

This Common Problem Will Enslave, Kill You if You Let It

A recent Gallup poll found that more than a third of the world's population experiences a lot of worry and stress. Stress is having such a negative effect in the U.S., where nearly half of Americans say they're suffering from it, that it's eating away at their overall well-being, according to the American Psychological Association.

Stress itself is not always negative. In its basic form, it is a built-in physiological response that is triggered in emergency situations when we believe we are facing a threat or danger, whether real or perceived. Or, during times when we experience heightened expectations for performance regarding a particular task, whether the expectations are self-generated or come from an outside source.

In a temporary form, stress can help us to function quickly under pressure and motivate us to give the best of ourselves. But when such a stress reaction is prolonged, it can be extremely harmful to us. Our body, mind and emotions are not designed to live perpetually in an emergency state.

If you surrender continuously to stress, it will enslave you. Whatever people constantly tolerate or consent to becomes their norm. That is why, if we give in to anxiety or fear in our lives, it will begin to define us. This is the point where stress is not just something we experience from time to time in certain circumstances, but has developed into something that has taken hold of us. When this occurs, we are dealing with spiritual factors as well as physical and emotional ones. Many people don't recognize this spiritual element to their stress, and that is why they remain in its grip.

Two Types of Stress

We can define stress in two ways: natural stress and spiritual stress.

1. **Natural Stress:** Natural stress remains largely in the physical, emotional and mental spheres, although spiritual elements can influence it. Natural stress can produce physical symptoms such as headaches, neck and shoulder tension, back pain, fatigue, stomach problems, sleeplessness and severe skin irritation. It can also produce emotional and mental symptoms, such as anxiety, deep sadness, anger, impatience, irritability, feelings of hopelessness, trouble concentrating, a certain degree of memory loss and negative thoughts. Although we might temporarily feel stress when we are placed in new situations or are challenged to meet high expectations, in many cases, stress manifests as a result of upsetting situations we are exposed to over time.
2. **Spiritual Stress:** When stress is in a natural stage, an individual has the ability to learn to manage and control it. However, when it has entered the spiritual stage, it cannot be controlled using natural methods, and therefore, significant spiritual issues must be addressed.

With spiritual stress, there are several types of controlling “yokes” that can manifest, such as jealousy, fear, anger and depression. For example, when a person crosses over from feeling under pressure regarding a situation to living in a state of depression, they become imprisoned in despair. The yoke of stress shapes or molds them into certain ways of thinking, which are reflected in their behavior. When we live in depression, we have no expectation of anything good, and we cannot see a way out of our problems—even at times when a challenge may be relatively easy to overcome.

If we are in a state of advanced stress, but do not understand

what has us bound, we will not recognize that we are being oppressed by an outside force and not just our own inward struggles. Only the power of God can free us from such a tyrannical influence. The Bible teaches us, "Do not give the devil a foothold" (Eph. 4:27, NIV). When we allow the devil to gain a foothold in our lives through a prolonged period of stress in which we hold on to fear, anxiety, anger or hopelessness, we will become oppressed.

However, we can be assured that no matter what type of yoke comes upon us through stress, God has more than enough power to break it and remove every burden from us. We have this assurance from the Scriptures: "It shall come to pass in that day that his burden will be taken away from your shoulder, and his yoke from your neck, and the yoke will be destroyed because of the anointing oil" (Isa. 10:27, NKJV). Jesus Christ has already defeated the devil. He wants to set us free, and we can learn to live continually in His victory.

Managing and Defeating Stress

We must remember that when we encounter various stressful situations at home, at work, at school, and in other contexts, this is often just a natural part of living, and we can learn to manage our stress. We handle these situations by looking to God's peace and strength and following other sound practices. Beyond that, there may be other times when we sense we are holding on to stress for extended periods of time or that stress seems to have a grip on us. It is not God's will for us to live stressed, depressed, and on the verge of collapse. We need to be set free and begin to trust in the One who rules heaven and earth and can help us in our circumstances.

If you recognize that you have some symptoms of oppressive stress, then you need the help of Jesus and the power of God's Holy Spirit. Perhaps you don't know how to pray and ask God for help. I invite you to pray the following prayer with me, knowing that if we declare it in faith, your stress can begin

to change to peace, your sadness to joy, and your despair to hope. Pray believing in your heart that God will act in your life:

Lord Jesus, I recognize that there are situations beyond my control that have robbed me of peace, bound my emotions and caused sickness in my body. Stress has progressed into spiritual oppression and taken over. I repent for the mistakes I have made, and I ask You to forgive me for allowing stress to invade my life. Today, I need Your help to be free. I accept the forgiveness You have provided for me by Your death on the cross, when You took my sins and failings on Yourself, and by Your resurrection from the dead. I receive You into my heart, and I ask the Holy Spirit to bring peace, faith and freedom to my mind, soul and body. Today, in Your name, I make the decision to let go of all anxiety, sadness, worry and everything else that causes me stress and depression. I receive peace, healing, faith and hope from You. Thank You, Lord Jesus! Amen.” {eoaj}

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