



worldoutreach
SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP

SERIES TWO

MODULE THREE: MANAGING STRESS



Outline Session 1 - 2

1. Managing stress (Part 1)
2. Managing stress (Part 2)

SESSION ONE: MANAGING STRESS (PART ONE)

Defining 'stress'

- (D'Souza) Stress is '...nervous tension that results from internal conflicts from a wide range of external situations.'
- (Taylor and Goldsworthy) 'Stress is tension inside that results from pressure either from our social environment, our physical environment, or our own experiences.'
- The external pressures are called 'stressors' and the internal result is 'stress'.

How to develop a greater capacity to manage stress?

Acknowledgment. In reference to Jesus' teaching, some of the thoughts are paraphrased from John Stott's commentary, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*.

1. Live by right priorities by choosing to put God first (Matthew 6:19-25)

In summarising Jesus' words, if we live by right priorities (heavenly treasure, light, God) we will be positioned to live a life that is not preoccupied with worry. Stress is reduced when our life has settled on the right priorities of God and his Kingdom.

2. Don't worry about what you don't have to worry about

Jesus said '*do not worry*' three times in a short but rich teaching found in Matthew 6:25-34 (note vv. 25, 31 & 34). He explicitly taught his followers not to worry about three specific things: food, drink and clothes. In essence, Jesus told his listeners not to worry about these things because life is so much more than physical existence. In addition, he told them not to worry because the '*...heavenly Father knows that you need them*' (Matthew 6:8, 32). To drive his point home, Jesus referred them to how the Father 'feeds' the birds (6:26) and 'clothes' the flowers (6:28-30) as evidence that God can take care of his children.

The unmissable implication is: God can take care of us, so why worry? We don't need to worry about what we don't need to worry about. Worry is a failure to trust God. In fact, wrote Stott, 'worry is incompatible with trust in God.'

3. Live one day at a time

'Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.' (Matthew 6:34)

Jesus mentioned both today and tomorrow. (Stott) 'All worry is about *tomorrow*, but all worry is experienced *today*.' Jesus, however, told his listeners not to worry about tomorrow, but to live one day at a time.



4. Wait upon God for strength

In Isaiah 40:29-31, God revealed himself as a God who strengthens those who place their hope in him. What does it mean to 'hope in the Lord'? The verb translated 'hope' can also mean 'wait' in the sense of 'waiting in confident expectation' (cf. Lamentations 3:25-26; Isaiah 30:18; Psalm 37:7). The expression 'waiting upon the Lord', writes Oswalt, '...implies two things: complete dependence on God and a willingness to allow him to decide the terms. To wait on him is to admit that we have no other help, either in ourselves or in another. Therefore, we are helpless until he acts. By the same token, to wait on him is to declare our confidence in his eventual action on our behalf.'

5. Cast our care upon the Lord

In 1 Peter 5:6-7 we read '**...Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**' The context is that Peter had made a call for humility in people's attitudes to one another. A proud person sets themselves up against God, and God, in turn, sets himself against the proud. Then in verse 6, Peter calls his readers to humble themselves under God's mighty hand. This humility is attained, wrote Peter, by '*casting our cares on him.*' Peter adopted a quote from Psalm 55:22, '*Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall.*' The word 'cast' means to throw something upon someone else. In this case it is casting our cares, concerns and anxieties upon the Lord. The main reason we should do so is because '*...he cares for us.*' God cares about every part of our life, therefore we don't have to be riddled by cares.



SESSION TWO: MANAGING STRESS (PART TWO)

6. Be specific and thankful in prayer

Philippians 4:6-7

Paul urged his Philippian readers not to worry, stress or fret about *'anything'* but to: *'Pray comprehensively ('but in everything')* – pray about every aspect of our life;

- Pray *specifically* ('...by prayer and *petition*...') – be very specific in our prayer as if we were presenting a case before a court of law;
- Pray *thankfully* ('with *thanksgiving*...') – thoughtfully recall what God has done in our life and verbally express gratitude and thankfulness;
- Pray *constantly* ('present your *requests*') – pray regularly for the things for which we're asking and believing God.

Paul's exhortation in verse 6 on how to pray is followed by the promise of verse 7 that detailed, thankful and constant prayer will result in the *'peace of God'* guarding our hearts and minds.

In Paul's mind, peace is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. It is an inner assurance, confidence, calm, ease and serenity of heart brought about by the Spirit's presence in our life. The peace of God is irrespective and independent of all earthly experiences. It is a deep-seated confidence and assurance, unruffled and untroubled by the tests, trials or uncertainties of life. Likewise, Jesus said (Jn. 14:27) that the peace he would give would not be as the world gives peace. It is not an artificial peace from some substance, relaxant or tranquil environment. It is his peace. On this basis, he said (Jn. 14:27; cf. 16:33), *'Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid'*.

This verse (Philippians 4:7) goes on to say that the peace of God *'...transcends all human understanding'* or is *'...far more wonderful than the human mind can understand'* (NLT). This peace is beyond the range of human comprehension. It is supernatural. It cannot be explained and cannot be explained away.

How does the incomprehensible peace of God help us in our fight against anxiety? Philippians 4:7 continues that the *'peace of God...will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.'* 'Guarding', in this verse, is a military metaphor. (Williams) 'The Roman army, when encamped, took great care in setting the watch. Sentries were posted within the camp and on its perimeter. The sentries themselves were kept under surveillance by regular patrols throughout the night.' The Greek verb translated 'to guard' conveys the sense of 'keeping the enemy at bay'. In the specific case of the Philippians, their enemy was *anxiety*, which appears to have been making some serious inroads into their general well-being.

But Paul emphasised that *if* the Philippians would pray specifically, thankfully and constantly, the peace of God would be like an impregnable garrison of soldiers around the vulnerable areas of their lives, which were producing stress in both their hearts and minds. They would experience the peace of God in the everyday reality of their lives, despite their external circumstances. The peace of God, which comes from the 'God of



peace', neutralises the incapacitating effects of anxiety and enables us to endure the stresses of life.

7. Receive strength from the Lord

2 Timothy 4:17-18

After writing about his isolation and loneliness at facing the Roman judicial process without any support, Paul revealed how he coped with stress and pressure on an unimaginable scale: *'But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength...I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.'*

At the time of his greatest need, the Lord's presence surrounded and empowered him to go on. The lesson from this passage for every anxious leader is to remember that we are never alone – the Lord is always with us. His power and strength are available. He will rescue us. He will bring us through. The application for leaders is to receive strength from the Lord.

Practical suggestions for managing stress

Aside from the Scriptural principles that have been articulated in these two sessions, here are some practical suggestions for how a leader can manage their stress levels:

1. Take control of your time. Manage your schedule. Work and stick to a plan. Prioritise your time for the things that really matter.
2. Learn to pace your life and leadership to be ordered and live within your physical and emotional limits.
3. Make time for fun, leisure and relaxation. Regularly do things that are enjoyable and rejuvenating, such as walking on a beach, riding motorbikes, crocheting or playing music.
4. Socially engage with people you enjoy being with. Wherever possible, find people with whom you can share your heart, especially about things that are causing stress. Be with people that make you feel 'safe'.
5. Maintain a healthy lifestyle by watching your diet, exercising regularly, reducing caffeine, and going for regular medical check-ups.
6. Get adequate sleep by remembering the old proverb: 'You can't burn a candle at both ends'.
7. Reduce the number of 'stressors' in your life by avoiding unnecessary stress, by learning to say 'no' to some people and tasks, and by minimising your contact with, and keeping a right heart toward, people who stress you.
8. Plan holidays, take regular days off and avoid doing work on days off or when you get home from work.
9. Talk to the appropriate people for perspective and wisdom when things are getting on top of you.
10. Seek professional help if you're unable to cope or continually feel overwhelmed, drained (emotionally bereft) or depressed.



REFERENCES IN THIS MODULE:

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