

Jesus Wept: The Bible and Human Emotions

Stress

Lesson #3 for January 15, 2011

Scriptures: 1 Kings 17:2-4,15,16; 19:1,2; Mark 6:31-34; Galatians 6:2; John 15:13.

1. Stress is certainly one of the hallmarks of our generation. Some forms of relatively mild to moderate stress are healthy. Some stress pushes us to do bigger and better things in life. A psychologist friend once said, "Without stress we would all be insufferable blobs."
2. In all of Scripture, who would you think suffered the most stress? To my mind, it would have to be Jesus: first during the temptations in the wilderness; then, even to a greater extent, in Gethsemane and on Calvary. Jesus may have had stress, but stress did not have Jesus! How did Jesus deal with that stress?

In those dreadful hours He had relied upon the evidence of His Father's acceptance heretofore given Him. He was acquainted with the character of His Father; He understood His justice, His mercy, and His great love. By faith He rested in Him whom it had ever been His joy to obey. And as in submission He committed Himself to God, the sense of the loss of His Father's favor was withdrawn. By faith, Christ was victor. (DA 756.3)

Is that the best possible way to deal with stress? Does stress imply a final breaking point?

3. Other Bible characters that I would consider to have undergone a great deal of stress would be Abraham when asked to offer up Isaac; Noah and his family during the flood; and what about Daniel, Ezekiel, and especially Jeremiah while Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonians as some in Jerusalem were eating their children! Jeremiah described his stress in Jeremiah 4:19. Does it stress God when His children turn away from Him?
4. But, the person chosen to illustrate the subject of stress for our lesson today was Elijah. Fairly recently in our previous series of lessons, we talked about the story of Elijah as we considered the widow of Zarephath.
5. Review the life of Elijah as we know it from Scripture. He probably grew up in a family of farmers or shepherds (or both) in a small village called Tishbe, east of the Jordan River in the hills of Gilead. Apparently, he had a special relationship with God because God suddenly called upon him to deliver a message to King Ahab in Samaria. He went straight to the king's palace, walked in, and announced that there would be no rain until he said so; and then he walked out, disappearing into thin air. He returned east of the Jordan River and stayed for a period of time beside the brook Cherith, being fed by ravens. When the brook dried up, he was told to go to Zarephath—a village between Tyre and Sidon on the Phoenician coast—to the home of a widow who lived with her son. The three of them survived for at least two years—each day using almost the last little bit of flour and oil in the woman's supplies. After 3½ years (Luke 4:25; James 5:17) of drought, Elijah was instructed to go back to Ahab. He laid down a challenge for Ahab to call all of the children of Israel to the top of Mount Carmel.
6. There, he faced 850 prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth in a showdown between two "gods." Despite their maximum efforts, the forces of Baal and Ashtoreth could do nothing. Did they have any idea what would happen when they climbed that mountain? Then, after pouring water over his altar, over the wood, and over the sacrifice, Elijah called on Jehovah. Lightning from heaven struck, burning up the offering, the wood, the stones of the altar, and the water in the canal around it, leaving a black hole in the ground. What did the children of Israel think after

seeing that? Then, Elijah supervised the killing of—or perhaps himself killed—the 850 prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth.

7. Next, he went to the top of the mountain and told his servant to go out and keep an eye on the ocean while Elijah began to pray for rain. After praying seven times, a small cloud appeared. Without hesitating, exercised his faith, Elijah told Ahab to get in his chariot and head back to Jezreel. The rain was so thick and the clouds so dark that Elijah had to guide the chariot by hand almost the distance of a marathon until they reached Jezreel.

At the gate of Jezreel, Elijah and Ahab separate. The prophet, choosing to remain outside the walls, wrapped himself in his mantle, and lay down upon the bare earth to sleep. The king, passing within, soon reached the shelter of his palace and their related to his wife the wonderful events of the day and the marvelous revelation of divine power that had proved to Israel that Jehovah is the true God and Elijah His chosen messenger. (*Prophets and Kings* 159.1)

That night a messenger aroused the weary prophet and delivered to him the word of Jezebel: "So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time." {PK 159.2}

8. Hearing the threat of Jezebel, Elijah panicked and began to run. Why was Elijah so afraid of Queen Jezebel? Apparently, his servant ran with him. What should Elijah have done? When they reached Beer-sheba on the southern border of the land of Israel, he left his servant behind; and he himself proceeded into the wilderness. Lying down to sleep under a tree and being refreshed by bread and water supplied by the Lord, Elijah slept again and then walked for 40 days on the strength of God's nutrition all the way to Mount Sinai. (1 Kings 19:8; *Prophets and Kings* 166.2) Why did it take Elijah so long to reach Mount Sinai?
9. At Mount Sinai Elijah went into a cave to spend the night. Suddenly, the Lord asked him, "Elijah, what are you doing here?" Elijah was certain he was the only one left serving God. So, God told him to go out and stand on the mountain. There was a fierce wind, a terrible earthquake, even a fire; but God was not in any of them. Then God spoke to Elijah in "a soft whisper of a voice." Once again He asked, "Elijah, what are you doing here?" And then God gave him instructions to go back to work. So many people think God is at work when they see miracles and spectacular events—even destructive events. Insurance contracts often have clauses about "acts of God." But our God prefers to speak in quiet tones to an attentive, respectful listener. And He speaks to us as "friends." In our day, God speaks through His Word in the Bible.
10. When Ahab took his 850 prophets to the top of Mount Carmel, what do you think he expected to happen? Surely, he must have known about *Yahweh* and *Yahweh's* power. The story of Elijah reminds us that emotional highs are often followed by emotional lows. Elijah had raised the widow's son back to life. He had seen incredible things happen in connection with the Mount Carmel experience. He had been fed morning and evening by ravens! Shouldn't that have been enough to convince him that God could care for him?
11. Read 1Kings 18:40. Clearly, Elijah needed help on Mount Carmel. Did he personally kill all 850 of the prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth? Or, did he just supervise? Why didn't Ahab offer Elijah a place to get out of the rain and get some sleep? Did Elijah decide by himself to stay outside the city because he did not want to get too close to Jezebel?
12. A time is coming when we will be faced with tremendous stress. The Devil himself will appear, claiming to be the Son of God. His mission will be to destroy all of God's people on planet

Earth. Ellen White said:

I saw that our bread and water will be sure at that time, and that we shall not lack or suffer hunger; for God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness. If necessary He would send ravens to feed us, as He did to feed Elijah.—*Early Writings*, p. 56.

13. Researchers Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe developed the social readjustment rating scale, which lists life events with corresponding stress values for each: the death of spouse—100; personal injury or illness—53; change in residence—20; etc. A person accumulating 200 or more points at any given time runs a 50 percent chance of becoming ill; someone accruing 300 or more will reach a point of crisis. Moderate amounts of stress are necessary to increase performance, but beyond a point, stress becomes a health hazard. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 29)
14. What methods should Christians use to help control their stress? What did Jesus do? He used lots of prayer. In order to face the challenges that He met every day, at times, Jesus would pray all night! (Luke 6:12) Even as a child, He would go out usually a great while before daylight into the fields to talk with His Father. (Mark 1:35)

The early morning often found Him in some secluded place, meditating, searching the Scriptures, or in prayer. From these quiet hours He would return to His home to take up His duties again, and to give an example of patient toil. (DA 89.6)
15. As we have already noted, Jesus found very little time to rest during His 3½ years of public ministry. Read Mark 6:31-34. After they had completed a tour throughout Galilee, Jesus tried to find a bit of quiet time with His disciples. But the Sea of Galilee is nothing more than a large lake. The people could see the boat carrying Jesus and His disciples cross the corner of the sea from Capernaum to near Bethsaida. They ran along the shore and arrived at His destination almost before He did. It was the time of the year when people gathered to prepare for the journey to Passover. (John 6) After preaching to some 20,000 people for most of the day, He fed them; then He sent His disciples away, and He sent the people away while He went into the mountains to pray with His Father. This was a habit for Jesus. No doubt, Jesus and His Father had this all planned in advance. Would that help relieve stress?
16. Fairly often, Jesus also found it necessary to travel to Jerusalem to confront the religious leaders there. While there, He often found refuge in the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Their home in Bethany was like a sanctuary. (Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:11) Why do you think Jesus felt so close to that family? (Luke 8:1-3. *Desire of Ages*, p. 524) This family owed a great deal to Jesus, and they were very thankful.
17. If Jesus was going to spend 33½ years here on this Earth as a human being, have you ever wondered why He did not actually minister for a longer period of time? In fact, His time of open public ministry recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke was primarily in Galilee and Perea and was limited to about one and one-half years.
18. Christians, following Christ's example, are to control their stress by serving others, resting appropriately, and taking time out to communicate with their Father.
19. Review the times in your own life when you were very stressed. Maybe as a student you were facing major exams. Or perhaps, having graduated you were looking for a job. Or, in a time of

economic downturn, your company went out of business. Did God take care of you? Did you go to Him for help? We are in a whole world of stress. Satan loves to stress people!

20. What general provisions has God made for us to deal with stress and maintain health as far as possible? Are you acquainted with the natural remedies? “Pure air, sunlight, abstemiousness, rest, exercise, proper diet, the use of water, trust in divine power—these are the true remedies.” (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 127) Sunshine produces Vitamin D in our skin. It is proving to be a huge benefit to our health. But very few people get enough of it. God used some of those remedies on Elijah in his time of deepest depression. Fortunately, that story was not the end of Elijah’s life. He lived to revive the schools of the prophets; to anoint a successor, Elisha; even to outlive Ahab; and ascend in a fiery chariot to heaven.
21. How many great Bible characters can you name who began their working lives herding sheep or for other reasons living a very simple rural life? David? Joseph? Moses (after age 40)? John the Baptist? Abraham? Amos? Contrast Solomon.
22. Do you think your faith would survive if you had to depend upon a direct act of God to provide your food every day? After a while, did the widow and her son and Elijah take God’s miracles for granted? Did any of the other people in the village ask for a handout?
23. Most of us have heard about the Peter Principle. When people are working in large institutions, there is a tendency for them to advance along corporate lines until they reach a level where they are incompetent. Is that a recipe for stress? In their younger days, Saul and David were faithful followers of God. God even gave Saul a new heart. But, elevation to kingship led to temptations and stresses that ultimately destroyed Saul. David had his problems as well.
24. For most of us, our biggest stress is worrying about ourselves. Could that stress be relieved by focusing more on serving others? That is what Jesus did. (Acts 10:38) So often, people here on this world believe that happiness comes from serving self—getting as much as they can during these short lives. But, real happiness comes from serving others. Paul clearly instructed church members to bear one another’s burdens. (Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:4)
25. Seventh-day Adventists have a secret weapon for dealing with stress. Dan Buettner scoured the world looking for “blue zones.” One of those blue zones—the only one in North America—was found in Loma Linda, California. And why do Adventists live up to 10 years longer?

Look at what they do on Saturday—they stop everything; they focus on their God; they cut the stress out of what they need to do; they all go to luncheons with really good friends, and then they’re off on the nature walk. And the payoff is six extra years of life for an Adventist female and nearly ten extra years for an Adventist male.—Josh Dean, “Dan Buettner’s Search for the Fountain of Youth,” *The Longevity Expedition, Adventure* (June/July 2009)
26. Do any of these Bible characters remind you of your own personal story? Have you had emotional highs and lows? Have you tried meeting stress as Jesus did? Some people have such extreme emotional highs and then such severe emotional lows that they are regarded as having a serious mental illness known as bipolar disorder. Take a good look at your health habits. Do you have an adequate balance of the seven natural remedies? What could you do to improve the stress-relieving characteristics that God recommends?

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