

To Stress or De-stress

(Part 5 of a 5-part series)

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Are you stressed?

Stress is defined by our online dictionary as "a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances."

The honest answer to our question is a resounding "yes!" for most people, because at almost any moment in life there will be some adverse or demanding circumstance.

As a baby, the physical absence of your mommy could've been traumatic; but as you grew into a toddler, you learned mommy wasn't usually that far away.

As a young child, misplacing your teddy bear or favourite toy could've been horrifying; but as you grew into a teen you learned that things – although important – could be replaced.

As a teen, you struggled with relationships and your identity: you depended on others to define who you were even if it didn't feel right; but as you grew into an adult you learned (hopefully!) that you are who you decide to be under the umbrella of God's adoptive grace.

As an adult, you struggle with your job, a growing or maturing family, maintaining a home, planning for retirement, the onset of old age, and more. Sometimes you witness the suffering and loss of loved ones. Maybe you suffer a "thorn in your flesh" as Paul did – mentally, emotionally, or physically.

So how do you "de-stress" your life? In many cases you can't! But there are things that you can do about it.

Some stressors you can control: if you don't like your job, you have the option to search for a new one; keep in mind that the search and change can create new stress for a time, yet the end result can be worthwhile.

Some stressors you're limited to change: if you don't get along with your family, you can't get a new one; but you can keep them at a distance to maintain your love and respect.

But some stressors you have no ability to affect: a chronic disease or disability, having loved ones move away, or the death of a loved one.

What then?

First, change what you can. Maybe you're stalling on the change, or you need some advice from wise friends. The longer you wait, the greater the toll on you.

Second, create flexibility for yourself. Make sure that your mental, emotional, physical and spiritual needs are being met in other areas of your life or add in new opportunities to do so: take a class or workshop, join a support group or Bible study, or begin a group of your own. Many stresses are conquered by learning new things about life.

Finally – and most importantly! – have some fun! Not rolling-on-the-floor-laughing mirth (which the Bible considers evil) or sensual pleasure, but fun: do some things just because you want to, not because you have to. Take a walk, read a book, enjoy a bath, play a game, etc. It isn't selfish – it's self-care; and self-care is the balance to stress.

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