to us.

Let’s look at the very first part of the sentence: When you practice the right disciplines. What discipline are we talking about? We’re talking about a quiet time.

Jesus was very busy! People were pulling on Him nonstop, during every waking moment. He had people who wanted to hear what He had to say, and they wanted to catch Him saying something that they could twist to create an issue with Him. Some people ignored Him, while other but people followed Him. He was constantly drawn in various directions.

Jesus practiced the right discipline.

The very thing that kept Him totally stress-free was that He practiced the right discipline. Do you know what that discipline was? Quiet time.

The paradigm in this Scripture passage is very powerful for us. The Bible tells us that very early, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house where He was staying and went to a solitary place where He prayed. Jesus practiced this discipline. In fact, the only thing the disciples ever asked Jesus to teach them was how to pray. They witnessed that discipline in His life; the abilities that Jesus had flowed from His intimacy with God.

Remember, Jesus was very God of very God and very man of very man! Consequently, He knows what you are going through physically; and He knows what you need to do with your body to align with what God is trying to do in your Spirit. Notice a couple of things:

Jesus made the time.

First of all, Jesus made the time. This is a discipline for us. You have to make the time to be alone with God. Some of you might think, "I just don't have the time." Yes, you do. You have all the time to do what you want to do. You have time to go to work. You have time to eat lunch. You have time to play. You have time to do what you really want to do. A friend might ask me out to lunch. Do you know what? I will find the time. Or, do you want to go play golf? Call me. I'm easy, I will find the time. I like to do that. If you want to hunt or fish, call me, I will make the time. Do you know what I'm saying?

But just don't call me to shop because I don't shop. My wife tells me that shopping, for women is the same as hunting, for men. I know that you can make time for what is important to you. All of us have 24 hours each day. What you do with those 24 hours is at your discretion.

Make prayer a discipline in your life.

Jesus chose to make this a priority in his life, to spend time alone with the Father. Make the time! This is a discipline. You can do this.

There are a lot of people who will serve God. They will sing, work, and sign up for some committee. They are busy and they are willing to do something. But when it comes to prayer by themselves, they have other things that they need to do. This is a very important discipline. If you are stressed out, you are probably not spending enough time alone with God to refresh your Spirit.

Jesus made the time. He also took the best time, while it was still dark. Do you know why this was the best time? Because no one was up moving around. Again, if you wait until everyone starts moving, there are a lot of people around. The phone starts ringing, you are drawn toward your e-mail, or you are looking at a text message. The longer you wait to spend time alone with God, the harder it is going to be during the

day. I have made a simple observation: People who go to bed late at night are not morning people! People who go to bed early are morning people. If you are a late-night person, it is hard for you to get up early in the morning. You can discipline yourself to go to bed earlier, so you can get up earlier. You may say, "I just don't like that." I don't know what your schedule is, but if we don't make the time, we will miss the best things.

By the way, I don't think God is a legalist, whatsoever. I don't think He cares whether you spend that quiet time every day, early in the morning like Jesus, or you spend it late at night. However, you need to make it the best time. The earlier it is, with fewer distractions, the more intimacy you will experience. Intimacy means that it is private time. Jesus went off to a solitary place. That is what I want you to hear, that He found the right place. That right place was away from others.

Pray and talk with God out loud!

Do you think you can do a quiet time with your wife? No, you can't. For your quiet time, you can pray together. You need to do that. And you can read Scripture together. That is wonderful! However, this intimacy with God needs to be alone time, alone time between you and the Lord. Of course, you can do a quiet time with your spouse and with your children, but that should not be the only time that you spend intimately with God. This needs to be very private, to be away from others.

Jesus also picked the perfect plan: prayer. It is that simple. This is the discipline that He used. Because of it, God gave Him the power to handle stress, even with all of the people pulling Him in different directions.

2. People will want what you have to give.

Let me give you the next part of that sentence: "People will want what you have to give." Do you know why? Because you do have something to give. Have you ever thought the reason why some people don't want what you have to give is because you don't have anything to give? That is why you are stressed out. There is more output than input in your life. You are giving yourself to everyone, but there is no input into your life. You can't give away what you don't have.

I really believe that people wanted what Jesus had because He had so much to give. Therefore, people wanted Him, and they were constantly pulling from Him. But guess what? That intimacy every day with God His Father filled up His tank!

Many of us are operating with an empty tank; and we will fill our tank through intimacy with God. If you will begin to practice this discipline in your life, you will find that the time alone with God becomes more important to you and more fulfilling than all of the other activities

that you may do. When that intimacy with God becomes real, it becomes everything to you; and you look forward to that time alone with Him.

What you do on the outside just gives you the avenue to share what God has already impressed upon your heart. If people don't want what you have to give, it may be because you are dry and empty. You cannot fill it full of information; people don't want information, they want inspiration. They need acknowledgement. They are looking for sensitivity. They are looking for someone with a listening ear. With many of us, we are so stressed out that we don't have time to listen to people. We don't have time to give them the right things because we have not ministered to the Lord and allowed him to minister to us. That is why we are dry and stressed out.

3. You will be ready to give of yourself.

Let me give you a third part of this sentence and I'm going to amplify it: "And you will be ready to give of yourself." This intimacy with God will produce the ability for: "You to be ready to give of yourself." If you read that next verse in the Bible after Simon Peter said, "Everybody's looking for you," Jesus didn't say to them, "You just interrupted my quiet time with God. How dare you! Come back in 30 minutes." He didn't say that. Instead,

Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else to the nearby villages so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

³⁸ Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹ So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons. (Mark 1:38–39)

This is pretty powerful. In fact, when you spend time alone with God, you will be ready to give of yourself with the help of others (Jesus invited the disciples to engage with him). Let us go to other villages (with a clear strategy and a determined purpose). We are going to other villages so I can preach (that is what I'm going to do). Then the Bible said He drove out demons (He was producing measurable results). If you are in business, you appreciate that. I love that sentence because this is a clear description of how to get things done in your life. God wants you to accomplish things and still have plenty of gas left in your tank to handle the next part of your journey.

Jesus operated like that and you didn't find him stressed. He wasn't stressed because He had spent time alone with God. You may think that doesn't make sense, maybe not to you. If it worked for Jesus, it can work for you. If you and I will get alone with God, it will keep us from coming apart. God will begin to "tiller"

our life and begin to allow our limbs to bend so we can become what He wants us to be. This will only happen when we have the priority of spending intimate time alone with Him. That's what a quiet time is all about.

By the way, I went to church all of my life. I cannot think of a time in my life when my family didn't go to church. I gave my life to Christ when I was 12 years old, but I did not hear, or I did not absorb the importance of time alone with God. I heard that you need to pray, but no one ever taught me how to spend time alone with God. I never understood that concept until I went to college. That means I had many years with a lack of discipline in my life.

When God began to develop that in me, things began to change in my life. Suddenly, other people started seeing my life becoming fruitful. If you want your life to become fruitful in every area, in your business, in your relationships, and with your children; you need to have time alone with God. It will help you deal with your stress; and you will be able to handle things that come your way with a lot more patience, love and purpose. You will see measurable results in your life.

GET ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN YOUR HEALING.

I will give you a third thought and that is: "Get actively involved in your healing." Some of us are stressed sick. I know that I have hit the bullseye with you. Dealing with this may be painful for some of us. If we are going to get healed of this malady in our life, we need to personally get involved in our own healing.

I will give you a great passage of Scripture from Matthew. The context is something different from stress. The Pharisees were creating burdens and legalism on the people who were wrestling with sin's control on their lives. Jesus gave them this description; it gives us principles that are very applicable to this issue. Jesus said,

²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28–30)

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened." That is what stress does to you. It makes you feel like you're carrying the weight of the world. In fact, that word "burden" is a word which describes the freight that has been placed on a ship; and it is still creating weight in the future. "Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." That word "rest" literally means in the Greek language "spiritual refreshment." We don't feel very refreshed because we are so stressed out. We are tense. For all of our lives, our teeth are on edge and we're looking for a fight.

Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Four Power Words of Action

There are a lot of things that we could dive deeply into this Scripture passage to uncover. I want to give you four power words:

1. *Come to me.*

Jesus said, come, come to me. All of these words are active, rather than passive. If you want to deal with stress in your life, you need to get engaged. You need to do more than just pray, "Oh God, take away my stress." It's not going to happen. You need to come to the place where you actively take a step to come. (Come to a class? No, come to Jesus.) He said, "Come to me."

You need to go ahead and be honest. You might say, "I don't know what to pray, when I get alone with God." Just tell Him how you are feeling right now. "Jesus, I'm stressed out. I'm stressed over work. I'm stressed over finances. I'm stressed with my relationships. Please help me." That is coming to Christ. Take that first step.

2. *Take my yoke.*

There is another word here: Take. Take my yoke. This is the description of getting set into the discipline. You know what a yoke is. It is that wooden harness that goes across the neck of an ox to hook him up to a plow, so he can do work. That takes discipline and it puts him under control. Literally, Jesus is saying, take my yoke, get involved in my discipline, and follow my principles.

3. *Learn from me.*

"Learn from me." Let me just tell you something. I've got two theological degrees and I'm still learning. Just because you went to Sunday School when you were young, you haven't graduated. No, you and I will be in a lifelong learning process. In fact, the word "disciple" means "learning one," "following one." It is a process and a journey. You and I need to get into God's Word and find out what He wants us to learn. Very importantly, we need to learn from Him. That is why I have given you the example of Jesus. You don't have to go to a stress management class; you just need to follow the example of Christ. Now, if you want to go to a stress management class, feel free to pay for the seminar. This information is free. If you and I will practice the discipline of Jesus, we will be able to deal with our stress.

4. *Find rest for our souls.*

Learn from me and we will Find rest for our souls. The refreshment that He gives us will come flowing out of us. You might say, "I don't feel rested. I had eight hours of sleep last night, but I woke up tired." Do you know why? Because you are stressed. You could say, "I'm too busy to spend time with God." Yes, you do! It must be a discipline in your life, and it will take work. Let me just remind you of my broken bow that I described at the beginning of this chapter. When I was doing the "tillering" and stretching, and pulling the limbs down; the limbs were bending well and it looked fine. I rubbed my hand up and down the limbs and I felt no splinters. I couldn't see any defects. But when I put enough stress on it, "bang," it broke! You may not be broken yet, but you are right on the edge. God is giving you a chance, an opportunity to begin again. Your life can bend with whatever causes you to bend; and you will have the power to shoot forward into the coming weeks and not break. He wants you to accomplish great things for His Kingdom, but He wants you to accomplish them the right way, with the right roots put deeply into Him.