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Stress Busters: God's Strategy For Busting Stress
"Stressed Out Over Relationships"
(Part 3)

Intro: We just passed one of the most stressful times for most men...Valentines Day! You want to talk about relational stress...this is it! (Explain women and men being Pink and Blue) This is a PINK holiday. It requires men to act in a way that is foreign to our nature. (Cards / Candy / Flowers / Jewelry / I can't get these things at Home Depot! The odds of us messing this up are great! This is STRESS! Men, hopefully you survived. Women hopefully you forgiving!

- Today we're going to look at another cause of stress and that is relationships. Relationships can be the sweetest experience in the world or the most stressful. If you are experiencing some stress in your relationships, maybe today will help.

I. What Causes Stress In Our Relationships?

- King David knew all about relational stress. He had so many relational problems that his life looked more like a soap opera. David is the author of most of the book of Psalms, and in this book, he reveals a lot of his pain in relationships.

Ps. 31:11, 13 "I am scorned by all my enemies and despised by my neighbors – even my friends are afraid to come near me. When they see me on the street, they turn the other way...I have heard the many rumors about me..." (NLT)

Ps. 38:11 "My loved ones and my friends stand aloof..." (NASB)

- Let me give you 5 factors that cause relational stress. Maybe you can identify!

A. Unfulfilled Expectations:

Ps. 35:13,15 "Yet when they were ill, I grieved for them. I even fasted and prayed for them...But they are glad now that I am in trouble..." (NLT)

1. David expected that these people would at least treat him with the same compassion that he treated them with...but those expectations were crushed. Instead of compassion, he is experiencing contempt.
2. Do you have unfulfilled expectations in some of your relationships? (Maybe you really did expect something different on Valentines Day / Anniversary / how your wife treats you even though you work so hard / how you feel your husband takes you for granted / expectations in parent – child relationships

3. Maybe you feel that for all you give into this relationship, you get nothing positive in return. It's all one-sided. These are all expectations.
4. The more unfulfilled expectations you have the more relational stress you will experience.

B. Emotional Wounding:

Ps. 38:19-20 "...they hate me though I have done nothing against them. They repay me evil for good..." (NLT) I didn't do anything to deserve this!

Ps. 41:9 "Even my best friend, the one I trusted completely...has turned against me." (NLT) This is emotional pain caused by others!

1. Emotional wounds go a lot deeper than physical wounds. Physical wounds tend to heal, while emotional wounds sometimes never heal. There are wounds that some of you pack around that happened 20-30 years ago.
2. Emotional wounding can happen in a variety of ways. Betrayal / abandonment / being slandered by someone / being rejected / never feeling accepted / all forms of abuse.
3. This emotional stress then is magnified when the offenders are family members or people we tend to see on some type of regular basis. Therefore, with every encounter, (holiday) it brings the wounding back to the forefront of our minds. That's stress!

C. Relational Fear:

Prov. 29:25 "The fear of man brings a snare..." (NASB) Fearing people will make you an emotional prisoner.

1. Now, we talked a little about this last week. I hope you've all had opportunity to practice saying NO to someone without guilt this week.
2. Relational fear creates relational stress. If you are overly concerned with how someone is going to feel / think / or what they may do, you will live in a constant state of stress.
3. "I can't say NO because I'm afraid they will be mad at me." "I'm afraid of what they might think about me." "I'm afraid they might not accept me". This is relational fear.
4. How many of you live in a state of relational fear? This is why we work so hard at maintaining facades...at not allowing people to see the "real" you. We are afraid! This fear creates enormous relational stress!

D. Unresolved Conflict:

Ps. 120:6 "I am tired of living here among people who hate peace..." (NLT) The conflict is wearing me down. I can't take it any more!

1. Unresolved conflict in our relationships just intensifies the stress. Have you ever walked into a room of people and knew something was wrong. You

- could cut the atmosphere with a knife? Everyone's uncomfortable.
2. This is what unresolved conflict does to our relationships. Everyone's uncomfortable all the time! Constant tension! There's no peace!
 3. This relational dynamic wears us down. This is why some of you are always tired. It has nothing to do with the amount of work you're doing but with the constant tension that exists in your relationships.
 - Healthy relationships energize us. Stressful relationships wear us down!
 4. Most people have conflict, they just don't resolve it. So, they get into an argument in the evening and say or do some things they shouldn't; then they get up the next day and act like everything is OK. Pretend it never happened.
 5. Each time you do this, the tension mounts / pressure intensifies / and eventually the lava comes to the surface in the form of an eruption.

E. Struggle for Control:

Ps. 83:3 "They devise crafty schemes against Your people, laying plans against your precious ones." (NLT) Some people have a wonderful plan for your life! Some of them are well intending, but in reality, they are trying to control your life. That is stressful!

1. There are two ways this stress is experienced. It is felt by those trying to control you and by those who are being controlled.
 2. If you can be brutally honest, some of you are control freaks. If you're not in control, it stresses you out! The problem comes when you try to control the people around you. AND, since this is an impossible pursuit, you're always stressed out by the people in your life.
 - So, how do I know if I'm a control freak? Here's a really easy and full-proof test if you're brave enough to take it. Ask the people in your life if they feel you try to control them! If they say YES, then it's true.
 3. If you are the one feeling like you're being controlled, you are building up resentment towards the one controlling you. Bitterness is taking hold of your heart and stress is building in this relationship. No one like feeling controlled.
 4. No healthy relationship can exist when one person is in control! Control creates stress.
- So, what do we do? These factors exist. How do we move past all this relational stress? I believe there are 4 choices God would have us make to reduce the stress in our relationships.
 - We can't remove all the stress. WHY? We are all flawed imperfect people. These steps are NOT easy. Most people refuse to follow them.

II. What Are Stress Reducers In Our Relationships?

- 4 choices that reduce stress in our relationships.
 - A. Choose Forgiveness

Eph. 4:31-32 “Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another just as God in Christ has forgiven you.” (NLT)

1. Verse 31 talks about the behaviors that cause relational stress and verse 32 talks about what reduces it. One of the keys is choosing forgiveness. I have talked about forgiveness multiple times, but it’s one of those truths we need to hear constantly. WHY? Because it NEVER gets easy to do!
2. I want to illustrate forgiveness for you today. (Backpack and bricks – These bricks represent the offenses / wounds) Have labeled bricks on the platform and put them in your pack.
3. Every time I choose not to forgive my life gets weightier and weightier. Unforgiveness is packed with me everywhere I go. I never get away from it. It affects everything I do.
4. Let me show you what forgiveness does. Forgiveness acknowledges each offense as a real pain, yet chooses to release the offender. (Take each brick out of pack and release each one – after the last brick is gone, let the pack fall to the floor) I’m FREE!
5. Some of you are destroying your life and relationships because you refuse to forgive. You love your self-righteous anger too much. You feel justified in your unforgiveness.
6. Some of you need to leave your backpack of bitterness here today.

B. Choose to Reconcile Where Possible

Matt. 5:23-24 “So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple...and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God.” (NLT)

1. In other words, RESOLVE the conflict. Be reconciled with the other person even before you worship.
2. So, what do we mean when we say reconcile? Reconciliation is different than forgiveness. Forgiveness is a solo performance while reconciliation is a duet. Forgiveness is something you choose to do alone. Reconciliation requires cooperation from both parties.
3. This is why we say, “Where Possible”. The fact is that reconciliation is not always possible. If you have someone who refuses to reconcile, there’s not much you can do. You can’t make someone reconcile with you.
4. So what does it look like to move towards reconciliation? Reconciliation is all about rebuilding the relational bridge of trust. Forgiveness and Trust are two separate issues. They are not accomplished simultaneously! It requires a tremendous amount of time to rebuild trust.

5. What does it take? (4 key traits)

- Willingness to move in the direction of the one you offended or the one who offended you. Can't drag someone into reconciliation.
- Humility to admit your part in the conflict or hurt – It's tough to reconcile with a perfect person. (I'm not referring to issues of abuse – that's a different issue.) Most of the time, mud was thrown from both sides!
- Courage to be vulnerable again in a relationship where you were wounded. There is a risk involved. They could hurt you again.
- Time: Reconciliation is like a construction process. It is built piece by piece over time. Trust takes an enormous amount of time to be re-established.

Are there some relationships where you need to move towards reconciliation?

C. Choose to Let Go

Ps. 33:20-22 "We depend on the Lord alone to save us. Only He can help us, protecting us like a shield. In Him our hearts rejoice, for we are trusting in Your holy name. Let Your unfailing love surround us, O Lord, for our hope is in You alone." (NLT) Do you hear the direction of David's trust?

1. Experiencing peace in relationships requires a lot of trust. BUT, the trust is not in ourselves, but it is in God's ability to work in other people's lives. There just comes a time when you have to let go of some things and trust them to God. Like what?
2. I need to let go of my unrealistic relational expectations of others.
 - Other people are responsible for my happiness
 - Other people are responsible for my feelings
 - Other people are responsible for my behavior
3. I need to let go of others unrealistic expectations of me.
 - I am responsible for your happiness / feelings / behavior
4. I need to let go of my attempts at controlling others.
 - It's an impossible pursuit that drives people away from me.
5. I need to learn to let go and let God work. I need to get out of God's way by placing my trust in Him and not myself! HOW?
6. On your knees every day! I don't know of any other way! Letting go is a spiritual exercise with God. It is the ONLY way to experience God's resources. (Ropes course – favorite activity – pole jump) You can't fix your relationships! Let them go!

D. Choose to Love

Matt. 5:46 “If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even the corrupt tax collectors do that much.” (NLT) There is a love in our relationships that needs to go beyond how the world lives. A love that is stronger than people’s relational failures.

1. There is a love that comes from God. It is the same kind of love that He loves us with. It is a love that is not performance based. It’s a supernatural love that is actually poured out into our hearts.

Rom. 5:5 “...the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (NASB)

2. With a relationship with God comes the ability to love like God. If you’re just trying to love people in our own strength, you already know that your resources run out. You know you can’t do it. If you’re honest, sometimes, you act and say things that are very unloving.

3. God wants us to love one another with the love He provides. If you are a believer in Christ, the ability to love others supernaturally is IN you! If you’ve never invited Christ into your life, this supernatural ability can be in you.

4. As long as you keep choosing to try to love in your own strength you will only increase your stress. If you choose anger / bitterness / unforgiveness / hurtful comments / this will only increase your relational stress.

5. As much as you long for your relationships to change, the main person in the equation God wants to change is YOU! He wants to give you the ability to love the people in your life like you really want to, but can’t.

6. Choosing to love is simply coming before God and asking for what He already wants to give you. “God, will you help me love my wife...help me love my husband / kids / parents / the ones who irritate me / wounded me / would you pour YOUR love into my life?”

As we close, I want to invite you to do this today. Maybe even before you choose forgiveness / or reconciliation / or even let go. Maybe this is the first step in God softening your heart towards someone. I know some of you are deeply wounded. Can you take a first step?