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January 2009 JBS

CHRISTIAN STRATEGIES OF COPING WITH STRESS

Introduction: One of the most common emotions, experienced by all, is stress. Especially in Western society, where we are caught between a competitive job market and a demanding educational system, not to mention countless other positions and responsibilities which we are expected to juggle simultaneously; stress can be a great danger if it is not appropriately copped with. There are many ways which we can copy with stress, ways which will help us and ways which will hurt us, ways which are supported by our Christian faith and ways which will ultimately take us farther away from God.

Our task today, is to discuss what stress is. What are the benefits of stress and what are the dangers of stress? And specifically, why should we be concerned with the topic of stress in a Bible study session? What are some common ways which the world copes with stress? How should we as Christians deal with stress? What are some examples from the Bible which might show us how stress should be dealt with?

I. Defining STRESS

- a. Discussing its definition (Ask ideas from the Youth)
 - i. What emotions are usually related to stress?
 1. Anxiousness
 2. Anger
 3. Panic
 4. Fear
 5. Depression
 6. Despair ... etc.
 - ii. Who are these emotions aimed at? What do we get stressed about?
 1. Events: disasters, weddings, economy, health, etc.
 2. People: arguments, last-minute favors, etc.
 - iii. What timing/tense does stress take?
 1. Past: over a past mistake or even sin
 2. Present: test anxiety
 3. Future: over a future event, deadline to meet etc.
- b. In the study of psychology, "stress" is a term used to refer to the pressures brought to bear upon an individual by the situations and circumstances of life.
 - i. The idea of stress is a new idea, but does that mean the emotion was not present in the bible?
 1. The bible still mentions many emotions which could be thought of as stress, such as:
 - a. II Corinthians 11:28 – Concern, pressure
 - b. Philippians 4:11 – Stressful circumstances
 - c. James 1:2 ; 1 Peter 1:6 – Trials, temptation and grief
 - d. Acts 14:22 – Hardships
 - e. Romans 5:3 – Suffering
 - f. II Corinthians 12:10 – Weaknesses, hardships, difficulties
 - g. Luke 8:22-25 – Disciples under stress

- h. Matthew 26:36-39 – Jesus under stress
- 2. This shows that during the time of the Bible, and amongst the disciples, and even Our Lord felt stress.
 - a. If this is true then stress itself is not a SIN, but like most emotions, it is important to control because it can quickly lead to sin.

II. Benefits and dangers of stress

- a. Emotions are of our Human Nature. Like most emotions, stress too can either help or hurt us.
 - i. Benefits of stress:
 - 1. Stress can help us manage our time (imagine how big a role stress plays in motivating us to complete school activities)
 - 2. Stress can motivate us to do something which we know we should but are reluctant to do.
 - a. Luke 18:1-5 – Judge does widow's will because she brings him anxiety.
 - b. Also, the feeling of anxiety one gets from i.e. passing a homeless person on the street.
 - 3. Reminds us of our limitations as mere humans if we lack the aid of God (Numbers 11:10-17)
 - ii. Dangers of stress:
 - 1. To the BODY:
 - a. Excessive stress can cause problems with ones physical health (heart disease, cancer, lung ailments)
 - b. Can provoke us to use methods of relief which are harmful to our bodies (and souls) such as drug and alcohol abuse as well as suicide (Matthew 27:3-5).
 - i. If our bodies are the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (I Corinthians 6:19-20), then we must care for it and avoid these physical threats of stress.
 - 2. To the SPIRIT:
 - a. Like other emotions, stress can inhibit one’s ability to allow faith and reason to guide them.
 - i. For example one being overcome by anger and turning to violence despite knowing it is wrong.
 - b. In times of stress the weak in faith might question: “where was God?”
 - i. A popular emotion following the 9-11 tragedy
 - c. Stress from others (peer pressure) might lead us in a direction opposite to where we know we should be going.
 - i. How we dress.
 - ii. What music we listen to.
 - iii. How and about what we speak.
 - d. Stress about insignificant and earthly things can distract us from more important things in life.
 - i. Basing your life on material wealth or fame instead of on faith and Goodness.
 - 1. i.e. Rich Fool (Luke 12:16-21)
 - 2. “The Knowledge of God does not reside in a body that loves comforts” (Isaac of Nineveh)

- ii. Not going to Church because of the feeling that others are “talking bad about you”.
- 3. It is because of these dangers to ourselves, our moral standing, and our faith, that stress is an important topic to discuss within a Bible study.

III. Ways to cope with stress:

- a. Common ways which the world copes (ask for ideas)
 - i. “I need a drink” (alcohol)
 - 1. Problem: Immoral, could be dangerous, only provides temporary relief, does not solve the issue which your stressing over.
 - ii. Positive Projection (distracting oneself with acceptable activities; eating sweets, shopping, working out, etc.)
 - 1. Problem: Still provides only temporary relief and does not address/solve the issue at hand.
 - iii. Take precautions (sleeping well, good nutrition, good posture to prevent physical stress, etc.)
 - 1. Good general advice, but these only decrease the likeliness of stress and do not prevent it.
 - iv. Consider your limits before accepting responsibilities.
 - 1. Will save time and prevent stress for both you and others.
- b. Christian coping strategies
 - i. Set some time aside for yourself (Matthew 14:13)
 - ii. Focus on what you’re doing and take life one step at a time (Matthew 6:34)
 - iii. Do not waste your energy on worrying about insignificant things (Matthew 6:25)
 - iv. Concentrate on what is most important (Matthew 6:33)
 - v. Trust in God who is our Provider (Matthew 6:31-32)
 - vi. Have hope in what Christ has promised is to come (Matthew 5:11-12)
 - vii. Be optimistic and positive (Philippians 2:3)
 - viii. Do not dwell on the past or what cannot be changed (Philippians 3:13)
 - ix. Learn to be content with what you have (Philippians 4:11-12)
 - x. Give thanks (Philippians 4:6-7)
 - xi. Be near and help the less fortunate; count your blessings (Luke 14:13-14)
 - xii. Prayer (Matthew 11:28-30 ; Matthew 7:7-8 ; Luke 1:37)
 - xiii. Confide in the clergy who have strong faith and more experience
 - xiv. Surround yourself by good peers who will support you and offer you good advice in times of stress.
 - xv. Read the scriptures

IV. Case study: Job

- a. Read: Job 1 together and discuss
 - i. With what was Job tested? What things happened which might be defined as stress-causing?
 - ii. How did Job react?
 - iii. How else might have Job acted which would have been less beneficial?