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Stress Busters: God's Strategy For Busting Stress
"Stressed Out Over God"
(Part 7)

Intro: Sometimes, the very thing that is supposed to bring us peace actually causes us stress.

- The 4 "P's" of Spiritual Stress

I. Performance: You Must Work Enough To Be Accepted By God

A. Spiritual performance creates stress

1. Many people just feel that they must "DO" certain things in order to be acceptable to God. The problem with this belief is that you never know if you've "done enough". Am I...Am I not? Stress!
2. We have all kinds of religious systems that promote this. Several weeks ago, I had 2 people come to my door on a Saturday afternoon (Explain: We'd like to give you The Watch Tower...they are working for accept)
3. In fact, every religious system out there is a performance oriented system. It's all about mankind doing enough to earn God's approval / acceptance.
4. It's easy to fall into this trap. We live in a performance oriented culture / performance oriented jobs / our thinking is motivated by performance / therefore it is easy to transfer all this to our relationship with God.
5. So we knock ourselves out trying to earn God's acceptance by our spiritual performance (Go to church every week / home group / serve / mission trip / read my Bible every day / listen to Christina radio / put a fish on my car / "Hey God, are you noticing?")
6. Some of you are thinking, "Aren't all these things good? Of course they are. BUT, the core belief of WHY you are doing these things is WRONG! You think these things make you more acceptable to God. FALSE!
7. We have fears / emotionally insecure with God always wondering where we stand with Him? Is He happy with me or not? Have I done enough?

Gal. 4:9-10 "And now you have found God...why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual powers of this world? You are trying to find favor with God by what you do or don't do..."
(NLT) Quit stressing out. Your relationship with God doesn't work this way!

B. God's acceptance is determined by His performance not yours

*Eph. 2:8-9 "God saved you by His own special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. **Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so no one can boast about it.**" (NLT)*

1. Your relationship with God is NOT a reward that is based upon your behavior / performance. It did not begin this way and it is NOT maintained this way.
2. Well, doesn't my behavior matter to God? Of course it does! It just doesn't make you acceptable to God. God sent His Son Jesus to die on a cross for us to pay the penalty of our sin. This is what makes us acceptable to God. It's what He did not what we do!
3. I am acceptable to God because Jesus makes me acceptable. Being accepted by God is a free gift to enjoy not a privilege to earn.
4. Sometimes our behavior is unacceptable; we still sin. But, when this happens, I am still acceptable to God as a person / as his son or daughter, even though my behavior falls short.
 - Behavior impacts fellowship NOT acceptance (my kids)
5. Embracing this truth liberates you in your relationship with God. Some of you are serving God out of fear / guilt / shame / trying to earn His approval.
STRESS
6. Embrace this truth and now you can serve God out of gratitude / freedom / confidence / security / and joy instead of stress.

II. **Perfectionism: You Must Be Good Enough To Earn God's Love**

A. Spiritual perfectionism creates stress

1. These people are a little different than the performers in that it's not just about working enough; for them it's about "being good enough". For perfectionists, it's all about quality!
2. They are beating themselves up trying to earn God's love / earn His approval by being perfect. That's stressful!
3. Often, these people grew up in homes where love was conditional. Love was given when they were good and love was withheld when they were bad. Therefore, in order to earn more love, they conclude they must be perfect.
4. Then we give our lives to Christ...and we bring this belief about earning love right into our relationship with Him. When I'm good He loves me and when I'm bad He doesn't. (At least that's how we feel.)
5. These are the people who end up being the legalists in churches. I know some of you perfectionists are saying, "We should always strive for excellence!"

That's true, but excellence and perfectionism are two different issues. (See slide)

6. According to the word of God, it's impossible for you to be good enough...so quit trying!

Rom. 3:10 "No one is good – not even one." (NLT)

Rom. 5:8 "But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." (NLT) You see, He already loves us despite our lousy behavior!

B. God's love is determined by His choice not by our perfection

Eph. 3:18 "And may you have the power to understand...how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love really is." (NLT)

Rom. 8:35 "Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love?" (NLT)

1. God's unconditional love for us is one of the most amazing / life transforming / mysterious truths I know in the word of God. That the God of the universe has chosen to love the likes of me. (despite all my imperfections)
2. I don't have to earn it / maintain it / worry about losing it / There is nothing I can do to increase it or cause God to love me more than He already does today. (Think about this!!! - explain)
3. Embracing this truth breathes freedom into your life. You don't have to live under the bondage of legalism any longer. You can stop trying to be good enough for God / stop living in the fear of rejection / stop packing around your guilt
4. Knowing you are unconditionally loved no matter what motivates obedience better than the fear of losing His love. Which are you living? Are you trying to be perfect and living in fear or are you living in the wonder of His marvelous love? (One is bondage and stressful one is liberating!)

III. Presumption: Incorrect Thinking About Who God Is

A. Presumption creates spiritual stress

1. People have a lot of misconceptions about God. There are a lot of "foolish ideas" out there on what God is really like. We've been influenced by our culture / media / Hollywood /
 2. It just amazes me how many movies / TV series have God themes in them. People in America believe in God. (Well over 90%) BUT, what kind of God do they believe in?
- God is indifferent / simply an observer / angry / enforcer of rules / punisher of sin / destroyer of fun / benevolent grandfather / WHO is He really?
3. Just as in any relationship, the less you know about someone, the less comfortable you are. OR, you make assumptions about people that aren't even true that adversely affects the relationship.

4. Have you ever had wrong assumptions about someone only to later discover what you thought was wrong. Then, when you embraced what was true, the relationship radically changed?
- Share about Sam Stuckey first coming to Foothills
 5. As long as we continue to hold to our wrong beliefs about God, we just magnify our spiritual stress / we feel isolated from God / that He doesn't understand or care about my pain / We are going to move away from Him instead of towards Him in relationship.

Acts 17:23 "... You have been worshipping Him without knowing who He is, and now I wish to tell you about Him." (NLT)

Rom. 1:21 "...they began to think up foolish ideas of what God was like. The result, was that their minds became dark and confused." (NLT)

B. Biblical understanding creates spiritual intimacy

Prov. 16:22 "Understanding is a fountain of life to Him who has it." (NASB)

1. If we want to remove some stress in our relationship with God and breathe some life into it, we must increase **correct** understanding of who God really is.
2. HOW? We get our understanding of who God is from His word. This is the source God has given us.
3. I have an assignment for you if you're willing to try it. Most often when people read the Bible, they're looking for what it tells them to do. Not that this approach is wrong, it's just incomplete. I want you to read with a different focus.
4. Assignment: Read through the Gospel of John. As you read, write down everything you can learn about who God is. You're not reading to find commands, you're reading to understand the person of God. You're reading for relationship!
5. As you discover these things, spend some time thanking God for those specific qualities. Begin relating to Him based upon what you discover. This will transform your relationship with God! WHY? Because you'll be relating according to what is true. (Much like what happened with Sam and I)

IV. Procrastination: You Can Spiritually Put Things Off Until Tomorrow

A. Procrastination creates spiritual stress

1. So what do we mean about procrastination? Spiritual procrastination is putting off until tomorrow what you should be doing today in your relationship with God.
2. If God is working in your life / speaking to your heart / and we continue to resist / put off / ignore what He is trying to accomplish, this creates internal stress. WHY?

3. Because you have internal conflict going on. You have the convicting voice of God's Spirit at work in you and you are trying to ignore it. This is why people who are spiritually procrastinating are miserable people. There is an internal battle raging. Stressful resisting God!
4. This is quite frankly where some of you are at today. You know God is working in your heart and mind and you're fighting it. You keep saying, "Later! I'll follow God later / when I have more time / when I'm older / when I retire / finish school / when we have kids / when I'm not so stressed / and God keeps talking!"
5. The problem with all of our excuses is that tomorrow is not guaranteed. We may not make it to these future dates. That's why the time to listen to God is today.
6. I can't tell you how many people end their lives with regrets because they kept telling God NO all their lives. I have yet to meet a person who regretted following God.

II Cor. 6:2 "...Indeed, God is ready to help you right now. Today is the day of salvation." (NLT)

- And if you'll let Him help you now...

B. Preparation produces anticipation

1. Those who prepare for eternity anticipate eternity. Those who do not prepare for eternity, fear eternity. This is why to not prepare for something that is inevitable is simply foolish.

II Cor. 5:10 "For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in our bodies." (NLT)

2. The Bible tells us that eternity is real and that how I live my life effects forever! I don't share any of this to make anyone feel guilty. Guilt is a lousy motivator. I share this to hold up the mirror of reality. Reality is a great motivator. (This life is short! Eternity is very long!)
 - I don't want to fear standing before my Creator...I would rather anticipate it!
3. God loves each of you so much. He doesn't want you putting off preparing for your eternity. He wants you to experience His friendship / His resources / and live with the anticipation of a life forever with Him.
4. I want to talk first to those who have never made a decision about a relationship with God. (explain)
5. Secondly, I want to talk to those who have accepted Christ, but you live with a lot of Spiritual stress because you're not walking with Him. You're a believer doing your own thing...and you're not happy because God just won't leave you alone. (Decide to stop resisting Him?)

- **Prayer Time:**

Some of you need to stop performing – embrace acceptance / some of you need to stop trying so hard to be perfect – embrace His unconditional love / Some of you need to get in His word and understand the REAL God / Some of you need to make some decisions today about preparing for your eternity.