

How Holy Spirit Can Help You Deal With Your Unavoidable Stress

Stresses and messes—they're unavoidable. According to a recent survey, 19% of American employees say they have a bad day at work almost every day, and almost 30% have a bad day more than once a week.

One person said, "All day I think, 'I don't want to do this. I can feel my life wasting away.'" Another said, "Bad days at work suck the life energy from me and I take this home to my family. I'm emotionally and even physically drained."

Yet workplace problems aren't the hardest to deal with. Struggles with our health and our homes affect us even more deeply. When our marriage isn't happy or our children aren't in good shape, it casts a dark blanket over everything. As fatigue sets in, it's a challenge to manage our anger or anxiety.

So, what's going on in your life? Are you in a good place, a bad place, a rough patch or on level ground?

The biblical story of Joseph is a reminder that God wants to stand beside us whatever we're going through. Whether he was wearing a multicolored coat, looking up from the bottom of a pit, surviving a cold prison or roaming and ruling in Pharaoh's palace, Joseph stayed sane by remembering God's overcoming power. Whatever the circumstance, God was ready to arrange them, rearrange them, and leverage them for Joseph's welfare. The record of Joseph's life is dotted with one recurring idea: "The Lord was with him" (Gen. 39:21, NIV).

The same sovereign oversight is available to us. God's love, power and care are always applicable to our situation, for He

is the God of the good, the bad and the ugly, just as He was with Joseph.

God of the Good

When we read Joseph's story, we often focus on the harsh times in his life—when he was betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, wrongfully accused of sexual assault and imprisoned for years. But the first 17 years of his life were happy, and during that time, God built a spiritual foundation that would sustain him in the coming years. And what a head-spinning moment when he was whisked out of prison to meet Pharaoh! Imagine the satisfaction of interpreting Pharaoh's dream and being promoted to the head of the kingdom. The last decades of his life were full of power and purpose. He was reunited with his aged father and reconciled with his brothers, and he had the pleasure of knowing that his suffering brought him to a place of power where he could preserve the population of Egypt during a prolonged drought.

As Christians, we often focus on God's ability to help us through difficulty, and, as I'll explain in a moment, that's a critical element of His care for us. But let's not forget to live a grateful life not only for those days, but the days when the load is lighter and the sky is bright and clear for us.

Most of us have more good days than bad ones, and we have more to be thankful for than we acknowledge. The Bible says, "Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:16-18, MEV).

Think for a moment of all the funny sounds animals make. Have you ever heard a dog howling to accompany a song, a donkey braying its unwillingness to oblige or a parrot mimicking words to its owner? Despite the curse of sin we live under, there's joy within nature that fills the atmosphere. It's

almost as if the world was made for joy and gladness, which, of course, it was. So, shouldn't a redeemed people rejoice in God's nearness every day, celebrating that they are filled with the blessing of peace within our heart and the promise of heaven with Him one day?

The psalmist said, "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; yes, an inheritance is beautiful for me" (Ps. 16:6). Psalm 23 says, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me" (verse 6a). Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11a). And James 1:17a says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights."

Our God is the God of the good.

God of the Bad

But, as I said, He is also there when we have bad days. You can tell if people are having a bad day by studying their faces. Or you could just read the messages on their T-shirts. Next time you're waiting at the airport, make a list of slogans from peoples' clothing. One person had these words blazed across his chest: "I'm So Grumpy I'm Not Even Talking to Myself." A college-age fellow had these words on his back: "Born to Philosophize. Forced to Work." One man ran to his plane advertising: "I'm Not Grumpy. The People Around Me Are Too Happy." One young lady passed by with this message: "I'm Not Weird. I'm a Limited Edition." Another said, "A Bad Day Only Lasts 24 Hours." Apparently, they had never missed a late-night flight connection.

What would Joseph's T-shirt have read? Maybe: "Life is the Pits." "Interpreter of Dreams—NOT!" Or "Lost: Colorful Handmade Coat." I think his T-shirt would have just one word: "Whatever."

When people say "Whatever!" these days, it's usually a sarcastic expression of resignation. But in Joseph's case, it

was a resolve to trust God whatever the circumstances. The apostle Paul had the same attitude when he said, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Phil. 4:11b).

Saint Francis de Sales is quoted as saying:

Turn your troubles ... into material for spiritual progress. Often turn to Our Lord, Who is watching you, poor frail little being as you are, amid your labors and distractions. He sends you help and blesses your affliction. This thought should enable you to bear your troubles patiently and quietly, for love of Him Who only allows you to be tried for your own good. Raise your heart continually to God, seek His aid, and let the foundation of your consolation be your happiness in being His. All vexations and annoyances will be powerless to move you while you remember that you have such a Friend, such a Stay, such a Refuge.

The concept of turning our troubles into material for spiritual progress is crucial. During a difficult time, we can pray, "Lord, use this for good! Use this for my progress! Use this for the advancement of Your work! Turn it to good, dear Lord." That's the kind of prayer He answered for Joseph, and that's the kind of prayer He'll answer for you.

God of the Ugly

God is also the God of the ugly. When the bad becomes catastrophic, or when our problems are prolonged beyond endurance, even then we can trust God with whatever He allows. His grace is always applicable, and He is always the appropriate answer for every challenge.

Joseph's trials lasted 13 years. He was 17 when his brothers betrayed him, and he was 30 when Pharaoh promoted him. During those 13 ugly years, he descended from the pit to the slave pen to the prison. But in God's eyes, it was but a single semester in the school of grace. There, Joseph learned to

trust God when everything went from good to bad and from bad to ugly. During that semester he learned to wait on God. There he learned wisdom, patience, faith, perseverance and the skills needed to navigate difficulty.

Let me end by telling you about another Joseph—Joseph Bondarenko, who grew up in Ukraine during the Soviet era. When God called him to be an evangelist, he faced wave after wave of persecution, and he was thrown into prison. He continued to share Christ there, though prison authorities punished him every time another prisoner came to Christ. “I knew many Scripture passages by heart and believed His promises. In times of suffering, in moments of loneliness, of complete isolation and exclusion, those Scriptures helped me to remain faithful to God. ... Throughout the years of my imprisonment, I saw the hand of our precious Savior. He sustained my spirit, faith and hope, and He gave me the strength.

Joseph lived to see the collapse of the Soviet Union, and he is still serving the Lord today.

Whatever you are going through, God’s Word and wisdom are applicable to your situation, whatever it is—good, bad or ugly. When we know His Word and believe His promises, the Lord reassures us again and again that He is with us whatever we’re going through.

Let Him sustain your spirit, faith, hope and strength.

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