

Stress for Success

Isaiah 40:28-31

You know it's going to be a bad day when..."

1. You wake up face down on the pavement
2. You call Suicide Prevention and they put you on hold
3. You see a "Sixty Minutes News Team" waiting in your office
4. Your birthday cake collapses from the weight of the candles
5. You turn on the news and they are just playing emergency routes out of your city
6. Your twin sister forgets your birthday
7. You are following a group of hell's angels down the freeway when suddenly your horn goes off and remains stuck
8. You wake up to discover that your waterbed has broken - then you realize you don't have a waterbed.

We all have days like this. Days like that create tension, anxiety, nervousness. But the word we seem to use most for it is stress. If there is a defining word for modern American life it is stress. From politics to inflation, from relationship issues to health concerns, it seems we are all "stressed out."

Someone has described modern life with these words:

The age of the half-read page / And the quick hash and the mad dash.
The bright night and the nerves tight, The plain hop, the brief stop,
The brain strain and the heart pain. / The cat naps till the spring snaps
And the fun's done.

Interestingly, that was written in by Virginia Basier in the Saturday Evening Post in 1949. We've only mashed the accelerator harder in the 70 years since. Modern life promised that we could do things better, but it feels like we are simply expected to do more faster. Modern life can be summarized in three words - hurry, scurry and worry.

A newspaper article pointed out how even fast food restaurants are trying to speed up how fast we get our food because consumers are wanting faster options. They're eliminating seats because we no longer have time to sit. They're installing computer kiosks and apps on our phones because we no longer have time to talk to human beings. They eliminate "think time" because our minds are too busy thinking about other things.

But there is someone who isn't surprised by any of this. God is the Great Physician. He knew about stress before we even knew what to call it. He gives us a prescription that is sure to cure the worst strain of stress.

I. The Problem Of Stress

What exactly is stress and why is it such a problem? Stress is the gap between the expectations

we have of life, or the expectations others have of us and our ability to make those expectations a reality. Basically stress is how far stretched we are between our want to's, ought to's, can do's and can't do's. When my can do can't keep up with my want to, stress sets in.

Stress is a major problem. Three fourths of us report symptoms of chronic stress including headaches, fatigue, and problems sleeping. 80% of us say we experience stress on the job. Almost half of us admit that stress negatively affects our behavior. We make bad decisions because of our stress. According to one recent survey, America is tied with Iran for the 4th most stressed nation on earth. U.S.A. U.S.A. U.S.A.!

What are we stressed about? 64% of us are stressed about money. 60% are stressed about work. 47% of us are stressing over family responsibilities. 46% are stressed about our own health issues.

How are we dealing with our stress? Not. Very. Well. We consume stress related medications as if they were candy. According to one report, job stress costs US businesses more than 300 billion a year in absenteeism, turnover, diminished productivity, and legal and insurance costs. It costs us 125 to 190 billion in increased health care expenditures per year.

One article reports,

“In the past thirty years, doctors and health officials have come to realize how heavy a toll stress is taking on the nation's well-being. According to the American Academy of Family Physicians, two-thirds of office visits to family doctors are prompted by stress-related symptoms.”

It is incontrovertible, stress is a major problem. One that is being handled very poorly, if it is being handled at all.

II. The Pressure Of Stress

Stress is inescapable. Stress can happen to anyone. We see that in our Scripture this morning in verse 30, *“Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted.”* No one is immune to stress.

Life, by its very nature is stressful. As the wise King Solomon observed in Ecclesiastes 2:22, *“What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.”* He wrote that 4,000 years ago. Do you think it's changed?

Dr. Thomas H. Holmes, at the University of Washington, did ground-breaking research in the area of stress. He measured stress in terms of “life-change units.” On a scale of 1 to 100 he rated the death of a spouse 100 life-change units; divorce rates 73 units; pregnancy rates 40 units; remodeling a home 25 units; even Christmas rates 12 units.

His conclusion was that from a strictly human point of view, most people can't handle 300 or

more units in a twelve-month period, without suffering physical or emotional breakdown over the next two years.

Every day, we continually face stress-inducing situations - the death of a friend, a divorce in the family, loss of employment, sick children, bad news from a doctor. With stress-related problems always comes stress-induced pressure.

A. Physical Pressure

We feel this as physical pressure. Stress has been called the “silent killer” because it can affect nearly every system of the body including the musculoskeletal, respiratory, cardiovascular, endocrine, gastrointestinal and nervous systems. It even affects our reproductive systems. When you are stressed, your muscles tense. When this tension never lets up it results in headaches, shoulder pain, and back pain. When stressed, you breathe faster and shallower which can cause real problems if you already have problems like COPD or bronchitis. Stress causes the heartrate to increase. Your heart beats harder. Your blood pressure goes up. When this goes on for a long time, you develop hypertension and have an increased risk of stroke or heart attack.

When stressed, your body releases chemicals and hormones. In the short term, these things empower the body’s fight or flight mechanism, but over the long term it leads to chronic fatigue, depression, immune and metabolic disorders. It contributes to premature wrinkling and skin disorders such as acne and eczema. If you feel like you break out every time you get stressed out, you’re not imagining that.

Stress literally changes the microbiome in your gut which actually has a strong influence on your brain affecting your mood. It can cause heartburn and acid reflux. It can make eating certain foods almost impossible, increases the amount of air swallowed leading to gas, bloating, and burping. I could go on, but you really don’t need to hear about bowel spasms on a Sunday morning. We feel stress as physical pressure.

B. Psychological Pressure

We feel stress as psychological pressure. The mental strain of stress is striking. Stress is what causes an actor to forget his lines. It is what causes a basketball player to miss the game-winning free throw. It causes you to miss something completely obvious at work.

Stress temporarily rewires your brain. It literally changes how you think. It’s a part of our fight or flight response. It makes your brain very good at a few things, but very bad at everything else. In the short term, it helps you survive. In the long term, it becomes self-destructive. This is directly tied the long list of mental health problems and all the anxiety disorders we’re dealing with right now. It slowly, but inevitably pulls your mind, body and soul into the depths of despair. It can cause “burn out” and bring on a complete mental breakdown.

III. The Provision For Stress

Now the Great Physician has already made provision for stress. He has given a prescription that cannot fail. According to the Word of God the problem of stress needs to be met by the provision of strength.

Verse 31 tells us, *“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.”* The word renew is a beautiful Hebrew word which literally means “exchange.” The Christian life is not just a changed life, it is an exchanged life. I am to exchange my weakness for His strength. The Lord told the Apostle Paul in II Cor. 12:9, *“And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness'”*

You see, God knows the stresses, the strains, the strife that we encounter every day. But God, in His grace and in His goodness, has already supplied His strength and provided His power to meet the stresses of everyday life. Now this is not just ordinary strength, nor is it just ordinary power. God has promised to His children the necessary strength they will need to meet the stresses of everyday life. Let's look at this power on four different levels.

A. There Is Steady Power

The first is steady power. Vs. 31 says, *“they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength.”* We are to *“wait for the Lord.”* That's how the ESV puts it. The NIV says *“those who hope in the Lord.”* That's not a mistake. It's not a confusing Hebrew word being translated. Both translations are accurate. The Hebrew word means to wait with the expectation of hope.

We aren't just sitting, waiting around for God to do something while twiddling our thumbs. There is a huge difference between waiting and waiting with hope. When you're waiting, stuck in traffic, that's one kind of waiting. When you wait a couple extra turns so you can be in the last car on the roller coaster, that's waiting with hope. When you're waiting to be seated at your least favorite restaurant, that's one thing, but when you're waiting for your favorite place, that's waiting with hope.

God is doing good things even while we wait, especially as we wait. Henri Nouwen writes, *“Life is “a little while,” a short moment of waiting. But life is not empty waiting. It is to wait full of expectation.”*

Scripture invites us to wait on God, knowing that our loving, heavenly Father is preparing something good for us, and knowing that he is preparing us for something good. Scripture invites us to wait on God knowing that heaven's timing is always better than our jam-packed schedules and crowded calendars.

Sometimes what we need in a life of hurry, scurry and worry is a little bit of expectant waiting, eagerly anticipating what God might do. This is why God invites us through the Psalmist to, *“Be still and know that I am God.”*

It is in the stillness of waiting on God that we find our strength. He is our strength. Waiting on Him allows us to tap directly on that power. Listen to what Isaiah says about God in verse 28, *“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary.”*

He is our source of steady power. We can always plug into Him. His power is always there. His power is everlasting. The Energizer bunny has got nothing on Him. He never gets tired. Never needs a nap. Never gets run down or burned out. He will act when He needs to act. He will give you what you need when you need it. That’s steady power.

The Psalmist said exactly the same thing in Psalm 27:14, *“Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord!”* According to Isaiah the key to dealing with stress is found in “waiting on the Lord.”

Find time every day to be still before God, to spend time with God – to wait, to watch, to listen. When you are stressed and life applies the pressure, it seems as if these quiet times are the easiest to cut out to meet life’s demands. But these are the moments you need these quiet times the most.

Dr. Vance Havner once made a wise observation. He said, *“There is no work that is more likely to crowd out your quiet hour with God than the very work that draws the strength from that quiet hour.”*

There was a housewife one time who recently went to her doctor. He asked her what was wrong. She said, *“I feel rundown.”* After he examined her he said, *“Lady, you're not rundown, you're too wound up.”* That is exactly what stress is. Being too “wound up.”

I was listening to another preacher talk about a grandfather clock they bought. The man that delivered that clock said, *“There are two dangers you need to avoid with a clock. 1) Don't let it rundown. 2) Don't wind it too tight.”*

Your body is more important to God than a clock. God neither wants your body to be rundown, nor wound up. The first key to combatting that is to have that quiet time. That time when you just get alone with the Good Shepherd and let Him make you lie down in green pastures, and let Him lead you beside still waters.

B. There Is Soaring Power

Vs. 31 continues with the promise of soaring power. *“They shall mount up with wings like eagles.”* You ever watch an eagle fly? Fascinating creatures, so elegant and powerful. I was reading about golden eagles. Whereas most birds flee from a storm, the eagle seems to seek them out. Here’s why? The thermal drafts of a storm cause that eagle to soar higher and fly further than he can on his own.

The storm empowers him to fly higher and faster. Normally an eagle can fly about 50 miles an

hour. But when he is in the strong winds of a storm, he can fly up to almost 100 miles an hour. These turbulent winds allow an eagle to stay up longer because he uses the winds to soar and to glide for a longer period of time. Finally, these storms and these turbulent winds allow the eagle to use less effort because the wings of the eagles are designed to glide in the wind.

When life gets a little stormy, you can allow the stress to blow you around and beat you down, or you can draw on the strength of God, spread your wings and allow him to lift you above the storm. When God renews your strength you can fly higher, you can sail further, and you can even rest on the winds of the storm.

C. There Is Surging Power

Vs. 31 then offers the assurance of surging power. *“They shall run and not be weary.”* God not only gives us height to overcome obstacles, but He gives us help to meet opportunities. We tend to think of stress as only a bad thing, but stress isn’t all bad. Some stress is necessary. Some pressure is good. It is the pressure of a deadline that forces you to complete a task. It is the pressure of a championship that forces the football player to dive a little harder to make the goal line. Stress motivates us and inspires us.

Opportunity knocks at our door only so often, and many people miss these opportunities because they’re not prepared to answer. They get stressed out. They get frantic. *“What do I do? What do I do?”*

God gives you power to act when you need to act. When God opens a door, He gives you strength walk through it. He empowers you to make the right decision, the wise decision. He gives you that surge of power you need when you need it.

D. There is Staying Power

Finally, there is staying power. Vs. 31 ends with this promise, *“They shall walk and not faint.”* Perhaps the greatest ability a person can ever have is dependability. If you will wait on the Lord He will give you the kind of staying power that will help you to keep walking when you don’t think you can take another step.

Real victory is not always in how fast you can run, but how far you can walk. The only religion that really matters is the religion in your shoe leather. You know the Lord is far more pleased with those Christians who just keep walking with Jesus, step after step, day after day, month in and month out, never quitting, finishing just as good as they began, as He is with so-called “rocket Christians” who go up like a rocket and come down like a rock.

Perseverance is what really matters to God. Staying power. That is the only the thing required by God. *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (Micah 6:8)

I want to close by giving you three sure, cure, fool-proof, fail-safe stress-busters. First of all,

celebrate God's presence. Remember, that when your stress seems to be unbearable, God is with you. Psalm 46:1, *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."* The word trouble in the Hebrew language means literally "to be restricted or to be tied up in a narrow cramped place." To put it another way it means to be "between a rock and a hard place."

Now when you are between a rock and a hard place, it means you are being pressed, you are being squeezed in. Stress is doing a number on you. But you remember that in the midst of that stress, God is right there with you. He is your refuge, He is your strength. When you are under that stress, God is building a tent of refuge around you. He is protecting you and surrounding you with His power and with His strength.

Then you **must appropriate God's power.** You cannot meet stress on a day to day basis in your strength alone. We must get off the treadmill of relying on our outward activity without the inward reality. It's not a matter of willpower, but a matter of spirit power. This goes back to waiting on God, plugging into him on a regular consistent basis. Listen, stress will sap your strength, but His strength will sap your stress. In fact, it might be helpful for you to write these words down on the tablet of your memory: His Strength For My Stress.

Finally, meditate on God's promises. As you face the storm, the stress, the strain, and the strife of life, remember Deut. 33:27, *"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; He will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, 'Destroy!'"* Remember Isaiah 41:10, *"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God, I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."*

Now you can have stress for success, but I want to say to you I do not care how much stress and pressure you are under, you do not know stress until you die without the Lord Jesus Christ. For that stress there is no cure, there is no hope.

You may be under stress today because that is God's way of trying to get your attention and show you your need for the Lord Jesus Christ. The greatest stress in the world is the stress of unforgiven sin. But the Jesus that can save you from stress, is also the Jesus that can save you from sin.