

Stress in Your Body, Peace in Your Soul

By Bobby Schuller

Do you ever feel stressed? A lot of times when we try to paint a picture of what it's like to feel stressed, you picture getting up in the morning. You get ready and you're running late for work. You get in the car and you bring your coffee with you, then you hit a bump and spill the coffee on you, but you have a presentation today! You're running late, you deliver your presentation, and it doesn't go well. You get a call that your kid is sick. Now, you have to get back to the school and pick him up. You're stuck in traffic. You get home and you get in an argument with your spouse, or you trip on your way in, or you find that bill that you forgot to pay. Every day, we have the opportunity to feel super stressed out. And very often, maybe, you feel that way. Maybe you had a day like that this week.

Today, we're going to talk about stress and what it does to us. I just want to argue, today, that stress isn't as bad as you think it is. Stress is actually good for you. Give me a minute, all right? One of the biggest myths of today is that stress is bad for you, and it's not.

There are other times that are stressful, as well. When you have to step in to that job interview. When you start your new career. When you have to get in front of a group of people and talk. When you have to,

maybe, break up with somebody that you care about but you know isn't right for you. When you have to make a major change in your life. When you have to take a risk. These are also times in your life that are stressful. So, we experience stress in life in many different ways, and they have different affects on us depending on how long we carry the stress, and where we put that stress.

I was telling my small group something recently. And, I love my small group. If you're not in one, join one. Anyway, I was telling this group that lately I sometimes feel like that joint in the middle of that thing that carries the toys above a crib. Believe it or not, I had to look it up. It's called a mobile. And, sometimes I feel like I am this joint on this mobile. We have all the employees of the church, all the bills the church has to pay, you have all the needs of people within the church, many of them very serious needs. There are people that are dying. There are people that just got kicked out of their house. There are people that are going through divorce. So, you carry that pastorally, but also your personal family life, and your friendships, and your own bills, and your own parenting. And sometimes it feels, I was telling this group, that I'm like this joint in the middle of all these things that are just relaxing and having fun while I'm responsible for everyone.

I thought how you sometimes feel like, “If I disappear, if something happened to me, what would happen to all of these revolving pieces?” And I began to pray into that and realized that a big part of being a Christian is not being that joint; that, although you have responsibilities, and although you matter, Christ is the joint. Christ is that. He’s the thing that’s holding it together, and if something happens to you, it will be okay. He’ll take care of you, and he’ll take care of the people that you’re responsible for.

Today, we’re going to talk about stress and the first thing I want to argue is that, although stress can be toxic, it can make you sick, it can do terrible things to you, stress, for the believer, can be a wonderful and a good thing. Stress for anybody can be a good thing because for you, stress triggers growth. All of us have different amounts of stress we can handle, but you can’t have responsibility without having stress. And many of us, in the attempt to rid ourselves of stress, rid ourselves of responsibility and we become bored and depressed. Not you. Not you. You see that the stress that you’re feeling in life, very often, God is going to use as a trigger for your growth to help get you to your next calling. The next calling that you have is always going to be heavier, weightier, and harder than your present calling, but it’s also going to be more meaningful. And unless you’re stronger, tougher, and more resilient,

you're not going to have the spiritual muscles to hold the weight of the next thing God has for you.

And so sometimes, the present stress that you're feeling in life, although it feels like failure and loss, very often it is God making your spiritual muscles and mental muscles stronger so that you are trained, triggered, and ready for your next calling. Do you receive that? Do you want that? Begin to look at the stress in your life in a positive light. That much of the stress I cannot control very often will make me stronger, as long as I have the right tools to deal with the stress, which is one, not carrying it so long, being able to put it down, and two, not internalizing it. Hold it on the outside.

Now, if Robert Laird is in the back listening to me, Robert, I have a cup that is half full, not half empty, of water. And I'm wondering if you can bring it on stage. Oh, here he is with the bow tie. Everyone, this is Robert Laird, aka Mr. Daps. Thank you Dr. Laird. This is an IKEA glass filled with water. Thank you very much, Robert. We appreciate you. This is a glass half-full, the other half was delicious, full of Garden Grove's finest water. We'll get there in a minute.

The scripture from today is a famous passage from 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 7. Paul, the author of this letter to a church in a city

called Corinth, is writing to Christians who are being persecuted, who are not being able to be involved in trade deals in an economic city because they're Christians. They're enduring all sorts of hardships. And he gives this analogy that is actually rooted in the old Jewish testament. He says that we have this treasure in jars of clay, clay jars. The clay jar is a Jewish symbol for the human body because in the Jewish creation story, which we endorse as Christians, God formed out of the dirt like clay the bodies of human beings and breathed his life into these clay figures, making them human beings. That's the visual you get. Something like that happened. That out of the dirt, out of the dust, God created these people.

Isaiah refers to God as the potter. That he's the potter's hands, our lives are like clay, and God is forming us into us the persons he's called us to be. And like clay pots, he's put inside of us, in a place that's invisible to everyone else, an incredible treasure. God has formed in you a clay pot, a vessel that is holding immense treasure that most people can't see.

In Paul's day, pottery is an everyday thing. It's as if you're saying that in these bits of Tupperware, God has put gold, hard cash. You know, it is an everyday thing. If you go to an archeological site, you'll see bits of ancient pottery two thousand, three thousand years old. Nobody

cares because it's everywhere. It's the trash; it's the leftover plastic of civilization. And Paul uses that for a reason. He says that although the world can't see on the outside of your life who you are, God sees the treasure that he's placed inside of you. And what is that treasure? The knowledge and the power and glory of Jesus Christ. That it's in your body. This immense power to change the world is in you, an earthen vessel and people can't see it. It's invisible.

And so he says four things. He says we're pressed. You ever feel pressed? You feel pressure right now? You have to pay the bills, you have to do this, you have to do that, you have to deliver. You feel pressure on your life. You ever feel pressed? God is going to use that pressure to make you stronger to draw out the inner treasure in your life.

Paul had a reason to feel pressed. He was responsible for all these churches in Asia Minor, many of which were being persecuted. He had people who were everyday happy Romans that are now Christians that are being killed because of his gospel. You feel pressure there? He has to raise money for orphanages; he has to raise money to help these churches that are in need. They're fighting. The Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians aren't getting along. And he's responsible to keep the order. You think he feels pressure? You think he feels stressed? He says I'm pressed, you're pressed, but not crushed. Hey, if you feel stressed

today, I want you to know that you may be pressed, but you're not going to crack. You're not going to break. That treasure on the inside of you is going to keep you galvanized and strong, and it's going to make you stronger. You're getting stronger even through the storm.

He says we're pressed but not crushed. He says we're perplexed, but not in despair. Perplexed means totally baffled, confused, like what the heck is going on? Here is Paul serving God and very often he's just following the spirit and he goes like towards India. Nope, don't go there. He starts going south. Nope, don't go there. And he's just wandering around trying to figure out what in the heck God wants him to do and he's not getting an answer. You ever feel that way? You ever pray for something, yet you're wondering where God is? He says we're perplexed, we're confused, we don't always know what's going on. We're walking through the fog but we feel a hand holding us and guiding us. And we don't know where this hand is taking us, but we're not in despair because we got it.

You might be perplexed today. You feel confused? Kind of wonder where's God? Why isn't God answering my prayer? Why aren't things going the way I want them to go? You may be perplexed but you're not in despair. Keep hope alive because the only one that can throw away your tomorrow is you. Don't throw it away. It's going to be great.

So Paul says I'm pressed, I'm confused. He says I'm persecuted. Man, Paul had people lying about him all the time. The name Paul means short. He was probably a little guy. When you read the text, he's probably a touch socially awkward. He doesn't seem to have a lot of friends. He seems to get in arguments a lot. People gossip about him. There's this whole group called the super apostles that say our gospel is better than his. Do you ever feel that way? Ever feel outside the circle? Ever feel like as a Christian it's your job. People don't like you. You ever feel like you have to hide who you are to do well at your work or in your social circles. You feel persecuted? Maybe you're going through a lawsuit right now. If you've never been sued, it's a terrible, terrible experience. I've watched people in the church who have been sued, and it's this terrible burden. And it feels like you're being chased, persecuted. There's no way you feel like you can get out of this, other than spending tons of money on lawyers. If that's you, God's going to give you the victory. He's going to carry you through this.

You may be pressed, you may be perplexed, you may be persecuted, and you may be struck down, but you will not be destroyed. And Paul knew. The guy was shipwrecked. In Lystra, Paul was stoned to death and they thought he was dead, but little Paul was like all right, time to preach the gospel again. He got up and kept going!

You may be struck down. You may just have experienced the biggest failure or loss in your life. Your life is not over. It's not over. Great things are ahead for you. Have faith. Endure. This stress, the storms of life make believers stronger because of the treasure we hold within. You say I don't have that treasure, Bobby. You do have the treasure. You've been saved and you've been filled with the spirit of God. If even one percent of you trusts in Jesus Christ, just a mustard seed, that's all you need to get the victory. God's bringing you through. We love you and God loves you. You're going to get through this. So you are getting stronger every day, even though you feel weaker. You know when you go to the gym and when you work out, you feel weak when you're done. You don't feel stronger. You may feel weak right now, but you're getting stronger. That's what's happening in your life right now. That's from the Lord.

And so Paul says to this church, he says we experience the death of Christ that is the pressure, the persecution, the confusion. We experience these deaths that Jesus experienced. Why? So that we can also experience his life and power. You can't have one without the other. And that is so important to hear. That when you're pressed, when you're struck down, when you're perplexed, when you're persecuted that brings out the treasure that's within you.

The stresses that we feel in life that we're not in control of, if we give them to God, and we handle them the right way, they're going to make us stronger, they're going to make you smarter, they're going to make you more caring, they're going to give you a deeper sense of meaning in life. Stress is good for you, as long as you don't internalize it and as long as you don't carry it too long.

This has been proved, by the way, in psychology, and I'm not a psychologist, but this is a big myth that stress is bad for you. The definition of stress is pressure from your environment. Do you ever feel pressure from your environment? You ever feel pressure? Yes, all of us do. Harvard Business Review was talking about this stress and that if you have the right tools, stress can actually be good for you. And you know what the number one most important thing people can do to handle stress right? It's to actually have a positive view of stress. And here's what Harvard Business Review said: "Stress gives you greater mental toughness, it gives you deeper relationships, it gives you a heightened sense of awareness, new perspectives, a sense of meaning and mastery in life, an appreciation for life, and strength of priorities." In other words, there are some people who are not stressed enough. There are some people that need more stress, that need more responsibility in their lives in order to grow to their next stage. Stress, when it's right, grows us. It makes us mature.

Abraham Twerski who was a great rabbi and a psychologist talked about how stress works a bit like the life of a lobster. It's true. A lobster grows in a unique way. He said he was sitting in a doctor's office and there was a magazine that said, "How do lobsters grow?" And he thought, "I don't care how lobsters grow" but then he got bored and he decided to read. And he read that lobsters are really squishy, delicious animals. Everyone wants to eat lobsters. It's not just humans. All those big animals in the sea want to eat them, too. And so they have this hard shell on the outside that protects them. And what happens is as a lobster grows, that rigid hard shell doesn't grow with it. Eventually the pressure and stress of that shell begins to confine the lobster and it has to go under a rock and take off that shell and grow a new shell so it can live its new life as a bigger, stronger lobster.

Now many of us, when we feel that pressure, we think I have to get rid of this pressure right now. And sometimes that's good. But sometimes it's not. And sometimes we can't get away from the pressure and stress we're feeling. You just simply can't. And sometimes in your life that is God calling you to move on to the next calling and a new shell.

I think of that rock as the inner life of God. I think that that's our prayer life. I think that when we are feeling these stresses of life,

sometimes we need to go into the dark, hidden places of our soul, pray, and give our burden to the Lord so he can give us a new shell. Maybe for some of you watching today, you need to let go of this current shell and take on a bigger one. Maybe you're strong enough to endure a bigger shell.

For the lobster, the stimulus for growth is that the lobster feels uncomfortable. Some of us are too comfortable. I think of my own life, about how good marriage was for me as a dumb bachelor. Not only did I get to marry a wonderful woman, but in that process, I realized I couldn't be both a married guy and a bachelor guy. Late at night I'm like, "Bye, Hannah. I'm going out with the guys." She's like, "Excuse me?" There is a certain responsibility that comes with being married, and a responsibility that comes with having children, *especially* having children. Man, those first six months, you don't sleep.

But I can tell you that, not only is a great marriage and a great family worth the stresses and sacrifices of being married and having children, it also makes you grow up. No doubt about it, marriage for some people is a rite of passage, especially for men. And although not everybody's called to be married, for sure, the experiences we go through in life, like marriage, like having kids, like new jobs, they're stressful, but they build us up and they make us stronger. I know. Being a dad and

being a husband makes me a better pastor. I know it, even though it gives me stress. Oh, I thought that was applause from Hannah. But you can clap, Hannah, you can. You certainly can.

Another thing is public speaking; it was a challenge for me at first. I think I had somewhat of a natural gift for public speaking, but I have to tell you, it was a burden on me the first several years as a pastor. The first year as a pastor, when I got up to speak in front of people, and we're talking in front of like twenty or thirty people, I had to fiddle with stuff just to wait for my heart to drop and relax so that I wouldn't be like (BREATHING HEAVY) today (BREATHING HEAVY). Like your heart just pounds. And now after almost fifteen years of public speaking, it's like a piece of cake. I can speak in front of thousands of people and it's no problem and I love doing it, and it's not a burden. Writing sermons are a joy for me. But it didn't come easy.

I even think about how some of the failures in my life were God preparing me for television ministry. When I was in college, I was asked to host this show out of Canada at the world's fair in Germany, and I was supposed to be on camera. I don't know why they picked me. I had no experience in television. I was 19 years old. It was probably because it was free. They didn't pay me anything. And I would get in front of the camera and I would talk about some concert or I'd interview some

famous person, and I was terrible. I would get in front of that camera and I'd be like, "Today we're going to talk...sorry, I messed up. Take two. Today we're going to talk...about...we're going to talk. Sorry, take three." And I would do this over and over, and you could see the camera operators, they would be taking breaks because I was doing so poorly. Cameras do something to your personality. There's no televangelism course in seminary, like televangelism 101. They don't prepare you for cameras and lights. And I didn't do very well. Honestly, it got me ready.

And then I went from there, and then there was this television program I did with The Learning Channel and, man, that was so awesome. It was this program where they asked people to come together from various religions and debate in speeches how their worldview answers ultimate issues in our world. And I thought this was going to be an amazing program. And I was a judge, and I was on TV every day. Guess how successful this show, "The Messengers," was? Have you ever heard of it? I know. I had such high hopes for the show. I was like, man, this is going to be a great show, and it was a colossal failure. I thought, man, all that hard work and all that effort, and it went nowhere. But guess what? God was preparing me in both of those things for this. Now being in front of a camera is easy for me. But I had to endure the stress and failure of those other two experiences, both of which I had huge

expectations for. Both of which were utter failures. Both of which prepared me to do what I'm doing today.

The things God has you doing today, even if they're a failure, even if you feel lots of stress, he's building you up for your next calling. He's building you up. You can't see it whenever you're in it. There's no way you can see it. It's always in hindsight. But he's building it up inside of you. So stress is good for you as long as you don't carry it too long, and as long as you don't internalize it. When you feel stressed, hold it on the outside.

Our family has thing we learned where every night we ask, "What was your high and what was your low today?" That has been such an important rhythm for us to simply talk about what is stressing us out, what we're worried about, what we're frustrated about. And then we all hug each other.

Rest is a scriptural mandate. Rest is a scriptural mandate and that is because being a Christian is stressful. Look – in the stress and work that God gives to you, and the glory and joy and meaning that comes with it, there is always also mandated a season of rest for every person. And it's in that season of rest that God causes us to relax and put everything in perspective. No matter how stressful your life is, and how

much stronger it's making you, it's going to injure you and harm you if you do it too long. You need breaks. Jesus took naps. Napping is a good thing. You heard it from Pastor Bobby. God wants you to nap sometimes. God wants you to go on vacation sometimes. God wants you to dial back sometimes so that you can endure more for your calling.

So there was a website called newsnerd.com that posted a story about a psychologist who held up a glass of water. And everybody thought she was going to ask the classic, "Is the cup half full or half empty?" But she didn't ask that question. She asked, "How heavy is this glass of water?" And people guessed. Some people said somewhere between a hundred and five hundred grams. And she said, "You know what? The weight of this cup isn't really the point, but how long you hold it is." How hard is it to hold this cup of water for two minutes? Not very hard. After two minutes, it's no big deal. But then if you hold this cup for more than two minutes, say you hold it for an hour, and your arm is going to start to cramp up. And as you keep holding it, if you hold this thing for a whole day, even though it's so light, your arm is going to feel numb, or paralyzed, or feel like it's going to fall off.

That's what stress is like for many of us. Just as weight and pressure makes your body stronger, you can't do it all the time. We have to go into our rock like a lobster and take a lobster break. We have to put

the glass down. Amen. Put the cup down. Don't overload your life. Many of us are saying yes even though we don't have a yes to give. God did not overwhelm your life. Much of the stress that we feel in life we didn't choose. But much of it we choose every day and simply don't need to. Don't overload your life.

And finally, pay attention to what Harvard calls second-hand stress. You've heard of second-hand smoke, haven't you? Did you know just in the same way that you can like get stuff from second-hand smoke, can you get stuff from second-hand stress? Twenty-six percent of people who saw pictures of people who are stressed out, themselves felt stressed and had increased levels of cortisol, the stuff that makes you feel stressed. Forty percent of people who see their spouse stressed out, themselves feel stressed. So there are people in your life that make you feel stressed. You might want to talk to them about that. Maybe you're that guy. The people in your life feel more stressed because you're always stressed out.

Even worse, did you know that when you're stressed, you leave a stress smell? That's true! When you feel stressed, there's a stress hormone, according to Harvard, that goes into the air, that even after you leave, people like feel stressed cause they smell this stress smell. It's called B.O. Just kidding, I don't know.

But in truth, the other thing is that in the same way that people can catch like a yawn, like I'm just going to do this. (YAWNING.) How many of you are like really fighting a yawn right now. The jaw lock? In the same way that people catch a yawn, people catch your smile. In the same way that stressed people, when you come in and you're relaxed, people catch that sense of relaxation and joy. That's why Jesus calls you a light of the world.

So friends, whatever's stressing you out, let it make you stronger. You'll endure. Don't hold it, don't internalize it, don't carry it too long. You're not alone. You're not abandoned. God is walking with you as you carry these burdens. But be at peace with the fact that God is going to use these things to make you stronger. Your best days are ahead. Don't give up, don't worry, God is preparing you for your next calling, and it's good. If you believe it, say amen.

Let's pray: Thank you, Lord, that we're allowed to take a mental and physical break from all of the stresses of life. But I also pray, Lord, that we would recognize that responsibility and stress are not altogether bad things. Let it build our souls, and build our spirits, and I pray, God, that you'd give us the hope to trust that every day we're getting stronger.

God says to you, you are getting stronger. And so, Lord, we thank you, in
Jesus' name. Amen.