LESSON ONE

No Pain, No Gain

Family conflict, disagreements with friends, pressure on the job, health problems, and overdue bills—stress fills every corner of life. Though we may be able to reduce the amount we are facing, we can never completely eliminate stress from our lives. But where can we find help for dealing with the stress we face? The most reliable source is God. The Bible uses such words as trials, suffering, troubles, conflict, and pressure to describe stress. This lesson will help you understand the biblical perspective on stress. You will learn that God uses stress to strengthen your character and to demonstrate his power by helping you handle the pressure.

* * * STARTER

1. In what ways do people typically respond to stress?

2. What good results have you experienced from stress?
### Romans 5:3-5

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<th>KJV</th>
<th>NIV</th>
<th>NLT</th>
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<td>And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.</td>
<td>Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.</td>
<td>We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. And this expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.</td>
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Paul said that Christians can rejoice when experiencing difficulties. Believers can rejoice in suffering, not because they like pain or deny its tragedy, but because they know God is using life’s difficulties to build their character. The problems they run into will develop their perseverance—which in turn will strengthen their character, deepen their trust in God, and give them greater confidence about the future. We can thank God for the strength he provides to handle the stress that comes each day.

3. **How can pressure and suffering produce positive rather than negative results?**

4. **How can hope affect someone’s attitude toward stress?**
5. What keeps Christians from rejoicing when they are experiencing stressful circumstances?

6. How can the stress you are currently facing help you develop patience and endurance?

1 Peter 1:6-7

KJV

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

NIV

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

NLT

So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while. These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.
As gold is heated, impurities float to the top and can be skimmed off. Steel is tempered, or strengthened, by heating it in fire. Likewise, the stress that Christians experience from trials, struggles, and persecution refines and strengthens their faith, making them useful to God. Begin today to view the stress in your life as part of the refining process that is preparing you to meet Christ.

7. How have your past trials strengthened and refined your faith?

8. How can a stressed-out Christian bring glory to God?

9. What are a few of the pressures that you are facing right now at home, school, work, or church?

10. What can you do now to strengthen your faith so that you will be better prepared to face stress in the future?
Daniel 3:28-29

KJV
Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.

NIV
Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king’s command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way.”

NLT
Then Nebuchadnezzar said, “Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king’s command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I make this decree: If any people, whatever their race or nation or language, speak a word against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they will be torn limb from limb, and their houses will be crushed into heaps of rubble. There is no other god who can rescue like this!”

King Nebuchadnezzar had commanded everyone to bow down and worship the image of gold that he had set up, with the warning that whoever refused would be thrown into a blazing furnace. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego chose to stay true to their beliefs, regardless of the consequences. As a result, the king acknowledged the power of the one true God. Remember that the way you choose to handle stress serves as a testimony to others. Rely on God to help you stand strong so that others will be convinced of God’s power.

11. Under what circumstances are believers most vulnerable to life’s pressures?
12. How does the way you handle stress affect the people around you?

13. When have you been encouraged through the example of a Christian friend who handled stress well?

14. What changes could you make in the way you deal with stress so that others can see God working in you?

SUMMARY

No one likes to experience hardship and pain, but these three passages reveal that the stress God allows in life can be good for Christians and helpful to others. If Christians depend on Christ’s power during difficult times, their character will be strengthened. In fact, the faith of Christians is often proven genuine through suffering—not through an easy life. The manner in which Christians deal with stress also testifies to the power of Jesus Christ. The next time you feel overwhelmed by life’s problems, look for ways that God is bringing good out of the stress you face.

15. In what specific ways do you need to change your attitude toward the stress in your life?
16. What spiritual lesson can you learn from a difficulty you are currently facing?

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

Read Genesis 50:15-21.

God brought good out of all of Joseph’s misfortunes. The stressful experiences in his life taught him that God brings good from evil for those who trust him. You can trust him because, as Joseph learned, God can override people’s evil intentions to bring about his intended results.

17. What misfortunes has God used for good in your life?

18. What is a current difficult circumstance in your life? How do you suppose God could use it for good?

19. How can you show that you trust God to work all things together for good?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.

Many people think that when God comforts them, their troubles should go away. But if that were always so, people would turn to God only out of a desire to be relieved of pain and not out of love for him. Christians must understand that being comforted can also mean receiving strength, encouragement, and hope to deal with their troubles. The more they suffer, the more comfort God gives them. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the stress and pain in your life,
allow God to comfort you. Remember that every trial you endure will help you comfort other people who are going through similar experiences.

20. How has someone comforted you when you were stressed out or suffering?

21. What lessons have you learned from present difficulties?

22. Whom can you encourage with these lessons?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18.

Christians’ troubles should not diminish their faith or disillusion them. They should realize that there is a purpose for their suffering. Stress and problems have several benefits: (1) They remind us of Christ’s suffering for us; (2) they keep us from pride; (3) they prove our faith to others; and (4) they give God the opportunity to demonstrate his power.

23. How does focusing our attention on Christ help us to get through our suffering?

Read James 1:2-3.

James does not say if you face trials, but whenever you face them. He assumes that Christians will have trials and that it is possible to profit from them. The point is not to pretend to be happy when facing pain, but to have a positive outlook. In other words, do two things to handle stress in your life: Expect it, and try to learn from it.
24. What will be the demands of family, work, school, church, and other activities this week?

25. What is your usual reaction to these stresses?

26. How would responding joyfully make a difference in your life?

27. What can you do to prepare yourself to respond joyfully?