

STRESS IN LIFE AND MINISTRY

The statistics don't lie:

- Stress now contributes to 90% of all diseases
- Half of all visits to doctors are stress-related
- "Anxiety reduction" is one of today's largest businesses
- More will die from stress-related illness than from infection or old age
- Those in ministry are especially susceptible to stress!

The Menninger Foundation reports five most common feelings:

- Overextension (too many commitments, few boundaries)
- Imprecise Competence (flying by the seat of my pants)
- Inadequate Resources (running on the leftovers)
- Groping for Relevant Faith (idealism vs. realism)
- Lack of Accomplishment (can't measure the intangible)

When you add these to "normal" stresses – look out!

It is not possible (without a frontal lobotomy) to live without stress.

Originally the term came from physics – the application of sufficient force to an object to distort it. So, stress is really a transaction that takes place between you and your environment. Outside factors interact with your belief system, your brain interprets what's happening and tells your body how to respond. The body gets put on "red alert," adrenalin flows, the "fight or flight" response kicks in.

Most of us are not subject to physical danger very often, but whenever you are "threatened" by an expectation you don't think you can meet, your body reacts in the same way.

Some stress is normal – and necessary! There is good stress ("eustress") and bad stress ("distress") in our lives, but prolonged or frequent stress of any type is detrimental. And medical experts are now saying that there is an "adrenalin addiction" that is similar to the state of physiological arousal derived from a dependency on alcohol or nicotine.

Psychologists tell us that some people are more likely to experience stress than others. These are the "Type A" people who tend to be more competitive, hurried, controlling and quick to anger. On the other hand, there are "Type B" people who are more calm, unhurried, easy-going and laid back. Type A's are 70% more likely to suffer heart disease – and probably 100% more likely to suffer stress.

One problem is that Type A's are most frequently placed in leadership roles, including ministry. (What would an employer rather hear? "I have trouble pacing myself" or "I have trouble motivating myself"?)

Another problem is that when Type A's don't get what they want, they act more Type A! A final problem is that everyone eventually develops Type A behavior as they interact in their relationships. (Nothing irritates a Type B quite like the pushiness of a Type A!)

It's like Martha and Mary in Luke 10 – a typical Type A and Type B. Martha invited Jesus into her home and then neglected Him as she worked for Him. Why was Martha hurrying? Because Mary wasn't! (Human beings haven't changed much in 2000 years.) No wonder Lazarus died prematurely! (By the way, in John 11 it was Martha that went out to meet Jesus while Mary was distracted by mourning.)

What's the number one stressor today? Relationships! Why? Because there's no such thing as a perfect one. Because you can't put them on a predictable schedule. Because you can't control what happens. Because they take inordinate amounts of time and effort. Because you can't always resolve things. Because when you compete with people you alienate them. Because your own personality traits cause most of the tension you feel in relating to others.

More accurately, it is our EXPECTATIONS in relationships that cause stress – because we expect others to think, act and react just like us! **NO ONE STRESSES ABOUT ANYTHING THEY DO NOT CARE ABOUT!** Some people care too little; others care too much. We need BALANCE! How do you determine an appropriate balance in ministry, where eternal issues hang in the balance every day? That is the million dollar question! And we do CARE about it! Before we attempt to answer it, let's further clarify the word "stress" by looking at the real culprit:

STRESS

- Normal and necessary
- Physical depletion
- "Post-adrenaline depression"
- Not a spiritual attack!

BURNOUT

- Result of mismanaged stress
- Emotional exhaustion ("compassion fatigue")
- Like stress, leads to feelings of (deeper) depression – reaction not usually to "collapse" but to "go numb"
- "Imbalanced living" provides a foothold for the devil!

Dr. Richard Swenson defines "MARGIN" as "the amount allowed beyond that which is needed" or "the space that exists between ourselves and our limits." If overload is the disease of the new millennium, margin is the cure. No margin for an extended period of time is called burnout.

POWER – LOAD = MARGIN

YOU CAN'T OBEY ANY OF THE FOLLOWING COMMANDS IF THERE IS NO "WHITE SPACE" IN YOUR LIFE!

Matthew 5:41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

Galatians 6:2 Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:10 As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

1 Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: [5] And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. [6] And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: [7] And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.

Isaiah 40:31 But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

Humanly speaking, there are two things drastically wrong with this verse. The first is that God expects us to be renewed (not frustrated) while we wait. That's how God's upside-down economy works. The second problem is the sequence of Isaiah's threefold promise to those who wait. Quite frankly, he's got it backwards! According to the rules of Hebrew poetry, the sequence of ideas should progress from the lesser to the greater. So we would expect the promises here to be reversed: walk and not faint, run and not be weary, mount up with wings as eagles. That sequence is far more dramatic and inspiring. Any of us can walk – that's commonplace! But God sees it otherwise. We may want wings, but what we really need is to walk without falling down ... to live for God consistently and faithfully ... to simply not faint.

Philippians 4:5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. **[WHY?]**
The Lord is at hand. **[HE IS WITH US ... AND HE IS COMING!]**