

## How to deal with Stress

“Life was never meant to be easy!” so they say, and stress is part of the inescapable reality of living our lives. Sometimes we feel pushed to the limit by our circumstances. So, people will find all sorts of avenues to pursue, as a way to handle stress. Gardening, watching a movie, listening to music, etc. But another stress reliever (and probably the best!) is God’s Word! In Psalm 119:143, the writer declares, “Distress and hardship have overtaken me, but Your Commandments are my delight.” The New Living Translation begins the verse, “As pressure and stress bear down on me.” Isn’t that what it feels like? Stress bears down on us. It’s an oppressive weight.

The second half of the verse reveals the psalmist’s strength: “But Your commandments are my delight.” In Psalm 119, the psalmist uses a variety of synonyms for Scripture, words like commandments, rules, testimonies, words, promise, precepts, law, and statutes. The psalmist delights in God’s Word. In stressful times, we can delight in God’s Word.

Consider everything that goes into your mind. Disastrous events dominate TV newscasts and online news feeds. You may hear negative comments from people around you. Our minds can be flooded with news and words that drag us down.

What if you tipped the balance more toward God’s Word? What if more of your mental input came from the Bible and less from the world? Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, my fellow-Christians, keep your minds on all things that are true, all things that are noble, all things that are right, all things that are pure, all things that are lovely, all things that are appealing and anything that is excellent and praiseworthy!” The following verse promises that “the God of peace will also be with you” (Philippians 4:9).

If you want more stress, fill your mind with stressful words - the latest crime report, the political banter, anything negative and unnerving. Or you can choose the alternative: combat stress with God’s life-giving Word. Our emotional capacity is limited. Therefore, seek fewer toxic influences and more uplifting content.

God’s Word shapes our thoughts and actions. “Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105). God’s Word leads us in a more graceful path. His Word teaches us His ways. Through His life-giving Word, He liberates us from an onslaught of negativity and frees us to live more optimistically and joyfully.

One of the most vivid New Testament passages about stress is in 2 Corinthians 4, known as the “jars of clay” passage. Paul described believers as fragile clay vessels filled with a great treasure! Paul knew about fragility. Two chapters later, he listed his resume of trials. Talk about stressful! Beatings, imprisonments, riots, sleeplessness, hunger, sorrow. The apostle was just getting warmed up. He goes into greater detail in chapter 11. Imprisoned, flogged, stoned, shipwrecked, cold, naked, concerned about the churches. He shouldered major stress.

But he persevered. The apostle testified, “In every way we are hard-pressed but not crushed. We are perplexed but not in despair. We are persecuted but not forsaken. We are struck down but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9). Hard-pressed. We feel pressure. But we’re not crushed!

In Christ, we’re not crushed. Do you know why? Because Christ fills us! We’re not empty vessels. We are “always carrying around in our bodies the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our bodies” (v. 10). If you’re a believer, you’re always carrying Jesus within you. A vessel filled with a firm substance can be cracked but not crushed - and nothing is more solid than the Saviour!

A godly perspective sustained Paul in his severe trials. In the midst of hardships, he knew that God was with him. Paul believed that God would not forsake him. Paul trusted that God would accomplish the purposes He intended, no matter how bleak the situation.

None of us would choose hardship for ourselves. The positive by-product of challenges is that once we’ve endured them, we see how God’s sustaining grace carried us. Personal experience convinces us of God’s faithfulness. As Paul wrote in what is presumed to be his final letter, “The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed and save me for His heavenly kingdom” (2 Timothy 4:18). Paul responded to his trials confidently because God had brought him through previous adversity.

God will guide us through stressful times. With that assurance, we can approach challenges with greater calm and composure. By His grace, the Lord equips us with faith-building tools for combatting stress: prayer, Scripture, and a God-shaped perspective. The pressures of life may be unrelenting, but so is the love of God for you! Even if you look back with disappointment on previous defeats in the battle against stress, today is a new day! With the Lord’s help, you can respond to challenges more gracefully today than you did yesterday. His sustaining grace makes it possible!