

Exercise and Stress Part VI— Spiritual Stress Management

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Introduction

Seyle (1930) suggested that stress could be broken down into two elements—distress and eustress. Distress was the damaging effects caused by stress, and could result in a decline in performance for athletes, or promote pathogenesis (diseases). Eustress was the advantageous effects of stress, and promoted growth and development. The first 5 papers of this series supported this hypothesis. The deleterious effects of stress were identified in part 4; the beneficial effects of stress were discussed in part 1 and 5. Eustressors include physical activity, which can result in beneficial adaptation such as muscle and bone growth. Distress includes an impaired immune system, cancer, and impaired performance, and can be a result of consistent worrying and irrational thoughts.

Paper 5 of this series discussed stress management, which should be implemented to decrease distress. This series would be completely amiss, however, to not discuss the most effective stress manager—Jesus Christ. In this context, the purpose of this paper was to discuss how to use spiritual principles to manage stress. A second purpose of this paper was to identify distress and eustress elements in ones spiritual life, according to the Bible.

Important note

The Psalmist Lamed said, “I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.” Psalms 119:96-96. In this context, it is beyond the scope of this paper—and any paper in fact—to discuss all the benefits that God has to offer us for managing stress. However, it is the hope of the current author that the readers may benefit from the tips that are given, and that it will motivate them to study scripture and pray to God themselves to find more treasures on this topic.

Spiritual Eustressors

A helpful model for this next section is the general adaptation theory. As you recall from article one, this theory suggests that stress is composed of three phases: alarm reaction, stage of resistance, and stage of exhaustion. During alarm reaction, the introduction of a stressor leads to a decrease in performance. Following this is the stage of resistance, in which the organism’s defense mechanisms fight to gain resistance. This is known as adaptation and is characterized by elevated levels of homeostasis. Lastly, if the stimulus is continuous then the individual would plateau or experience maladaptation. The maladaptation according to Seyle reflected similar symptoms to the Alarm reaction stage, and was the result of a depletion of the organisms defense mechanisms caused by chronic stress (Wilson and Wilson, 2005, a).

What is unique about this model of stress is that it discusses the beneficial aspects of stress. As discussed in article one of this series, stress is often given a bad rap, but it is absolutely essential to our growth. Without stress, our bones and bones would atrophy; and we could never learn. In this context, it is clear from the bible that God allows us to go through difficult situations, in order to allow us to grow. Consider the following verses.

1 Peter 4:12-19

12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. 14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

James 1:2-12

2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

It is clear from scripture, that we will face trials, and difficult times. And further, it is through these times that we shall grow.

Now, I want you to pay attention to something. Notice how the bible focuses our attention towards *why* we are going through these stressful situations. Instead of complaining or acting like these things are strange, Peter and James say that we should rejoice, because it is these situations that are going to make us grow. Thus, we should focus on how to handle the situations, instead of letting these situations steal the joy out of our lives, turning into a distress.

What is interesting is that Psychologists are supporting what the bible was recommending to do thousands of years ago! This is essentially social engineering, which was discussed in article 5 of this series.

Several examples of how to properly and improperly handle stress will be discussed further on.

Distress

There are several possible sources of distressors in Christians lives. In the aforementioned section, if we allow difficult situations to bring us down, this can easily turn into a distress. This will be elaborated on more momentarily, but first, I want to focus in on one common source of distress for Christians.

Matthew 5:48

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

The bible gives countless instructions on how Christians can be prosperous, and successful in their spiritual lives. And Christians are instructed to do their best to live a holy life. But many Christians let this commandment develop into a horrible stressor.

The bible says that *all* have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God. Therefore, all Christians are bound to sin in their lives. But the question is: how do we handle our sins? Well, unfortunately, many Christians respond inappropriately. They often times will beat themselves up continually over the slightest of sins "I am so stupid for doing that sin! I should have never done that, why am I so stupid!" As will be displayed in the next several paragraphs, not only is this mentality unscientific, and unhealthy, it is unscriptural.

Accepting Grace

Often times, Christians will tell me, "I know I am saved, but I just don't feel saved..." while Christianity does involve feelings and emotions, salvation is not a feeling—it is a free gift.

Ephesians 2:8

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

We are told to walk by faith and not by sight. Therefore, we should not base our salvation on how we feel. It is just something that must be accepted. The bible says that Christ did all of the work, and all we must do is accept it. Therefore, are we given permission to sin? Absolutely not! Paul discusses this in Romans and includes that, "31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." But many Christians put the cart before the horse. The bible says we are working as a result of salvation—not for salvation. People that do not accept this, and try to earn their salvation are under constant stress, because it will never happen. We read in the bible that we are all sinners, and none of us are worthy of salvation. So trying to achieve our salvation through works is a losing battle, bound to result in increased stress.

What many Christians fail to understand, is that Christianity is a journey. We are not born perfect; in fact, Psalms says we are born in sin. Isaiah says we must learn to do well (Isaiah 1:7); The Lord says he will teach us and guide us in the way we should go (Psalms 32:8); Psalms 19:12 says "Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults." The above scriptures from James and Peter suggest that we must go through a process to become perfect; Hebrews 12:4-7 says that the Lord chastens every one of his children for our mistakes, and that in fact, if we are not chastised by the Lord, we are not his children, implying that all of us are bound to make mistakes. And a hundred more scriptures could I show on this topic. The take home message is this: we are sinners, and we will make mistakes. We are not perfect, *yet*; the path to perfection is a process, and it is one that God entirely understands. He does not expect you to be perfect when you come to him. If you were perfect, then there would be no need for Christ's sacrifice. But we are not, and this is why we are saved by grace, and not by works. This is summed up nicely in the following verse.

Romans 4:1-8

1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? 2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. 3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. 4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. 5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. 6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, 7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

This is my favorite verse in the entire bible. It demonstrates how God understand our week state, and is incredibly pitiful towards us.

Psalms 103:6-18

6 The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. 7 He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. 8 The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. 9 He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. 10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. 12 As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. 13 Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. 14 For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. 15 As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. 16 For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. 17 But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; 18 To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

Many Christians view God has a harsh and cruel God. But this is not the God of the bible. The God of the bible is kind; understanding, and so incredibly merciful. He understands what we are going through on earth, and the temptations we deal with. In fact, he understands it better than anyone else ever will. Because he went through more temptations than we shall ever go through in our lives.

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus was given every single temptation a man could be given on earth, yet, he never sinned once. He understands what we are going through. And guess what? He has a solution to the problem. If you allow God to work in your life, he will develop

you into that perfect man of God he wants you to be. But it is a process, and you must be patient with yourself, just as God is patient with you.

Effective and Ineffective Stress Management Techniques

The following paragraphs will discuss several ways to effectively and ineffectively handle stress, according to the bible.

One of my favorite Christian books is John Bunyan's Pilgrims progress. I have listened to it on CD at least a dozen times, and highly recommend it. The story is about the Christian journey, or pilgrimage. Our main Characters name is Christian. As I have listened to this CD, I have noticed one problem with Christian—he beats himself up all the time. He would constantly ponder his past mistakes, and dreadfully sob, or be angry with himself. This was best portrayed during one seen in the book, where Christian loses his bible, and he must travel back to get it. On the way back, we are told that he continually beat himself up, calling himself names such as a full, sinful, and, sluggard. And there are many other times he repeats this scenario throughout his journey.

Many Christians do the same thing today. When they make a mistake, they respond by beating themselves up. And they are constantly beating themselves up over past mistakes. Sadly, many Christians just won't forgive themselves, and even believe they cannot be forgiven.

But is this biblical? Not only is it unbiblical, it is unscientific.

To review what we learned in article 5, Beck identified that people had learned, automatic thoughts to stressors. These thoughts are often harsh, negative, and irrational. They are not well thought out, and often fallacious. Lastly, they can harm us emotionally, and behaviorally.

How does the bible say we should respond when we sin, and what should we think about?

First, Jesus says that *all* sins, no matter how wicked they may be, will be forgiven men if they repent (Mathew 12). So that dispels the myth that we cannot be forgiven. When we sin, the bible instructs us to repent. This means to turn away from our sins, and move back on the right path. Second, we are to ask for forgiveness from God. Nowhere in the bible are we instructed to beat ourselves up. In fact, just the opposite. Consider the Apostle Paul.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

12 And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; 13 Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. 14 And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. 15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. 16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a

pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.
 17 Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be
 honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Paul says he was the king of sinners! Yet, Christ forgave him. And this was to be an example for us, on how all of us could be forgiven. Now, did Paul dwell on his past mistakes? Let's look...

Philippians 3:1-14

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. 2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. 3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: 5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. **8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,**

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. 12 Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. **13 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,** 14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul completely disowned his past. He refused to dwell on it. He allocated all his attention on the future, and to becoming more like Christ.

Consider the Church of Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. **11 And such were some of you:** but ye are washed, but

ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

Now, consider this parable by Christ.

Matthew 18:21-35

21 Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? 22 Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven. 23 Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. 24 And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. 27 Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. 28 But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. 29 And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. 30 And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. 32 Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: 33 Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? 34 And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. 35 So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

The take home message is this: when we are saved, Christ separates our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. And if we sin again, all we need do is repent, and ask for forgiveness, and he shall forgive us. And then, we should do our best to live Holy lives before God.

So what is it that we should ponder on, then?

Philippians 4:1-9

6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.** 9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.

This is a consistent trend throughout the bible. Instead of beating ourselves up, we need to focus on the positives.

The same thing applies for worrying about difficult situations. Consider this scripture.

Matthew 6:25-34

25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? 26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? 27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? 28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: 29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? 31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? 32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. 34 Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

We should not spend our time stressing and worrying about all our problems. First, it is unearthly; and second, it is faithless. The bible says we should put our worries on Christ.

It is funny, Christ came to remove the Burdon of the law from us, yet many Christians are still living under the burden of it. As Peter said in Acts chapter 15, "10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they." I challenge those who are stressed and burned, to accept Christ's offer. He wants to take that stress away from you!

Matthew 11:28-30

28 Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

In John Chapter 17 we read that Christ prays that our joy may be full. In Romans chapter 8 we read that, "Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Consider this verse.

Ephesians 3:14-21

14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 That he
would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with
might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts
by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to
comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and
height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye
might be filled with all the fulness of God. 20 Now unto him that is able to do
exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power
that worketh in us, 21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus
throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

I would challenge the reader to find a scripture that says Christians should be living stressful lives. Guess what? It does not exist! The bible is entirely anti-stress!

Another problem with stressed Christians is this: when we ponder on all our faults, we often fail to recognize our strengths. And what happens is we miss an opportunity to thank God. In Hebrews 13:15 we read, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." In other words, we should be continually giving thanks to God. Take time to ponder the *good* that he has done in your life, and how he has changed you. It is so silly to focus on the bad things in your life, when there are so many wonderful things that have happened. Let us instead focus on what God has blessed us with, and be grateful to him for it.

Another problem with stressed Christians is that they begin to lose their testimony.

Have you ever been around someone that just makes the entire room gloomy? It seems like every day they have a frown on their face, or something horrible happened to me. No one wants to hang around a person like that; let alone be like them.

There is no greater testimony a Christian can show than a stress free life. Christ says we are to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14), that all men shall know we are his disciples if we love one another (John 13:35), and that the second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:49). But how can we love our neighbor as ourselves, if we do not love ourselves? And how can we be the light of the world, when we are stressed all day?

Now, let us consider some more examples in the bible on how to correctly and incorrectly handle stress.

King David was called a man after Gods own heart. He was one of the greatest characters in the bible. But he committed one of the most evil sins discussed in scripture. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and then had Uriah killed in battle to hide his sin. The Lord responded by taking the son Bathsheba bore him away; yet, he also put away David's sin and forgave him.

So how did King David respond to this? We read that he went and fasted, and prayed for mercy from the Lord that he would spare his child. He remorse so bitterly, that his servants were terrified to tell him when the child died. But when he found out, they were shocked at his response.

2 Samuel 12: 20 - 23

20 Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. 21 Then said his servants unto him, What thing is this that thou hast done? thou didst fast and weep for the child, while it was alive; but when the child was dead, thou didst rise and eat bread. 22 And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? 23 But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.

What king David is showing here, is the fruitlessness of stressing over past sins. He instead moved on with his life, and ended up doing many more great things in the Lord. Further, he ended up having King Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, through Bathsheba.

Now, consider Job. The Lord allowed Job to be tempted by Satan. Satan took his children; riches; animals; and harmed his body physically with a great plague. At first, Job responded remarkably well, "20 Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, 21 And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. 22 In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." But then, he spoke foolishly along with his friends for 30 plus chapters in the bible, starting at chapter 3, "1 After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day." In response to this, the Lord harshly rebuked Job for his ill-advised words. Nonetheless, he forgave Job, and abundantly blessed his life at the end.

Consider Moses. We read in Psalms 106, that Moses was not let into the promise land because of his ill advised words to the Lord, because the people were constantly complaining to him, and stressing him out.

And there are numerous other examples in scripture.

Summary**3 John 1: 2**

2 Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

The sum of the matter is this: God allows us to go through trying situations to turn us into the man or woman in Christ that he wants us to be. And the bible wants us to live a happy and healthy life, void of distress.

Keep it Hardcore,

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References

1. Bible. King James
2. Refer to Part 1-5 of this series for the remaining references.