

# Lecture #2: Dealing with Stress

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While a limited amount of stress can be positive in order to enhance your creativity, focus, and performance, often stress becomes excessive affecting your health, relationships, and ability to make sound decisions. If stress is prolonged, it eventually leads to burn-out.

There are many situations that lead to high tension and anxiety. Whether it is financial difficulty, loss of a job, family trouble, work overload, death of a loved one, illness or injury, you are surrounded by many situations that cause stress.

Stress is the cause of many diseases such as high blood pressure, irritable bowel syndrome, headache, acid reflux, and weakening of the immune system leading to infections.

Stress also leads to behavioral problems which affect your relationships and your ability to focus on your job or studies. This results in unhappiness that ultimately can lead to burn-out and depression.

So, if stressful situations are inevitable, what is the appropriate response? Before you can answer this question, you first need to analyze the causes of your stress and also try to understand God's purpose in adversity.

## I. Causes of Stress

There are situations that are stressful to everybody such as the death of a loved one. These are trials that God allows in your life for a purpose. However, there are other circumstances that may be more stressful to you than to another person, such as a specific job assignment. So, the extent of stress you experience depends upon:

- Your perception of the extent of threat arising from the situation.
- Your judgment about your ability to cope with this threat.

Types of situations that lead to stress include:

- **Making the wrong decisions:** This realization makes for very tough times as you are blaming yourself for the pain you are going through
- **Other people's behavior:** Mockery, persecution, backstabbing, and cheating
- **Living in a fallen world:** Earthquakes, floods, disease, etc.

## II. God's purpose in adversity

In many cases, stress results from trials that God has allowed in your life. Some people are uncomfortable asking God "Why?" However, without understanding the purpose of God in adversity, you are unable to extract as much good from your suffering as possible.

- **God allows trials to get your attention:** He knows when you are set in your ways e.g. full of bitterness or pride. Adversity can strip you of self-reliance and ensures your complete attention. (In Acts 9:5 blindness captured the attention of Saul)
- **God allows trials to purify your life:** Trials force you to examine your life not only for obvious sins, but also for hidden sins and bad habits.
- **God allows trials to get you to reevaluate your priorities:** You may have become so focused on material things that you have neglected the spiritual, or you might be workaholic ignoring your responsibilities towards your family
- **God allows trials to remind you of His great love:** As parents lovingly discipline their children to protect them from developing bad habits, so God disciplines you. If He was to let you go your way, this would not be a reflection of a loving Father
- **God allows trials to test your faith:** Testing your faith produces spiritual maturity, which leads to endurance (James 1:3). This enables you to withstand any assault, no matter what form the trial comes

- **God allows trials to test your devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ:** True devotion requires that you follow the Lord Christ regardless of the circumstances. Do you obey God only in good times? This is only discovered during hardship times
- **God allows trials to teach you to hate evil:** Satan promises that sinful acts result in pleasure and fulfillment. God brings adversity to show Satan's lies and help you overcome sin. For example drug addicts freed by God, speak of their hatred for this sin
- **God allows trials to demonstrate His sustaining power:** When you maintain peace through difficult times, it is an amazing testimony to non believers
- **God allows trials to produce Christ-like character within you:** Your trials reveal you cannot live the Christian life by your own efforts. This requires a complete surrender to God's will so that your reaction to adversity is actually His reaction lived out through your lives
- **God allows trials to equip you to serve others:** 2 Corinthians 1:4 makes this point clear, "[God] who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

You may not be able to fully understand all the reasons of your trials, but God promises they are for your good and His glory (Romans 8:28).

### III. Your response to stress

Your response to difficult situations depends upon your relationship with God.

#### **Wrong response:**

- Try to forget problems by smoking or drinking
- Work so much that you ignore proper eating and exercising, or do not sleep enough
- Flee from the problem by changing jobs or bosses, hoping that the problem will be solved
- Internalize feelings seeking to suppress them. However, this usually spills over into some other area, most often family life
- Crumble emotionally, leading to despair and depression

All of these approaches are likely to have a negative effect on your health and do not solve the causes of stress but create more problems.

#### **Christian attitude:**

You should first analyze why a situation is causing you stress and try to understand if God is trying to send you a message. Then you are more able to find an appropriate approach to dealing with the matter.

The right understanding of God's purpose in adversity results in the following:

- You believe that God is in control of timing and intensity of the trial and will walk you through every step (Hebrews 13:5)
- Realize that God has a specific purpose for each trial
- Accept that each trial is for your own good
- Discover how each trial can strengthen your faith when you depend on God
- Rejoice that each trial is an opportunity for God to demonstrate His power to sustain you
- Submit yourself to the development of Christ-like character resulting from the trial which leads to spiritual growth
- Have faith that you will not only survive, but you will also conquer over each trial

#### **Christian response:**

Your response to stress should depend on the degree you can control the causes of the situation:

- **Action-oriented** – If you have power over the situation, then you can confront the problem causing the stress, often changing the environment or the situation.

- Concentrate on solving today's problems not tomorrow's
  - Ask God to provide you wisdom to deal with your hardship
  - Read His Word to seek guidance
  - Thank God for His daily grace to sustain you
- **Emotionally-oriented** – If you do not have the power to change the situation, then you can manage stress by changing your view of the situation and the way you feel about it.
    - Do not magnify your troubles beyond their significance
    - Don't be swayed by the negative talks of others
    - Rely on God's strength to help you cope
    - Ask God to stabilize your emotions with His peace and to give you joy amidst adversity
    - Ask God to show you the reasons for allowing such adversity
    - Thank God for the spiritual growth resulting from the trial
  - **Acceptance-oriented** - Where something has happened over which you have no power and no emotional control such as the loss of a loved one, your focus is on surviving the stress.
    - Remain focused on God and not on the circumstances
    - Believe that God remains in control
    - Pray asking for God's strength through the trials
    - Accept that adversity is ultimately for your own good and spiritual growth

Adversity has a way of pushing you beyond yourself where you find God waiting to put His arms around you. It also stirs you to pray like nothing else can, and it is in prayer that you find shelter from the storms of life. You discover a sense of security and hope.

In Psalm 18, David proclaims: "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my strength, in whom I will trust; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies."