

Pressure Points The Stress of Relationships

February 26, 2017

Have you ever been going along in life and things seem to be going pretty well? Your job is fulfilling, you're doing well in school. Your bills are paid, your savings account is growing, but yet there is something that is just not right. For some reason you have a nagging sense of emptiness.

You may have every area of your life in order but if your relationships are not healthy the level of stress that that can cause can be crushing.

You see God designed us as relational beings. He built it right into us. We were never designed to go through life alone. We need each other and when our relationships are not right, life suffers. We experience stress!

God's Word has so much to say about relationships, which makes sense since He is the author and designer of our lives and the relationships within them.

Here is the problem, we live in a throw away world. If our TV breaks, we throw it away and get a new one. If our phone dies, we pitch it and get another one. Unfortunately this has led us down the path of treating people the same way.

If a relationship goes south, we walk away and find a new one. This is true not only in friendships, but sadly all too often in marriages and family relationships.

Here's the deal, there will always be stress in our relationships, because we are a broken people. When stress happens it is God's heart that we work toward reconciliation. The alternative can be crushing.

This is such a big deal to God that a significant amount of God's Word is devoted to teaching us how to get along with one another.

It was the apostle Paul who in writing to a group of believers in Philippi who said,

Philippians 2:1-2

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? ² Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Philippians 2:1-2 (NLT)

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He is essentially saying, *“Hey if you call yourself followers of Jesus, then get along!”* Because he knew there was too much at stake when we don’t.

If you are with us this morning and you don’t consider yourself to be a follower of Jesus, first I want to say, welcome. We are so glad you are with us. It is my hope that you have a very real and genuine experience with Him this morning.

With that said, I would imagine that a number of you are not a regular part of a church simply because of this very issue. You have seen God’s people not get a long. You have seen people living under the stress of broken relationships and unwilling to work toward reconciliation.

If that has been your experience, if that is what has kept you away from the Church and seeking a relationship with Jesus, I am sorry. I am sorry that we as God’s people have done such a poor job at living the way He desires us to, that we have repelled people, like you away from the very God that loves them and desires relationship with them.

This morning as we get into God’s Word and discover His plan for relational harmony I believe that what you will see, whether you are a follower of His or not, are answers that work; answers that lessen the stress in our relationships. Not completely alleviate it, but certainly lessen it, and help us navigate through it.

From the very beginning of time we have been struggling to get along. Stress in relationships is nothing new. It is an age-old problem, and God knows that.

It was for that reason so much of God’s Word is devoted to helping us get along. The Old Testament is filled with commands on how to get along and alleviate stress.

Let’s look at the 10 Commandments alone.

“Honor your father and mother.”

“You must not murder.”

“You must not commit adultery.”

“You must not steal.”

“You must not testify falsely against your neighbor.

You must not covet your neighbor’s house. You must not covet your neighbor’s wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.”

Notice anything? They are all commandments on how to get along, how to lessen the stress of relationships.

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God continues His mission to help us get along with one another right into the New Testament.

At one point we see Jesus debating with the religious leaders of the day and one of them asked him *“Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”*

Jesus comes back at them and says that all the commandments could be summed up into this one statement.

Mark 12:30-31

“And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.” Mark 12:30-31 (NLT)

Mic drop.

Love God.

Love your neighbors.

If we could only get a handle on that, the pressure would be relieved. The stress would be lessened.

Who though is our neighbor?

I have lived in many neighborhoods, and around a lot of neighbors that have caused me a good deal of stress, loud neighbors, obnoxious neighbors, neighbors that can’t control that barking dog! Is there a way to relate to them that would alleviate stress? Yes.

Jesus of course is speaking about more than just the people that live around us.

God has given such us a tremendous gift in His Word, the Bible. It is the instructional manual for relationships. Relationships with Him, relationships with people.

Within the New Testament there are 59 “One Another” statements.

- Be devoted to one another.
- Live in harmony with one another.
- Accept one another.
- Encourage one another, etc.

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Statements given to us to help us get along with “One Another.” Now before you think this is going to turn into a sermon with 59 points, relax, I simply want to boil it down to 1, *Honor One Another*.

If we can just get our heads and hearts wrapped around what it means to honor one another, we will experience much less stress in our relationships.

Romans 12:10

Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Romans 12:10 (NLT)

I love the Message version of this verse:

“Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.”

In other words don’t make it about you. Don’t make yourself #1. Give preference to one another.

Let’s take a look at how we can show Honor to one another and thus lessen the stress that tends to crop up in our relationships.

Five ways to Honor One Another

1. Humble Yourself

Let’s face it; humility is not a very popular theme in our world. It is a concept that is generally equated to weakness. In God’s economy, it is the exact opposite.

Humility actually opens us up to experience God and His grace in ways that we otherwise would not.

James 4:6

And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6 (NLT)

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As we put humility into practice and receive God's grace, we are in turn able to extend it to others. We are able to extend it to the people we struggle to understand or get along with.

A humble grace filled person is the one who is able to put the needs of others before their own, because a humble grace filled person understands that they really are no better than the person in their life that they are trying to understand.

Humility and grace enables us to take an interest in others, to look past the stuff that we may not understand or appreciate about a person.

And grace allows us to see people the way God does.

Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. Philippians 2:4 (NLT)

The phrase "look out" is the Greek word "skopos", from which we form our words telescope and microscope. This is great because when we look through a telescope or microscope we see very close. We see the fine detail.

That is the idea here, that we pay close attention to the feelings of others, that we notice the details of another person's life.

We may even see something that we don't agree with, but because of what God has done for us, we are able to show grace. In doing so we show Jesus!

As a youth pastor I saw so many students with great behavior issues that were very difficult and stressful to deal with, but when I was able to see past the behavior and understand the cause I was able to show grace and in turn show them Jesus.

This took humility on my part because it would have been so easy to simply write them off as an annoying kid and think more highly of myself.

Another attribute of a person of humility is they are able to see their own faults and own up to them. They are able to admit them to the people in their lives.

Honoring others means...

2. Openly Admit Your Faults

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When we open up to others about ourselves, it will encourage and help them realize they're not the only ones who deal with struggles, and temptations, and sin. They are not the only one who is struggling with life.

I would image you are a lot like me in that I have a difficult time being around people who seem to have all together. The truth is, they really don't, they just pretend to.

How do I know they don't? Because nobody is without fault.

I would rather be with a person who can admit they don't have it all together.

Romans 3:10 tells us "No one is righteous – not even one."

So let's quit pretending like we are.

We need each other. Faults and all! There is actually power in admitting our faults. Look what happens when we are able to confess our sins to one another.

James 5:16

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results. James 5:16 (NLT)

I hurt for the person who is too proud to admit they are without fault because they miss out on the healing that comes from confession.

They miss out on the sense of community that takes place when people who share in the same struggles.

They miss out on the results that come from the prayer of those they are open with.

Our Celebrate Recovery is a great example of this! I love being around the people of CR! They are open about their struggles and they find great joy-filled relationships because of that.

Now when we are with people that are open about their faults we may hear things that hurt us. We may have someone in our life that confesses to an offense they have made against us. What then? That alone can be a great cause of stress.

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3. Never stop forgiving

Why? Because we never stop messing up. We are all broken. None of us have it all together. I am broken. You are broken. All of us are in need of grace and forgiveness.

As soon as we stop forgiving one another, we can expect the stress level to rise.

Last month we talked about how forgiveness brings about freedom. When we forgive we are set free from the internal stress we carry around when we don't forgive.

In our relationships we have a choice, bitterness or forgiveness. One leads to stress the other to freedom.

That is why the Apostle Paul said in

Ephesians 4:31-32

Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior.³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Ephesians 4:31-32 (NLT)

So when your spouse does something that hurts you, forgive.

When your boss is unfair, forgive.

When your children are disobedient, forgive.

Forgiveness puts you in a better place and forgiveness brings healing to broken relationships.

How thankful I am for God's forgiveness of me. It is because of His forgiveness, that I am able to do the same for the people in my life.

I know forgiveness is a tough issue. We just completed a whole series on forgiveness and it was challenging for many of us to listen to and apply. If you missed it, check it out online.

4. Offer Your Ear

Everyone wants to be understood, but not everyone is a good listener. When we take the time to stop and listen people feel valued.

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Here's the deal about being a good listener, it takes work and intentionality.

James 1:19

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. James 1:19 (NLT)

There is a big difference between hearing and listening.

Have you ever been in a conversation but you weren't really listening? You appeared to be, but you know you really weren't. The person was talking but your mind was somewhere else. You heard their voice, but that is all.

Being quick to listen means we are fully present.

Here is how we can do that.

- **Remove distractions**

Put down the cell phone and listen. Turn off the TV and focus on the person you are with.

If you are too preoccupied, reschedule. Find a time to meet in which you can be fully present.

Consider this, God may want to speak to you through the person you are with. If you are unwilling to remove distractions so that you are fully present and able to listen, you may very well miss what God has to say to you.

- **Ask good questions**

Part of being a good listener is being active in the conversation and asking questions. In doing so we add value to the person we are with.

In asking questions we show the person that we are engaged with them, and want to understand them; that we want to see and know their heart. And sometimes it just takes asking the right questions.

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Though good advice lies deep within the heart, a person with understanding will draw it out.
Proverbs 20:5 (NLT)

Again, God just may want to speak to you through the person you are listening to.

We all want to be understood, so allow God to use you to show understanding to other people.

Now what if you hear something that you don't agree with? What if something comes out of their mouth that offends you a little? Before you react...

- **Withhold judgment**

Remember a good listener is slow to speak and quick to listen. Be more focused on what is being said before you open your mouth.

Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish. Proverbs 18:13 (NLT)

Fools have no interest in understanding; they only want to air their own opinions. Proverbs 18:2 (NLT)

In withholding your judgment, you show the person you are interested in and care about what they are saying to you.

As you allow the person to finish what they are saying, you just might be surprised at how God uses it in your life.

If it is something that truly is wrong or hurtful, let them finish and then speak.

I love the quote: *"Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt."*

Be slow to speak.

Last way we can show honor to others...

5. Respect Authority

If there were ever a hot button topic today, this would be it. The current political climate has shown us that showing honor to those in authority is a struggle. With God, it's not an option.

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There are many authority positions I could apply this to but for the sake of time I will boil it down to two.

- Respect Those That Lead

God has placed all kinds of different leaders in our life.

There are governing officials, and law enforcement officials that we may not necessarily interact with on a daily basis, but there are also those that we do, bosses, teachers, and the like.

Ask anyone sitting in jail right now that is there because they broke the law, if they are experiencing stress. Safe to say, their answer would be yes.

When we understand that God places all authority, we are able to exhibit respect, if not for the person that certainly for the office.

Romans 13:5-7

⁵So you must submit to them, not only to avoid punishment, but also to keep a clear conscience. Pay your taxes, too, for these same reasons. For government workers need to be paid. They are serving God in what they do. ⁷Give to everyone what you owe them: Pay your taxes and government fees to those who collect them, and give respect and honor to those who are in authority. Romans 13:5-7 (NLT)

In showing respect we will eliminate stress. The opposite of a clear conscience is stress!

- Respect Your Parents

Perhaps the most important authority God has placed in our lives is our parents.

Look at Exodus 20:12

Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you. Exodus 20:12 (NLT)

This is such a big deal that God attaches a promise to it. *“That you will live a long full life.”* Ephesians 6:2 tells us it’s the first commandment with a promise.

So kids, you looking for an opportunity to live with less stress in your home? Honor mom and dad!

Let me also say there is not an age limit attached to this command. As adults we may no longer need to obey our parents but we must find a way to honor them.

I have seen so much stress and strife in people's life over this one issue.

Even if we feel they don't deserve it, we are called to honor them. Why? Because it's the right thing to do. God tells us to do it.

And remember ... with obedience comes blessing!

That is a lot to consider!

- Humble Yourself
- Openly Admit Your Faults
- Never Stop Forgiving
- Offer Your Ear
- Respect Authority

As we get a grip on these truths I believe we will see the pressure relieved and the stress lessened.

Let me close by going back to what Jesus said in Mark 12:30-31. He said something very profound before He instructed us to "*Love your neighbor as yourself.*"

He said:

Mark 12:30

"And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength." Mark 12:30 (NLT)

The more we draw near to Jesus the more He will give us the strength to love our neighbor.

INVITE WORSHIP TEAM TO STAGE

If you have not yet given your heart to Jesus let me say to you, there is nothing He wants more from you today.

Make today the day you decide to *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind, and all your strength.* And He will give you the desire and the power to honor one another.

If you have given your heart to Jesus, trust Him in these things. Show honor to the people in your life and let Him relieve you of the stress you may be dealing with.

Pray.

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