

Seven Secrets of Stress-Free Living

This is one of a series of A5 booklets that cover the things in life that cause us most stress. The pressures of time, money, marriage, our job, etc.

To introduce this series, I want today to examine the life of one great leader whose name we all know, and show how He was able to remain at peace under pressure.

This leader was a man who was constantly under pressure: demands on His time; He was rarely alone; He had very little private life; He was constantly interrupted; people misunderstood Him; people criticised Him; people ridiculed him. He had enormous stress every day of His short life; such stress that would have caused any of us to cave in. This great leader was Jesus Christ. Even a quick study of His life will show that He remained at peace in spite of such destroying stress.

Jesus was never in a hurry; He was always at ease and had a calmness about His life that enabled Him to handle all this stress in His Life.

We are going to look at certain principles in the life of Jesus Christ that enabled Him to handle great stress in His life.

“Know who you are”

John 8:12 [NIV] *“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”*

18 times in scripture Jesus says “I am”. He knew who He was.

John 8:18 [NIV] *“I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.”*

“I testify for myself”

The principle of identification

This is important because if we don't know who we are someone else will try to tell us who they think we are.

We allow other people to manipulate and pressure us into being someone whom we are not.

A lot of stress in life comes through living a double life, trying to be someone we are not, wearing a false mask for others to see.

Insecurity always produces pressure to perform in our lives, as we set unreal goals just to impress others.

How can we know who we are?

We know who we are by knowing whose we are.

1 John 3:1-3 [NIV] *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made*

known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

I am a child of God. I am not here on earth by accident but with a very specific purpose.

John 14:21 [NIV] *"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."*

I am deeply loved by my Creator God.

John 15:16 [NIV] *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name."*

I am accepted by God and He has a personal plan for my life.

Therefore I am significant.

"Know who you are trying to please"

John 5:30 [NIV] *"By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."*

The principle of dedication.

We cannot please everybody – even God cannot please everybody – and it's foolish to try to do something God cannot do.

Christ's dedication paid off.

Matthew 3:17 [NIV] *"And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'"*

When we don't know whom we are trying to please, we cave in to three things:

- a) **Criticism** because we worry about what everyone else will think about what we do.
- b) **Competition** because we worry about someone else getting ahead of us.
- c) **Conflict** when someone else disagrees with what we say or do, so we give in to them.

Matthew 6:33 [NIV] *"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

When we are just trying to please Jesus Christ we are freed from the pressure of seeking all these physical "status symbols" to make us acceptable in the eyes of other people.

This simplifies life and reduces pressure.

We love to blame our stress on other people. Thus other people are blaming us . "You made me" – "I have to" – "I've got to".

When we find ourselves saying things like this we need to ask the question "Who says so?"

When we stop to think, there are very few things in life that we have to do.

We have to breathe, yet even this we can choose not to do.

When we say “*I have to*” we are really saying “*I choose to so as to avoid the consequences of not doing so*”.

Everything we do is by choice so we cannot blame others.

When we get under pressure [stress] we are choosing to allow other people to put us under that stress.

We are not a victim unless we allow it.

“Know what we want to accomplish”

John 8:14 [NIV] *“Jesus answered, ‘Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going.’”*

The principle of organisation

We have to plan our lives and set priorities. If we don’t, we will be pressured by others to go where they want us to go or accept what they think is important.

We live by our priorities *or* we live by others’ pressures.

We need to look back at each day and ask the question, “*Did I accomplish what I planned to accomplish?*”

Busyness is not always productivity.

We have to have a goal and plan our lives round that goal.

Preparation prevents pressure but procrastination produces pressure.

Having real goals simplifies life. If we start each day in prayer with God looking at our schedule for the day and ask the question:

“Is this the way I want to spend the next twenty-four hours of my short and fleeting life?”

“Focus on one thing at a time”

Luke 4:42 [NIV] *“At daybreak Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them.”*

The principle of concentration

Everyone had “*Plan B*” for Jesus but He would not be side-tracked from what He had purposed to accomplish at that moment. When we diffuse our efforts we are ineffective but if we concentrate all our energy on one task we can be very effective.

It is like light: diffused light doesn’t even cast a shadow but concentrated light [a laser] has great power.

Jesus Christ did not allow interruptions to distract Him from concentrating on the one job in hand at that moment of His Life. The result was not being under stress.

“Don’t try to do it all yourself”

Mark 3:14 [NIV] *“He appointed twelve-- designating them apostles-- that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach.”*

The principle of delegation

We get tense because we feel it all depends on us.

Jesus enlisted and trained twelve other men to help Him because He realised He couldn’t do it all Himself.

Why **don’t** we get other people involved?

a) Perfectionism – *“If you want a job well done do it yourself.”*

Nice idea but it doesn’t work all the time and if we get under pressure trying to do it all ourselves we will make mistakes.

Do you think Jesus would have done a better job at preaching than the disciples?

Yes, of course He would have.

There is a lovely principle to learn as we mature in life. *“Let other people make some of the mistakes.”*

Mistakes are really a privilege. Eddison said, *“Don’t call it a mistake, call it an education.”* So let others be *“educated”* by making some of the mistakes.

b) Fear that others may do a better job than we can.

This can be threatening but if we *“know who we are”* we won’t be threatened by such a thing happening.

“Knowing what we want to accomplish” helps us to realise we have to get other people involved. So we delegate. *“Focus on one thing at a time”* means we have to delegate other related things to others if they are to be accomplished effectively.

“Make a habit of personal prayer”

Mark 1:35 [NIV] *“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.”*

The principle of meditation

Prayer is a gigantic tool for relieving stress.

No matter how busy Jesus was He made time for prayer. How much more do we need to make time daily for prayer, however busy we may be.

A quiet time with God can be like a decompression chamber for the pressure of stress.

Jesus waited for instructions before He started His day, talked out the day's schedule with His Father, God.

Many of our stress problems come from our inability to sit still and be quiet.

Most people cannot sit by themselves for five minutes in a car without turning the radio on.

Walk into the house alone and we turn on TV or radio.

Psalm 46:10 [NIV] *“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”*

Job 37:14 [NIV] *“Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God’s wonders.”*

The reason many people do not know God is that they cannot be still; we get so busy yet we don't know where we are going.

Have you noticed that when we get lost on a car journey we tend to double your speed instead of stopping and looking at the map ! !

Start our morning with prayer and study of God's Word – that is a stress reliever. Normally we tend to start the day wrong: we turn on TV or radio for some bad news, then the newspaper for some more bad news.

As if we don't have enough problems ourselves, we add all the problems in the world to them. So we then end up starting work with *“the problems of the world on our shoulders.”*

“Take time off to enjoy life”

Mark 6:30-32 [NIV] *“The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.”*

The principle of relaxation

Jesus was able to handle stress because He knew when to relax.

Rest and recreation in life are not optional; they are so important to our welfare that God put them in the Ten Commandments. Every seventh day we are to rest.

Mark 2:27 [NIV] *“Then he said to them, ‘The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.’”*

Our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual constitution demands periodic breaks.

Matthew 11:19 [Phillips] *“The son of man came, enjoying life.”*

1 Timothy 6:17 [NIV] *“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.”*

Life was meant to be enjoyed – not just endured.

Balance is the key to stress management. We all need “*creative loffing.*”

It is better to have loffed and lost than never to have loffed at all ! !

Any time we ignore any of these principles we are asking for tension and stress.

Last principle

Which Jesus didn't need because He was God but we as humans do need.

Matthew 11:28 [NIV] “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*”

The principle of giving our stress and our life to Christ

John 14:27 [NIV] “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*”

Christ is the Prince of Peace [**Isaiah 9:6**] and we will never have ultimate inner peace until we have a relationship with Christ the Prince of Peace. Christ is the greatest stress reliever.

The greatest source of stress in our lives is when we try to live our lives apart from the One who Created us.

Ask God for a new life: we **don't just** “*turn over a new leaf*” for the underside has just as many problems as the top side.

John 3:3 [NIV] “*In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is **born again.**’*”

The only lasting way to deal with stress is for our old stress-filled life to die and to be born again to a new life.

How do we do this ?

Romans 6:3-4 [NIV] “*Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*”

A new life where Christ is not only our saviour but the Lord [director] of our life. This will allow God to transform us from the inside out.

Psalms 23 translated by a Japanese businessman:

“The Lord is my pace setter, I shall not rush, He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals: He provides me with images of stillness, which restore my serenity. He leads me in ways of efficiency through calmness of mind and this guidance is peace. Even though I have a great many things to accomplish this day I will not fret, for His presence is here. His timelessness, His all importance, will keep me in balance. He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my activity, anointing my mind with His oils of tranquillity. My cup of joyous energy overflows. Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of my hours, for I shall walk in the pace of my Lord and dwell in His Kingdom forever.”