

**Get a Grip**  
***On Stress***  
**October 11, 2020**

Good morning everyone. Whether you're onsite or online, I'm glad you're with us today as we continue our series, *Get a Grip* ... because *that* – getting a grip – is what a lot of us need to do right now.

As I said at the beginning of last week's service which we called *Restoring Your Soul* (and if you missed that, you *really* should go back and watch it) ...

As I said last week, everywhere you turn, it feels like there's a constant and oppressive weight pressing down on us.

In addition to the trials and tribulations that are just part of normal everyday life ...

- There's the coronavirus and everything that goes along with it.
- There's cultural tension over racism and bad policing and systemic injustice, and the extent to which any of those truly exist in our country.
- For a lot of us, there's financial stress from the lockdowns.
- And then there's the political drama that never ever ends.

And it's taking a toll on us. It's affecting the way we live.

I love that song we just sang. I love its imagery, and I love its promise: that, in the crushing and in the pressing of our everyday lives, God is able to bring forth something fresh and new and highly desirable.

But, for a lot of us – even those who are Christians – what's coming forth right now from the crushing and the pressing isn't "new wine." It's something much less desirable.

Far too often these days, you and I are being driven by ...

- Our fear
- By our anger
- By our judgmentalism
- Our fatigue
- Our apathy

- And our dissatisfaction.

And, if you're a Christian (and even if you're not), *that is not the kind of life God intends for you to experience.*

... which is why, from now through the Sunday before Thanksgiving, we're going to be talking about how to "get a grip" – how to take control of those particular attitudes and emotions so that they don't take control of us.

And if you're wondering why we're going to talk about *those six*, it's because they're the ones that I'm seeing most frequently in myself right now and in many of you.

And what we're going to do is to devote a week to each one of them, BUT, *before we can do that*, we first need to talk about *stress* ... which is the subject of today's message.

So, let's get into it.

## Understanding Stress

And let's begin by defining "stress" ...

... which is a bit of a challenge because there *is* no generally accepted definition among medical professionals.

Further complicating things is the fact that doctors and psychologists sometimes talk about stress as the *cause* of problems and sometimes as the *result* of them.

So, I thought it might be helpful to talk about it in terms of physics.<sup>i</sup>

And I know some of you are thinking, "did he just say *physics*? As in the subject I never really understood back in high school and college, but had to take in order to graduate?"

Yes, that's what I said.

But I promise I will keep it simple. (And for those who are engineers, I know this is overly simple).

**In the world of physics, *stress* is the amount of force exerted on a material.**

For example, if I jump up and down on this stage, I am putting stress on it.

However, I'm not *straining* it.

***Strain* is the amount of deformation of material caused by the action of stress.**

And obviously, there is very little deformation in this particular material when I jump.

You know why?

Because of its *strength*.

***Strength is the ability of a material to resist deformation.***

And because this stage is made of concrete, it has a lot of ability to resist the *strain* brought on by my *stressing* it.

On the other hand, if I were to take Richard's guitar and jump up and down on it ... do you mind if I borrow it?

Because the material his guitar is made of doesn't have nearly the *strength* of concrete, it can't handle a lot of *strain*.

... which means the *stress* from jumping on it would cause a great amount of *deformation*. In fact, it would probably break it.

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Point being, if we're going to get better at handling the emotional and psychological stress in our lives, we have to do one of two things.

**1. Either we have to get *stronger* so that we're not as *strained* ...**

... so that we can bear up under it and push back against it, which is sometimes called *resiliency* – the ability to bear stress and snap back from it without breaking.



**2. Or, we have to get out from under it.**

We have to remove ourselves from people and situations where we're being metaphorically "jumped on" and strained beyond what we can bear without breaking.

It's either *get out* or *get stronger*.

Actually, there's a third thing we need to do, but it doesn't fit my physics analogy, so I'll hold off on it for just a bit.

## An Illustration

Now, what's interesting about the idea of getting out and getting stronger is that both of them are so well illustrated by an event in the life of Jesus.

And if you're new with us or maybe just beginning to investigate Christianity, it's probably worth saying that the reason we care about the life of Jesus in the first place – the reason we even *know* about the life of Jesus in the first place ...

... isn't just because we're Christians, and the New Testament is our book, and we believe what it says – though all of those things are true. (Don't hear what I'm not saying).

It's just that it's way better than that.

- The reason we know about Jesus ...
- The reason a New Testament even exists ...
- The reason we care about what Jesus said and did ...

... is because when a guy predicts his own death and resurrection and then pulls it off, you ought to write down the story of what He said and what He did and then take it seriously.

And, as Christians, we did, and we do.

Anyway ... here's what happened.

Very early in Jesus' ministry, well before he had become a hugely popular public figure ...

After a long day of teaching and healings and a confrontation with the Pharisees (the religious leaders of his day who were constantly trying to trap him because they didn't like him) ...

Jesus had gone to Peter's home for dinner and for what He hoped would be a quiet evening with some friends.

Unfortunately, when the people of the town found out where He was, according to what Christians call "The Gospel of Mark" ...

... which, by the way, is most likely the recollections of Peter passed on to Mark ...

... which means we can trust what Mark says because Peter was *there*. It was *his* house where this happened.

**Anyway, Mark's gospel says that ...**

*That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed.  
Mark 1:32 (NIV)*

Apparently, word had gotten out of what had happened earlier in the day – the teaching, the healings and the confrontation – and people wanted more.

**So much so, Mark says, that ...**

*The whole town gathered at the door.*

Can you imagine that? What a scene.

*And Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons ...  
Mark 1:33-34 (NIV)*

In addition to everything He had done earlier in the day, Jesus went the extra mile *and then some* for all of these people who had lined up at the door.

Now, here's the important part at least for today.

Because Jesus was not only 100% God but also 100% human, by the end of this day, He had to have been totally exhausted – just like you and I would have been ...

**... which is why Mark continues: “the next morning, Jesus slept in.”**

No, that's not what he wrote. ☺

**He wrote ...**

*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.*

We'll talk about why He did that in just a bit, but let's go ahead and finish the story.

**Mark says that, a little while later ...**

*Simon Peter and his companions went to look for him ...*

Apparently, they woke up and noticed that He wasn't there.

But you know who was there?

*Everyone in the town who had experienced the events of the previous day and evening.*

**... which is why ...**

*... and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”* Mark

1:36-37 (NIV)

And the way Mark records it – the way Peter remembered it – is that the disciples were fired up about that. They were excited about that.

They could see that if Jesus played his cards right, His ministry would take off big time.

So they said, “Jesus, it’s amazing! The word is out! And everyone is waiting for you! Come back and do more healings! Do more miracles!”

**And Jesus said, “yes, this exactly what I was hoping for!”**

No, that’s not what He said.

**What He said was ...**

*But Jesus replied, “We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came.”* Mark 1:38 (NIV)

Instead of being driven by everyone else’s burdens and demands, Jesus chose to focus on the burdens and demands to which *He* was called and for which *He* was responsible.

Instead of going back, Jesus got out.

## **Get Out**

Now, reality is that there are many stressors in our lives that you and I can’t get out from under.

I mean, if you have a family or a job or a mortgage, you have to take responsibility for those things.

And sometimes that’s hard. Sometimes, you just have to bear the stress that’s associated with those things.

But reality is *also* that there are *some* things we *can* get out from under.

*Some* stress we bring on ourselves because we’ve agreed to carry burdens and responsibilities that aren’t really ours to carry.

*Some* stress we bring on ourselves when we cross the line between a healthy sense of responsibility and a “savior complex” where it feels like the weight of the whole world (or, at least, our small part of it) rests entirely on our shoulders.

- “If the job is going to get done and done right, I’m the only one who can do it.”
- “If the crisis is going to be resolved, I’m the only one who can fix it.”

- “If we’re going to stay within budget, I’m the one who has to be the bad guy about not overspending.”
- “If the kids are going to turn out right, I’m the one who has to handle the discipline.”
- “If this organization is going to stay afloat and headed in the right direction, I’m the one who has to tie myself to the mast so that the ship doesn’t go down.”

Really?

Even Jesus – THE savior – didn’t think like that!

As compassionate as He was, Jesus didn’t heal *everyone every time*.

- Sometimes, He said “no.”
- Sometimes He said, “I can’t do that *and* do what I’m supposed to do; what *only I* can do. It’s too much.”
- Sometimes, Jesus – God in human flesh – got out.

And sometimes, we should, too.

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Of course, the question is ... how do you know when you should do that?

Well, answering *that* could actually be an entire message in itself. In fact, I *have* done entire messages on it.

But, very briefly, just two things I’ll pass along today.

**1. First of all, when you constantly carry the load that belongs to someone else, you should get out from under it.**

I like the way Henry Cloud talks about this in his book *Necessary Endings*. He writes:

“There is a difference between helping someone who is disabled, incapable, or otherwise infirm ...

... versus helping someone who is resisting growing up and taking care of what every adult (or child, for that matter) has to be responsible for: herself or himself.”

“When you find yourself in any way paying for someone else’s responsibilities ... you are probably harming that person.”

... to say nothing of what you’re doing to yourself.

**2. And second, when the stress from a situation goes from “doable hard” to “destructive hard” and stays there, it’s time to get out or, at least, try to.**

So, what’s the difference between doable and destructive hard?

When something is *doable* hard, it feels difficult in the moment but there’s also an underlying joy because you sense you’re making a positive contribution; that good things are happening because of your efforts.

And you know that when it’s over you’ll look back at what you went through, and you’ll feel good about it.

But *destructive* hard is where you are simply unable to give what is required and yet you *continue to try to make it work* to the point ...

- Where your heart, mind, soul, body (and maybe your bank account) are totally drained
- Where you feel beaten down and wonder if maybe you’re going crazy.
- Where you’re bitter and angry at everyone, including God.
- Where there is no joy in anything.

That’s what “destructive hard” looks like and feels like.

And when you reach that point with a person or a situation, I’m pretty sure it’s not God’s will for you.

**Jesus once said ...**

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me ... For my yoke is easy to bear, and my load is not hard to carry.”* Matthew 11:28,30 (NET)

It won’t be destructive to you. It won’t be so stressful that you won’t be able to bear up under it.

**Get Stronger**

So, again, point is that sometimes we just need to get out from under the stress.

But sometimes, we need to get *stronger*. Sometimes, we need to *increase* what we can bear.

So, how do you do that?

Well, let’s go back to that story Mark tells us.



Remember what Jesus did the next morning after a super-stressful day?

**Let's read it again.**

*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.*

And this wasn't an isolated occurrence. This was typical of what He did all throughout His ministry.

**Luke tells us that ...**

*... vast crowds came to hear him preach and to be healed of their diseases.*

The same thing that happened at Peter's house that night kept happening.

And Jesus kept doing the same thing.

**Luke says ...**

*But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer. Luke 5:15-16 (NLT)*

Do you see the pattern here?

- Crowds and ministry and stress ... followed by solitude, quiet and prayer.
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And this is so fascinating because if you're someone who works out on a regular basis, you probably recognize what's happening here.

**Stress followed by a period of rest and recovery produces strength.**

This is how you build muscle in your body.

- You do things to stress the existing muscle which tears the fibers.
- And then you rest and recover, which not only heals those fibers but actually builds more of them ...
- Which increases strength.

Stress followed by a period of rest and recovery produces strength physically.

And, incredibly, it does the same thing emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually.

That's why Jesus did it.

And, again, don't miss the significance of this, especially if you're a Christian.

**Jesus, the Son of God ... Jesus, God in human flesh ... understood and accepted His limits.**

He knew he couldn't just give and give until nothing was left.

**So Jesus, the Son of God ... Jesus, God in human flesh ... regularly called "time out" to restore His soul.**

He regularly did what was necessary to rest and recover from the stress He had experienced, which renewed and increased His strength for whatever was coming next.

And if *He* needed to do that, then I think it's pretty obvious that those of us who follow Him need to do it, too.

And part of the reason for doing last Sunday's service which we literally called "Restoring Your Soul" was to illustrate and give an example what that looks like and feels like.

- We worshipped through singing.
- And we prayed.
- And we read scripture.

And again, if you missed it, you need to go watch it. It's only 45 minutes long – it was a shorter service than usual – and well worth the time.

But that's only one way to restore your soul. And it might not even be the best way depending on how you're wired in your personality.

What's important is that you find what works and you do it. Regularly.

One of the things that I find fascinating about God is His insistence on this principle; that His people *rest and renew* themselves on a regular basis.

And that's so clear in the 10 Commandments that he gave to the nation of Israel. Number four is "remember the Sabbath and keep it holy" which doesn't mean "make it religious."

It means keep that day separate from all the other days. It means treat that day differently than you do all the other days.

Specifically, it means don't work on that day. Don't bring stress into your life on that day.

"Rest and renew so that you gain strength for whatever is next. That's my command."

I mean, how gracious is that?

How amazing is it that God doesn't say "Moses, go back down and tell the Israelites I want them to work even harder?"

**So, obviously, the question is ... do you make time for downtime? And what do you do when you make that time?**

Specifically ...

**Do those things actually help to increase your strength and resiliency? Or are they just distractions that merely take your mind off of things for a while?**

I mean, some of the things we do bring us temporary *relief* from stress, but they don't *restore* us or *renew* us. They don't help us to recover and gain new strength. They're just time wasters.

Now, obviously, we have to make that evaluation as to whether or not what we're doing is actually working.

Of course, the people who are around us all the time could probably tell us that, too.

I mean, if what they regularly see in us and experience from us are things like fear, anger, judgmentalism, fatigue, apathy, and dissatisfaction, then whatever we're doing isn't working.

Or, maybe, we're just not doing it enough.

## **Get Filled**

But there's also another reason why that might be happening, another possible reason why we're not handling stress very well.

And this brings me to that third thing we need to do if we're going to get better at it. This is the one that doesn't fit my physics analogy.

And this one comes from an observation Jesus once made which is so true.

**He said ...**

*"Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."      Matthew 12:34 (NIV)*

Think about that.

What Jesus is saying is that you and I never say anything accidentally. There's no such thing as "letting words slip."

What Jesus is saying is that if it's coming out of your mouth and out of your life then it's already present in your heart ...

... which is exactly the opposite of how most of us think about it.

We think that *stress* is what's making us angry and apathetic and judgmental and fearful and <the list could go on>.

**But the truth is that stress is just bringing out of us what is already in us.**

When you're crushed and when you're pressed, what's already in you is what will come out of you.

And, according to Jesus, it could be good or not so good.

*The good man (or woman) brings good things out of the good stored up in him/her, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him."*  
*Matthew 12:35 (NIV)*

So, obviously, the question is ... what are you storing up in yourself?

What are you allowing to take up residence in your mind and in your heart and in your soul?

That's what's coming out when you get crushed and pressed by the stress in your life.

This is really worth thinking about because so many of us these days are filling our minds with so much negativity from social media and the news media.

And quite frankly – and I know this is hard to imagine – we just need to shut it off and walk away for a while.

The other night when the VP debate was on TV, that's what I had to do. I literally had to get up and walk away. I went upstairs and put on my headphones and listened to some EWF which, crazy as it might sound, restores my soul.

But I'm not kidding, less than two minutes into the debate and I'm yelling at the TV. And to be totally honest, I wanted to *cuss* at the TV. And if Jetta hadn't been there, I probably would have.

Actually, I *have* cussed at the TV when she's been there, so she would not have been surprised.

But I've allowed so much of the crap that's flowing from our politicians these days to get stored up in me. I keep watching it.

So, it's no surprise when comes out. It's no surprise *but it's sad*.

And I don't like it.

## Conclusion

A couple weeks ago in our small group meeting, we were talking about how we've been affected by all that's gone on since last March when COVID basically took over our world.

And when it was my turn, I was very honest about where I am right now. I just laid it all on the table for them, and it wasn't pretty.

And when I finished, I said "and the worst thing about it is that I'm kind of ashamed of how poorly I have been handling this. I'm embarrassed that I'm not more mature emotionally and spiritually."

One the guys spoke up and said, "Well, Rick, you know it *is* the worst pandemic in over a hundred years, so maybe you shouldn't be so hard on yourself."

And I really appreciated that because there's truth in what he said. This is a crazy time.

And I know that there's grace from the Lord and grace from the people who are around me all the time, and I appreciate that, too.

But I want more than that. I was *made for more* than that.

And so were you.

In the crushing and in the pressing – in the *stress* – of these times, I want that "new wine" to come out of me.

- I want to be calm in the midst of the storm instead of being emotionally tossed about by every new wave that comes along.
- I want to be a person who brings strength and wisdom and hope to others instead of being one more burden for them to bear on top of everything else.
- I want to be *adding* life and *adding* energy instead of *draining* it.
- I want to be more like Jesus with all of His strengths, and less like me with all of my weaknesses.

And I know you do, too.

### **So, let's agree today among ourselves that ...**

- We're going to try to GET OUT from under the stresses that are not ours to bear. We're not the savior of the world. Jesus is.

- And let's agree that we're going to GET STRONGER by regularly making time for downtime that actually restores our soul so we can bear up under whatever comes next.
- And let's agree that we're going GET FILLED up in our hearts and minds with good things so that, in those times when we break open from the crushing and the pressing of the stress in our lives ...

Good things like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control will come out of us.

New wine, new power that looks a little more like Jesus and a little less like us.

Let's pray.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.mechanicalebook.com/definitions/defstrength.htm>