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Stress Busters: God's Strategy For Busting Stress
"Stressed Out Over Life's Pain"
(Part 4)

Intro: Share the difference between the birth of 1st and 2nd daughter. There are a variety of pains in this life that causes stress (physical / emotional / relational / financial). How is it possible to reduce the stress that comes with the pains of this life? I believe God gives us some biblical keys that can reduce much of this stress. (Not all!) Pain will always be stressful, but God's principles can make it manageable. Here are 5 keys.

I. Have Proper Expectations Of This Life

John 16:33 "...Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." (NLT)

1 Peter 4:12 "Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you." (NLT)

A. Expect pain as part of this existence

1. Jesus told us to expect it. Jesus said that this world is filled with many trials and sorrows. (Notice the word "many".)
2. We only increase our stress levels when we think that we shouldn't have trials and sorrows. We're actually surprised by the pain in life as if something strange is going on.
3. I think Americans struggle with this more than other places in the world because we are so affluent and blessed. Everything in our culture attempts to make things easier and more convenient. It's all about alleviating pain.
4. We don't need to learn a map or directions – we have GPS / don't need to know how to change a tire – call AAA / If we want to lose weight, we don't have to eat less and exercise – we just take a pill.
5. We bring in a faulty expectation that sets us up for more stress. We even judge the quality of our lives based upon our comfort levels. Less pain and stress the more successful my life is. What's the truth?

B. Pain is part of living in a fallen world

1. When sin entered God's created world it affected everything. (man / animals / plants / environment / sin corrupted everything God made. This fact

- explains much of the pain in this world.
2. Because we live in a fallen world affected by sin, bad things happen / painful things happen / stress happens. God didn't make a world like this. Sin corrupted it.
 3. Therefore, tornadoes sometimes destroy communities / people get diseases and die / some people make evil choices that hurt others / drunk drivers kill innocent people...
 4. Why doesn't God stop it all? He will someday. But for now, this is the environment we all get to live in. Since we live in a fallen world, we need to have realistic expectations or we'll just increase the stress. (realistic not fatalistic.)

II. Fix Your Hope On The Next Life Not This Life

1 Thess. 4:13 “And now brothers and sisters, I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope.” (NLT) Then he describes a glorious reunion we will have someday.

John 14:1-2 “Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in Me. There are many rooms in my Father's home, and I am going to prepare a place for you. If this were not so, I would tell you plainly.” (NLT) Heaven is real! Anticipate this!

A. Stop placing your hope in the temporal

1. It's very easy to place our hope in things that are temporary. All the hope this world offers is a temporary hope. (The hope of money and possessions / hope of positions and titles / hope of pleasure and satisfaction)
2. All these things are temporary. And, the more we place our hope in temporary things the more stress we will experience. WHY? Because it is an unpredictable hope.
3. Trials and pain can remove any of these temporary hopes. If your hope is in money and possessions, what happens in a recessions? If your hope is in your position / title, what happens when you lose your job? If your hope is in pleasure, what happens when life isn't so pleasurable – sickness / disease / tragedy?
4. If all my hope is in this life, I am setting myself up for some great disappointment and great stress. There has to be more. There is!

B. Practicing placing your hope in the eternal

1 Peter 1:13 “...fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation (the return) of Jesus Christ.” (NASB) fix your hope on something eternal.

1. As believers, we just don't think enough about eternity. We don't know enough about eternity to even fix our hope there. Notice this passage says to “fix your hope completely”. How can you hope in something you don't know anything about.

2. Over 90% of all Americans say they believe in some type of heaven / afterlife, yet very few can explain what it is. I've even heard many Christians say, "Well the Bible doesn't say much about it." WHAT!!!
3. The reason we are so in love with this world is because we're so clueless about the next! I think it's time for me to do a series on heaven! What God has in store for those who love Him is beyond our imaginations!
4. An eternal hope can't be taken from you. An eternal hope is there even in the pains of life. (What hope does a person who lives in India and gives their life to Jesus have? – Lowest cast – Imagine their eternal hope?) It matters!
5. Sometimes in the midst of the pain you have to think about eternity to lessen the stress. (No more sickness / pain / sorrow / glorified bodies / reunions /
6. If you really want to practice placing your hope in the eternal then you first need to begin to increase your understanding of what God says about it. I can't accomplish this today. (Recommend book: HEAVEN – Alcorn)

III. Trust God To Accomplish Good Through Your Pain

A. God will make good changes in me through my pain

Rom. 5:3-5 "We can rejoice when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us – they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character..." (NLT)

1. Since pain is going to be part of our existence, in God's goodness, He's going to use it to change us. He will use the pain of this life to transform our character.
2. God is not creating the trial / pain, but He will use it in our lives not to destroy us, but to actually strengthen us and mold us into the people He wants us to be. (There is no increase of strength without increase of tension)
3. There are just some things about my character / about my endurance and tenacity, that was only developed in fiery trials of life. Strength of character is developed in pain!
4. Do you honestly believe that some of the maturity / and character qualities that I have were developed because God somehow protected me from pain, trails and darkness? I wouldn't be where I am today without the pain!
5. You want to increase your stress? Just don't submit your life to God in the midst of your pain. Pain alone will not automatically make you better...it usually makes people bitter.
6. As long as you continue to fight against God's process to change your character you will only increase your stress! Some of you need to quick shaking your fist and start bending your knees. BUT, if you trust Him...

B. God will accomplish good results through me using my pain

Rom. 8:28 “And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good for those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.” (NLT)

1. Notice it didn't say all things are good. It says God causes everything to work together for good to those who love Him. Notice that for those who do not have a relationship with God, not all pain works together for good. It's God who makes good things out of our pain!
2. God will never waste pain that is given to Him. In fact, the greatest life lessons you have to share with other people come from the deepest pains of your life.
3. For some of you the greatest pain you've gone through has been your marriage, but now God has taken you through it and you have a story to tell. For others you were addicts, but God...Some of you it has been a personal tragedy that you thought would destroy your life, but God sustained you...
4. The stories could go on and on. If I'm in the midst of painful circumstances, I must remember that God will accomplish something good in me and through me. He will not waste what I'm going through; even if I can't imagine any good coming out of it.

IV. Allow Others To Walk With You Through The Pain

Gal. 6:2 “Share each other's troubles and problems, and in this way, obey the law of Christ.” (NLT)

Ecc. 4:10,12 “...people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble...A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back to back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple braided cord is not easily broken.” (NLT)

A. God does not expect you to bear the weight of your pain alone

1. This is one of the reasons why God is so concerned about close relationships in Scripture. He doesn't expect you to handle everything by yourself. In the NT alone, there are 58 “one another” commands. (explain)
2. We increase our stress during the pains of life because we have a tendency to isolate ourselves from other people. We do the very worst thing we could do...we go off by ourselves to die!
3. I can't tell you how many people over the years come into my office and then apologize for having problems / feel guilty for not being able to handle it themselves / feel defeated because they ask for help. WHAT???
4. This is why it is so essential that you get plugged in somewhere in this church. God doesn't expect you to go through pain alone. There are people here who will go through it with you. (home group / ministry / even writing a request on the blue cards)
5. If you are bearing the weight of life's pain alone, your stress only increases.

B. God does expect you to allow other people to help you

1. As much as other people are commanded to love / support / pray / comfort etc... You and I have to allow others to do this. I will admit to you that I struggle with this sometimes. (I'm the Sr. Pastor...)
2. Lisa helps me with this. She used to say, "Last time I checked there wasn't a giant "S" painted on your chest." (You're not superman!) My stress only increases when I refuse to allow others to support me.
3. How do we move in this direction? I already talked about getting involved somewhere, but even if you do, you still have to be willing. This requires 3 qualities we all tend to lack.
 - Humility: Admit I can't do it by myself. Dump your pride.
 - Honesty: Telling other people what is really going on. Stop spiritualizing and sugar-coating. (explain) - Pastor sharing
 - Willingness to allow yourself to be loved. (We don't allow people into our pain so they fix it. They are here to support us.
4. The more you shut people out of your pain, the more stressful it will become

V. See Your Pain As An Opportunity To Experience God

II Cor. 12:8-10 "Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. Each time He said, 'My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness... Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (NLT)

A. God uses pain to move us to deeper levels of experience with Him

1. There are just places in our relationship with God that we will not go unless there is pain. It seems that we have to be forced to go there, because left to ourselves, we just won't.
2. In this passage, no one knows for sure what the Apostle Paul was requesting to be removed from him. We do know it was something painful that he felt was a hindrance in some way.
3. God said no to the removal of the pain but said yes to something else. He said yes to an even greater experience with God.
4. He told Paul, "My gracious favor is all you need." I'm all you need Paul! This is the place pain takes us. It either pushes us away from God or we come before God broken and confused and say, "God, you're my only hope... you're all I need." (This is where the stress is reduced! In the presence of God.)
5. God wanted Paul to experience something specific?

B. God uses pain to show us our inadequacies and His sufficiency

1. Pain illustrates one of the paradoxes of the Christian experience. Weakness is God's path to experience His strength! The pain of this life can make all

of us feel pretty weak. God says, that's OK, because when you're weak, that's when you can experience My power.

2. When God says NO to the removal of our pain, He is setting the stage for us to see and experience His power. This doesn't mean He always changes what is causing the pain, but His power will be experienced despite the pain.
3. Painful circumstances will never hinder God's sufficiency and power in your life. Pain, many times, becomes the conduit for experiencing the supernatural power of God.

Testimony: There is someone here at Foothills who models this every day of his life. He lives with his own personal pain and trusts God in the midst of it. Pastor Dave