

God's Formula for Handling the Stress of Life
Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins - May 20, 2018

There are many reasons why people have stress that gets out of hand. Life can be difficult and oftentimes the problems are not handled as they come and people try to run away from the troubles that engulf them. Sinful behavior causes stress and people try to hide their guilt. God confronted those in the Bible times and He confronts people today.

God confronted Adam, Eve, and the serpent when sin entered the world. When God entered the garden at the cool of the day, Adam and Eve were hiding. He called to Adam and though God knew that his children had sinned, He confronted them and had them confess their sins and He covered them with skins to give them clothing. Sacrifice of animals was used for sin offerings until Jesus came to be the ultimate sacrifice for the salvation of humanity.

When King David sinned by committing adultery, murder, and lying, God sent Nathan the prophet to confront him. David wrote about the stress of the guilt that tormented him at night robbing him of sleep. Even his bones ached and he was distressed sorely until he finally confessed and sought God's forgiveness and restoration.

I think of the stress that Peter, the disciple, felt after he had denied knowing Jesus when Jesus was in the courtyard being interrogated by the religious leaders and faced crucifixion. Jesus had warned Peter that Satan desired to sift him as wheat, but that He had prayed for him that his faith wouldn't fail. Peter thought he was strong enough to stand by Jesus regardless of what would come his way, but when the time came, he denied knowing Jesus three times and when Jesus looked at him, his guilt smote him. Jesus had told him that before the rooster crowed, he would deny him. Peter went out and wept. However, after Jesus arose, the angel told the disciples to meet Jesus in Galilee and he told them to also make sure that Peter was there. He confronted Peter about his failure and after Peter was reconciled to the Lord, he was a man of boldness and power that brought many people to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Peter wrote the book of 1 Peter and in chapter 5:7, he wrote about refusing to carry burdens that were not meant for him; He tells us to cast all our cares upon Him for He cares for us. If you continue reading this chapter, he explains that God has called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, and after we have suffered a while He will perfect us, will establish us, will strengthen us, and will settle us. To God be the glory and dominion for ever and ever AMEN.

There is a story in 1 Kings 19:1 that reveals God's loving concern for his people when they are overwhelmed with stress. Elijah, the prophet, had won a great victory over the idol worship that had penetrated the hearts of Israelites under the authority of King Ahab and his wicked wife, Jezebel. God had withheld rain for three years and then God sent Elijah to confront Ahab concerning his sin. Elijah had a contest with the prophets of Baal and he challenged them to call on Baal to bring down rain on the earth and when their prayers, chants and cries didn't bring results, Elijah built an altar to the Lord and laid a

sacrifice on it. Then he commanded water to be brought and the sacrifice was covered with water and the trench around the altar was filled with water. Elijah said a simple prayer asking God to show that He is the only God and He is all powerful. He wanted the people to recognize that Baal had no power and God was to the only God worshipped. God sent fire from heaven that licked up the water, consumed the sacrifice and all that was left was ashes in its place. The people cried out, "The Lord he is God! The Lord he is God!" Then Elijah killed the 450 false prophets and rain began to fall. However, Jezebel was angry when she learned of what had transpired and she vowed to kill Elijah before the next day. In verse 3, Elijah ran for his life and sat down under a juniper tree and he requested that he might die. He pleaded with the Lord to take his life because the threat of death was the last straw for him. He was worn out! He fell asleep under that juniper tree and an angel of God was sent to touch him and to give him something to eat. He looked and a cake was baking on some coals and a cruse of water was placed at his head. He ate and drank and lay down to sleep again. The angel of the LORD came the second time, touched him, and told him to eat what had been prepared for him. The angel told him that the journey was too great for him. Elijah went on the strength of that food for forty days and then he arrived at Mount Horeb, the Mount of the LORD. He entered a cave and lodged there. The Word of the LORD came to him and asked, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah told the LORD that all the prophets had been killed and the people of God were turning to idols. He alone was left and Jezebel was seeking to take his life also. God told him to go stand upon the mountain before the LORD. Elijah obeyed and God passed by and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD. But the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was fire and the LORD was not in the fire. After the fire came a still small voice. Elijah wrapped his mantle around his face and stood at the entrance of the cave. There God talked to him. He asked him what he was doing there. Elijah told God how stressed he was over the sins of the Israelites and the wicked queen Jezebel had turned the hearts of the people away from obeying God's commandments. The LORD listened to his complaint and troubles and then gave him clear directions. He didn't rebuke the prophet for his lack of faith or for running away; he set him back on track to do God's bidding. He also gave Elijah information that he didn't know; God had 7000 people in Israel who had not bowed to Baal. He told Elijah to return to the wilderness of Damascus and anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. Also he was to anoint Jehu to be king over Israel, and He was to find Elisha and have him travel along with him for the rest of his days. He was not alone! It is hard to stay strong and to endure hardships especially if we feel that we are alone. In Psalms 46:10-11 says to "Be still and know that I am God!" It is difficult when we face unbearable circumstances to stop and listen to the still small voice of God telling us how to get through the rough waters of life. God calls us to rest in him. See Matthew 11:28. It

reads like this: “Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

There is a wonderful story in Luke 10:39 that reveals Jesus’ character and priorities. Jesus entered a certain village and a certain woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. She had a sister named Mary who also sat at the feet of Jesus listening to his teaching. But Martha was concerned with making sure that everything was served properly and timely and she didn’t understand why Mary was not willing to help her. She came to Jesus and said, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.”

Jesus answered and said, “Martha, Martha, you are careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful and Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

Human nature clamors for us to escape; God says “draw near to me and I will draw near to you.” James 4:8.

God promises to give peace to those who draw near to him. John 14:27. In verse 26, Jesus promises to send the comforter in his name and he shall teach us all things and bring all things to our remembrance. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

“The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs in and are saved.” Proverbs 18:10. Above all things, God wants us to know Him! As we believe in his sovereignty 1 Chronicles 29:11, and accept the absolute goodness of his plans (Jeremiah 29:11) and his deep abiding love for us (Ephesians 3:17-18) we will grow in trust. We then will find it easier to “be still” and not give in to the urge to run away from our problems. Stress unchecked becomes distress. When stressful situations come our way, we need not feel defeated and hopeless. When we have a clear understanding of our heavenly Father and a firm belief in his love and care for us, we will be able to walk through the worst of circumstances with inner quietness. (Galatians 5:22) We will also have genuine confidence. (Hebrew 13:6)

This is our privilege as God’s children with our house built on a rock. Matthew 7:24.

God’s word will stand true when all else is proven to be false. Galatians 6:7 tells us not to be deceived; God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows that he will also reap. This is an unalterable law that affects everyone in every area of life, family, work and pleasure. “We reap what we sow, more than we sow, and later than when we sow.”

2 Corinthians 5:10 reveals that we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each may receive the things done in the body according to what we have done in this life whether good or evil. Good habits reap good rewards; for those who sow disobedience their portion will be heartaches, and sorrow. The Bible says that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth to those who reject the gospel. We will reap the harvest of our lives.

Matthew 13:23. Hosea 8:7 tells us that those who choose to sow to the wind will reap the whirlwind.

There are many ways that people are deceived. The present situation of their lives don't always reflect their true character and behavior. Pharaoh didn't respect God when Moses appeared to him and told him that God wanted his people to go into the wilderness and hold a feast to him, this is what Pharaoh's response was, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD; neither will I let Israel go." See Exodus 5:1-2. We know the outcome, but Pharaoh didn't understand that he was fighting against the Creator of the universe and even the breath that he breathed was given to him by Almighty God. Pharaoh's rebellion reaped a harvest of sorrow, pain and death.

There may not be immediate consequences so people continue down that path and are deceived into thinking that all is well. It is unlike an earthly harvest of crops that get planted in the spring, grow in the summer and are harvested in the late summer or early fall. Some crops we reap quickly but others take years for the harvest to ripen and produce fruit. Be patient for the season will come for those who go the second mile with good deeds; those who give more than is required, and those who trust God to avenge them of their enemies. The Bible says "Vengeance is mine and I will repay, says the LORD." Romans 12:19. The faithful servants of God will reap rich dividends when their labor is over. This is a comfort and assuring thought to those who faithfully labor under difficult circumstances. Our heavenly Father always keeps his promises! Proverbs 14:16 A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident.