

# Stress- A Self Inflicted Hell

By Jason Lightfoot

Stress is something everyone knows, talks, and thinks about almost constantly. Self help books provide strategies for stress management, doctors prescribe relaxers and depressants because nearly every medical condition is somehow affected by or caused by stress, and in society everyone discusses how busy and stressful their schedules are. Everyone agrees that stress is a problem, but the solution may be simpler than you realized.

At its core, stress is simply pressure: pressure put on you from either the outside world or from yourself. As stressors in our lives build up, we become more and more burdened by these pressures until we feel unable to function and hold up the weight that has been placed on our shoulders. I used to be crippled by this weight until I took a step back and looked at my situation objectively (as objectively as possible. Obviously true objectivity is impossible). I realized that all this pressure was self-inflicted! Let me explain:

Some of the pressure came from the outside world, in that I assumed that if I did not meet my perceptions of others' expectations (often others' expectations are not as stringent as we perceive them to be) I would suffer some consequence. The people I was attempting to appease would not like me, be proud of me, or respect me. Sometimes the stress came from the outside but not from a specific person. In school, I assumed that if I did not get perfect grades, I would not get into the college I wanted, study in my desired field, or get a degree, and as a result, would spend the rest of my life working at McDonalds.

On the other hand, much pressure came internally. I had to prove to myself that I was capable, competent, smart, good, etc. Honestly, this is where the worst part of my stress originated.

After looking at my situation honestly, I realized that my stress was almost entirely a result of my pride. That hurts a lot to say, but it's true. I was so enraptured by my pride that I was unable to believe in God's ability to "work all things for good". If I didn't do good enough then whatever my life ended up being would not meet my standards of what it should be. It was only when I let go of those impossible standards that I was set free from my panic and anxiety.

There's one catch to this solution. One hundred percent of it requires divine intervention. Without Jesus to come rescue me, I am without hope of rescue from these chains of pride. I began to search scripture for God's plan for my life. I looked at Matthew 6 where Jesus says "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink for the pagans run after all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well." I came to realize that even if I end up working at McDonalds, I will be ok. God needs people to represent him at McDonalds too. If I truly dedicate my life totally to God and His mission, then I have nothing to fear because I am guaranteed that He will accomplish his goals. I just have to set aside my pride and be ok with His plan being different from mine.

Now, an important caveat: this freedom from stress is not permission to sit around on the couch all day and eat bonbons because somehow God will magically continue to provide a couch and bonbons. Working for God is exactly that. Work! But it is a fulfilling work, because you know that wherever you end up, you are being used for an eternal purpose. So, in my life, I simply continued to do my best in school without worrying about the outcomes of my efforts. If I am putting my best effort in, I can rest knowing that God will take those efforts and multiply them in the ways he desires. If I am genuinely trying my hardest in my classes, and I am still not doing well, then maybe God is pushing me in a different direction

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life...Look at the birds of the air, they don’t sow or reap or store away in barns, yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?... So do not worry, for the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

• Philippians 4:6 (A classic, but clichés are cliché for a reason)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. When I feel overwhelmed by the amount of information I must learn, I simply slow down and remind myself that I will do my best, and that is all I can do. God will do the rest, and He will put me exactly where he wants me.

That is my solution to stress in story form, but here is a step by step process to handle one source of stress at a time:

1. Pray for guidance in determining the real source of your momentary stress.

Often our circumstances blind us to the real source of stress. What triggered a panic or anxiety attack may have only been the straw that broke the camel’s back.

\*\*\*If you are not sure whether you have chosen the exact source of the stress, that’s ok! Just pick something that you feel is weighing on you and follow through with the rest of the steps. If you need to repeat the process with another stressor you absolutely can!

2. Once you have picked your stressor, follow your anxiety’s train of thought through to its end. Example: I’m stressed out because I have exam week coming up, so I think “I’m stressed because I’m scared I won’t do well on my exams. Why am I scared of failing my exams? Because I will receive bad final grades. Why am I scared of bad final grades? Because I will lower my GPA. Why am I scared of lowering my GPA? Because I won’t get the job I want.”

In this example, I have determined the root of my fear to be “I won’t get the job I want?”

3. Look at the root of your fear and ask, “What would God tell me about this fear?”

Go for specifics here. Obviously, the Bible tells us not to fear, but what about your specific fear?

In my example God would probably say, “I literally have a plan already made for your life. If that specific job is part of my plan, I’m perfectly capable of placing you in that position with or without your help. Why do you doubt me, oh you of little faith?”

4. Say a prayer asking for God’s help in giving you a new mind.

Here is an example prayer:

God, I ask you now to come into my mind and heart and free me from the anxiety and fear that are invading. I ask for a spirit of humility: that you will break any possessive ties to the way I think my life should be. My fear of \_\_\_\_\_ [*insert your root issue*] is preventing me from living in the fullness of your promise. Help me to hand over my expectations of my life and to believe that you are powerful and faithful enough to bring about your plans for me. I pray that you will be the only definer of who I am: that no friends, superiors, or internal voice will have any power in assigning my value. I pray for peace over my situation, since there is no situation too big for you to handle. I ask for motivation and work ethic to do my best in this situation and for peace knowing that the rest is out of my control. Help me to be ok with not being in control. I ask these things in the name of your Son, Jesus.

Helpful Scriptures:

- All of Psalm 25, but here are some highlights:

“In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in you, do not let me be put to shame... Show me your ways, Lord. Teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior and my hope is in you all day long.”

- Matthew 6:25-34 (highlights below):

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life... Look at the birds of the air, they don’t sow or reap or store away in barns, yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?... So do not worry, for the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

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