LESSON TWO

Stressed to Kill

If you suffer from headaches, backaches, allergies, or high blood pressure, stress could be a significant contributing factor. In fact, experts agree that most diseases are stress and lifestyle related. Beyond the physical effects, however, stress takes its toll on spiritual health. Christians must recognize the dangers of stress so they can take action before they succumb to its pressures. This lesson will help you to identify the negative effects of stress on your spiritual life and to know when to reduce the level of stress in your life.

##### STARTER

1. What negative side effects have you experienced from stress?

2. How do you know when you are under too much stress?
STUDY

Read the following three sets of Bible passages and application notes. Answer the questions for each set before moving on to the next.

Mark 14:33-34, 38

KJV

And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; and saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch. . . . Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

NIV

He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch. . . . Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak.”

NLT

He took Peter, James, and John with him, and he began to be filled with horror and deep distress. He told them, “My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and watch with me. . . . Keep alert and pray. Otherwise, temptation will overpower you. For though the spirit is willing enough, the body is weak.”

In times of great stress, a person is vulnerable to temptation, even if he or she wants to resist. Jesus’ disciples wanted to support him during this time of sorrow and pain, but they succumbed to temptation and missed the opportunity to help him in his hour of need. If you are under so much stress that you feel helpless to resist temptation, you may need to look for a way to eliminate or reduce some of the pressures in your life.

3. How do you usually respond when you feel distressed or troubled?

4. What are some steps Christians can take to prevent themselves from falling into temptation when they are under a lot of stress?
5. How can Christian friends help each other through difficult times?

6. If you feel vulnerable to temptation, how could you eliminate or reduce some of the pressures in your life?


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<th>KJV</th>
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<td>Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them. . . . And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required. And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will.</td>
<td>Pilate argued with them, because he wanted to release Jesus. . . . But the crowd shouted louder and louder for Jesus’ death, and their voices prevailed. So Pilate decided to grant their demand. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.</td>
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When the stakes are high and the pressure is on, it is difficult to stand up for what is right. Had Pilate been a man of real courage, he would have released Jesus no matter what the consequences. But the crowd roared, and Pilate buckled. Holding on to moral stan-
Taking the easy way out, as Pilate did, may relieve the stress but leave us with a burden of guilt to deal with later.

7. Why are most people so vulnerable to peer pressure?

8. What has helped you stand up for your faith despite negative pressure from others?

9. In what area of your life are you most in danger of compromising your beliefs or moral standards because of stress?

10. How can you better equip yourself to stand strong under this pressure?
Mark 4:14-17

KJV  
The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word’s sake, immediately they are offended.

NIV  
The farmer sows the word. Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

NLT  
The farmer I talked about is the one who brings God’s message to others. The seed that fell on the hard path represents those who hear the message, but then Satan comes at once and takes it away from them. The rocky soil represents those who hear the message and receive it with joy. But like young plants in such soil, their roots don’t go very deep. At first they get along fine, but they wilt as soon as they have problems or are persecuted because they believe the word.

In this parable, Jesus said that the pressures of life cause some people to abandon their faith in God. They fall away because they do not have roots. Some Christians experience such tremendous stress that they get distracted from their desire to obey Christ. Do not allow the problems in your life to overwhelm you. Let your problems push you toward Christ, rather than away. Then the roots of your faith will grow stronger and deeper.

11. What trials or difficulties cause some believers to fall away?

12. When have you felt overwhelmed by your problems?
13. What pressures do you face now that could weaken your Christian commitment?

14. How can you make sure that stress does not choke out the life of your Christian walk?

SUMMARY

You have learned from these three passages that stress can make Christians vulnerable to temptation, weaken their resolve to stand against peer pressure, and even push them to compromise their faith. To protect yourself, you must acknowledge the power of stress and be willing to take steps to reduce it when it threatens your spiritual health.

15. What steps can you take this week to reduce or better manage the stress in your life?

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

Read Matthew 14:6-10.

Herod did not want to kill John the Baptist, but he gave the order so that he would not be embarrassed in front of his guests. How easy it is to give in to the crowd and to be pressured into doing wrong! Peer pressure often tempts Christians to compromise their faith. Determine to do what is right, no matter how much pressure you face.
16. When are you likely to promise more than you will want to pay?

17. In what circumstances do you feel the most pressure to please the crowd?


Relationships that cause us to fall bring only additional stress to everyday life. But this stress is unnecessary and even avoidable. By choosing our friends carefully, we can eliminate the stress caused by hanging around with the wrong crowd. And God has provided us with the wisdom we need to choose friends carefully and limit the stress in our lives. This wisdom is found in Proverbs. If you heed it, you will not add to—and you may even decrease—the amount of stress already in your life.

18. Which friendships are the most stressful for you to maintain?

19. How can you keep the friendship but reduce the stress?

20. How can you bring more peace than stress to your friendships?
Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

Stress can cause people to reshuffle priorities. The pressure of a deadline can loom over every other activity. The temptation can be to skip church, ignore friends, or neglect family. Make sure you stay involved with other believers when the pressure is on.

21. What is a way you can encourage someone to remain faithful to God, family, and friends even through their difficult times?

22. What is the most encouraging thing someone can do for you when you are under a great deal of stress?