

Manage Stress So It Doesn't Manage You

Today it seems as if everyone is under stress. It's become a normal part of our everyday lives. As long as we keep that stress at a reasonable limit, there's no problem. But when we allow it to exceed that limit, trouble begins.

For example, a chair is built to sit on. It's designed and constructed to bear a certain amount of weight. If used properly, it should last a very long time. But if it's overloaded beyond its capacity, it begins to wear out prematurely and eventually break down completely under the strain.

In the same way, you and I were designed and created to bear a certain amount of physical, mental and emotional strain day after day. However, problems arise when we allow ourselves to be weighed down by more stress than we're capable of supporting.

A word we don't hear much about today is "prudence." The Merriam-Webster definition says prudence means: "skill and good judgment in the use of resources." In the Bible, being prudent means to be a good steward or managers of the gifts God has given us to use. Those gifts include time, energy, strength and health—even material possessions. They include our bodies as well as our minds and spirits.

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Proverbs 14:8 (NIV) says, "The wisdom of the prudent is to give thought to their ways, but the folly of fools is deception." We all need to "give thought to [our] ways" and know our limits—we need to know how much we can handle. We need to be able to recognize when we're reaching full capacity

or overload.

Instead of pushing ourselves into overload to please others or satisfy our own desires of reaching personal goals, we need to listen to and obey what God's telling us to do. We must follow His wisdom if we really want to enjoy the peaceful, joyful life He has planned for us.

Stress can be caused by just about anything. Stressors can be big or little things. In addition, what causes *you* stress may not bother someone else. And what bothers you today may not bother you tomorrow.

Let's say you're at the grocery store, and the high prices create a stressor for you. Then the process of paying for your groceries (especially if money is tight) stresses you out. On top of that, the checker in your lane runs out of change and has to shut down temporarily. So you switch to a new lane and learn that five of your items don't have a price on them. The checker has to call for a price check on each one while you wait, and the line behind you grows. These small, seemingly innocent circumstances pile up until you feel like you're going to explode from the pressure.

Nobody can remove all the big and little things that cause stress in our lives. That's why we must be prudent in identifying the stressors that affect us most and learn how to respond to them correctly. We must recognize our limits and learn to say no to ourselves and others.

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Stressors, not managed properly, can mount up one by one,

bringing us to our breaking point, but with God's help, we can learn how to manage or reduce their effects on us. We can't control all of our circumstances, but we we can adjust our attitude and not let them pressure us.

It seems the very atmosphere of the world today is charged with stress and pressure. But the good news is, we don't have to operate in the world's system—reacting like people in the world who have no hope or peace in their lives. The world responds to difficulties by becoming upset and stressed, but our attitude and approach should be entirely different.

You know, you can turn a situation around just by choosing the right attitude and approach when you're in a challenging situation. Instead of stressing out and tensing up, take a moment to pray for God to help you, just like the Bible says in Philippians 4:6: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Take a deep breath, calm down and focus on getting His perspective on the situation.

In the midst of your daily life, you'll have many opportunities to be stressed. But you can refuse to allow your circumstances to dictate how you're going to feel if you will remember to ask God to help you. The truth is you may not be able to control the situation, but you *can* control how you respond to it.

When you know you're going to face a stressful situation, take an offensive approach and decide beforehand what your attitude will be. Then the door will be opened for God to supernaturally help you to calm down and cheer up.

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