

Stressed Out!

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According to a 2007 survey conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA), 1 in 3 adults feel extreme stress; nearly 1 in 5 reach their highest stress level 15 or more times per month; and almost half of those surveyed (48%) state their stress level has risen over the last five years. While stress is a part of life, the survey indicated that participants were suffering physically, emotionally, professionally, and personally as a result of stress.

This quarter's KCM Newsletter focuses on effective management of stress. Perhaps the best place to start is by covering the specifics of stress, so that we can better understand how to manage it as opposed to allowing it to manage us.

When we experience physical, mental, or emotional strain, it can be said we're experiencing stress. Basically, stress can be viewed in one of two categories: first, there is *eustress*, which is seen as a healthful type. For example, when we exercise we experience *eustress*; in effect, we're straining our body through a manner that produces healthy results. The second category of stress is known as *distress*. This state occurs when we experience persistent physical, mental, or emotional strain that cannot be effectively coped with or adapted to. In many respects, it is our repeated experiences with *distress* that leads us into conditioned states that prove to be dysfunctional; wherein, our modes of thinking and traits of behaving fall outside of God's will. This is especially true of the *distress* we experience through sin.

Endocrinologist Hans Selye served as a pioneer in the study of stress and developed the theory of General

Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) involving a three stage process pertaining to *distress*. The first stage was identified as — *alarm*. The moment we sense a threat, a complex physiological response is generated. During *alarm* our body rapidly increases production of certain neurochemicals like epinephrine (aka adrenaline), resulting in changes to our: cardiovascular, respiratory, gastrointestinal, renal, and endocrine systems. During this state, we physically experience such changes as: increase in heart rate and breathing, muscle tension, a surge in energy, dilated pupils, and more. Mentally, we focus on that which is alarming us; the greater the *alarm*, the more intense our focus. Emotionally, we may feel: fear, dread, anger, etc.

If that which is causing our state of *alarm* persists, we will experience the second stage of GAS — *resistance*. Because our body could not tolerate a continuous state of *alarm* without eventually breaking down, it attempts to cope with the *distress* through *resistance*. For example, if you were being chased by someone who meant to do you harm, and you managed to get a safe enough distance away but were still being pursued, you might slow your pace down from a sprint to a jog. In other words, your body would resist the constant exertion of running at a full sprint once you perceived that the threat was no longer imminently upon you.

However, if the stress associated with the threat persists long enough, we'll experience the third stage of GAS — *exhaustion*. Here, the body is depleted of its resources and breakdown of systems begins to occur. The more frequently we experience this third stage of *distress*, the greater the likeli-

hood for development of *dis-ease* (e.g. hypertension, depression, ulcers, etc.).

The key to managing stress is awareness. We cannot solve a problem unless we are first aware that it exists. With respect to *distress*, the more aware we can be of what stage we're experiencing, the better opportunity we have at preventing escalation and actually reducing our stress. Look for the following physical symptoms of *distress*: fatigue, headache, upset stomach, muscle tension, change in appetite/sleep, teeth grinding, change in sex drive, and feeling dizzy. Additionally, look for the following psychological symptoms: irritability, anger, nervousness, lack of energy, and feeling on the verge of tears. It might be helpful to write your symptoms down and rank them on a scale from 1 to 5 (one = minimal, five = extreme).

Next, work to identify potential stressors (i.e. factors associated with the cause of stress). Write down each factor along with all possible solutions for eradicating or reducing the stressor's level of intensity. For example, a married couple might make a decision to sell a car they were still paying-on. The husband could then commute to work with a co-worker and split the cost of gas. Over the course of a year, this solution will save thousands of dollars, as well as reduce the couple's financial stress.

While it is not always easy to make sacrifices; sometimes the trade-off in reduced *distress* is well worth the effort. Ask God to search your heart and reveal what it is He wants you to see about your current situation— then set-about reducing your *distress* and *living* life, rather than surviving life.

5330 Office Center Ct.
Suite #27
Bakersfield, CA. 93309

Ph: 661.324.4070

E-Mail:
info@kcmcounseling.com

Web:
www.kcmcounseling.com

Bearing the Burden



We were not called to bear all of life's burdens on our own. Paul wrote to the Galatians saying, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." (Gal. 6:2, NIV). The apostle is not suggesting that we get involved with matters we have no control over; rather, he's directing us to assist our fellow brothers and sisters who are struggling with the weight of life's burdens as a result of sins or misfortunes.

Clearly, we are to bear the responsibility for our own decisions (see Gal. 6:5); however, it has never been God's intent that we would sit by and watch those we love be crushed by the weight of this world. Thus, we're

to support one another in life by displaying our empathy. And what is empathy? It's the identification with and understanding of another person's situation, emotions and motives. While we need not attempt to *fix* people's problems, we can demonstrate our love for them by supporting them emotionally in their time of need.

Who among us has not struggled with challenges in life? Who hasn't made a poor decision? Fact is, we all struggle in life at one time or another; and every person who has walked the face of this earth (save Jesus) has made a poor decision now and then.

During these tying economic times,

the seemingly littlest of efforts in assisting another in need may turn-out to be a significant act. As Christians, this is our time to shine! The world has gotten considerably darker and colder for many people; but we can make a difference by demonstrating Christ-like character.

On the flip-side of the coin; neither were we charged with bearing life's burdens all by *ourselves*. Each one of us needs to reach-out for assistance when we find our load too great and our burdens distressing. Pray the Lord will strengthen you to give someone a hand-up; and in return, don't be afraid to ask for a hand when need be.

Assessing Stress

The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale is designed to help you identify the level of distress you are currently experiencing in life. Below is a list of stressors in order of their Life Change Units (LCU), from highest to lowest. Circle the score of each event you've experienced in the last year, then add-up the scores.

Life Event	LCU
1. Death of spouse.....	100
2. Divorce.....	73
3. Marital separation.....	65
4. Jail term.....	63
5. Death of a close family member.....	63
6. Personal injury or illness.....	53
7. Marriage.....	50
8. Being fired from work.....	47
9. Reconciliation with spouse.....	45
10. Retirement.....	45
11. Change in health of family member.....	44
12. Pregnancy.....	40
13. Sexual dysfunctions.....	39
14. Addiction of family member.....	39
15. Major business readjustment.....	39
16. Major change in financial state.....	38
17. Death of a close friend.....	37
18. Changing to a different line of work.....	36
19. Change in frequency of arguments with spouse.....	35
20. Mortgage loan or major purchase over \$15,000.....	31
21. Foreclosure on a mortgage loan.....	30
22. Major change in responsibility at	

work.....	29
23. Children leaving home.....	29
24. Trouble with in-laws.....	29
25. Outstanding personal achievement.....	28
26. Spouse begins or stops work.....	26
27. Starting or ending school.....	26
28. Change in living conditions.....	25
29. Revision of personal habits (i.e. dress, manners, associations, etc.).....	24
30. Trouble with boss.....	23
31. Change in work hours/conditions.....	20
32. Change in residence.....	20
33. Change in school.....	20
34. Change in recreational activities.....	19
35. Change in church activities.....	19
36. Change in social activities.....	18
37. Mortgage or loan under \$15,000.....	17
38. Change in sleep habits.....	16
39. Change in number of family gatherings.....	15
40. Change in eating habits.....	15
41. Vacation.....	13
42. Christmas.....	12
43. Minor violation of the law.....	11

Scoring

Total your scores from above.

0—150: At the moment your stress level is low. Your chance of illness or accident related to your stress level within two years is low.

151—300: You have borderline high stress. Your chance of accident

or illness related to stress within two years is moderate.

301+: You have a high stress level. Your chance of accident or illness related to stress within two years is great. Seeking-out professional help for stress management is strongly recommended.

Stress Reducers

1. Don't hide your stress away, this only compounds matters; rather, confide in someone you believe you can trust.
2. Increase your physical activity as a means to reduce the energy level associated with the pressures of distress.
3. Set and maintain reasonable limits. Pushing yourself to the breaking-point serves nobody, especially you.
4. Have fun. If life hands you lemons—make lemonade. Take time to enjoy the good things in life.
5. Self-medicating (e.g. drugs, alcohol, and mood altering behaviors) will only exasperate matters. It is far better to learn how to manage distress, instead of allowing it to manage you.

Relax

Here are ten suggestions for relaxing:

1. Go for a walk. While you're out, work to clear your mind of the myriad of things competing for your thoughts. Work to find God in everything you see. Walk slow, enjoy God's creation.
2. On a clear evening, go outside, lay on your back and ponder the cosmos. Consider your place in it all.
3. Get up early one morning and watch the sun rise. Work to stay present in the moment; don't let your mind wonder into worries.
4. Laugh—if possible, with someone you love. Rent a Three Stooges movie; share the Sunday comics section of the newspaper, etc.
5. Soak in a hot tub or bath. Barricade the bathroom door if necessary; lay back in the warm water and feel its soothing power.
6. Stop acting your age. Get out and do something fun (and legal) that you used to do as a child.
7. Give a part of yourself away. Volunteer for an activity where you interact with people who are less fortunate than you.
8. Catch a smile. Pick one day out of the week where you make a conscious effort to smile often. I bet you'll find it to be contagious and spreading to other days of the week.
9. Pick a Saturday where all you do is lay around in your pajamas, watch inspiring movies and don't worry about the chores. If you live with others, inform them of your plans and invite them to join you.
10. Get a massage.

Of course, ensure your safety in these endeavors (e.g. walk where it is safe, and with a friend if necessary, etc.).

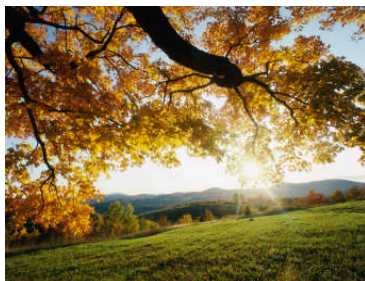
A Lesson in Frugality

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how

far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them. Jesus then took the loaves, gave



thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets

with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world." Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

-John 6:1-15, NIV

Questions: Why did Jesus tell His disciples to gather the remaining pieces that were left over? After all, He could have produced more food whenever He wanted to. How might this matter apply to your life?

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."

John 6:12, NIV



KINGDOM COMMUNITY MINISTRIES

5330 Office Center Court, Suite #27

Phone: 661-324-4070

E-mail: info@kcmcounseling.com

Web: www.kcmcounseling.com

Kingdom Community Ministries (KCM) exists to serve the Body of Christ by offering biblically-based, Christ-centered counseling services. Our mission is to develop fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ by bringing counselees into a closer relationship with the Lord; and helping them to overcome the crippling effects of sin and guilt. KCM counselors are licensed ministers with graduate level degrees in Ministry with emphasis in Christian Counseling; however, we are not licensed psychotherapists. We offer evening appointments, and a sliding scale payment plan for those who qualify. Your prayerful consideration of our services is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

God's Economy

Who could have guessed just a few years ago that America would experience its biggest economic down-turn since the Great Depression? Certainly, most people possess the understanding that what goes up, must come down; which, of course is true of our economy. But I'm not sure anyone could have predicted the market would drop so low, and so fast.

Frankly, I've almost completely done away with following news on the economy. First, there is little I can do with respect to America's economy. Second, fretting over matters will not change my situation. All worrying does is rob me of the power God gives me moment-by-moment to handle anything that comes my way (see Phil. 4:13). Third, I'm resting on the understanding that God's economy is really not like this world's economy.

Here are some points I've been mediating on lately:

- *One:* I'm not to worship anyone or anything besides the God Most High (see Exodus 20:3, 4). I've asked God to search my heart and reveal to me what in my life I've been putting before Him. Times such as these can prove to be rather beneficial in searching one's heart for what is truly essential.
- *Two:* According to the world's economy, I'm not even close to being wealthy; however, according to God's economy—I'm rich! Listen to the words of the apostle Paul, "Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ..." (Eph. 3:8, NIV). Remember, this world is passing away, but we will forever be blessed as co-heirs with Christ Jesus.
- *Three:* Continue to bring all my tithes into God's house (see Malachi 3:10).

By tithing: I continue to recognize God as my ultimate Provider; when He is first in my life, He is honored; and by giving God the first of my fruits, He then redeems the remaining portion. In effect, when we tithe, we fulfill God's pledge found Malachi 3:10; in which He challenges us to "test" Him. Go ahead—test God and see if He is not faithful! There may never be another time in life where tithing will be such a complete test of our Lord's faithfulness.

Our Heavenly Father's economy is available for us to partake of; the currency is faith, let us exchange the former things we've clung to in this world for the blessings of God. Peace be with you!

Dr. Michael Mannia is founder of Kingdom Community Ministries. He holds a Masters in Theology and a Doctorate in Ministry; both with an emphasis in Christian Counseling. He can be reached at: 661.324.4070 or drm@kcmcounseling.com