

Finding our Anchor in a Turbulent World

By Santiago Lange

An article in a leading medical journal was titled, "Is Stress the Cause of All Disease?" The author says: "At the beginning of the century, bacteria were considered to be the center of attention. Today, mental stress has replaced bacteria." Stress is without question something to take seriously. It has been linked, directly or indirectly, to hypertension, depression, ulcers, and heart disease.



The reality of stress has become commonplace today. We hear of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders, health stress, financial stress, work related stress, the stress of being a parent, the stress teenagers must deal with etc. Today we would add the reality of terrorism as another source of stress.

Given the reality of stress and its serious nature, how can we better cope and reduce stress in our lives?

FIRST, KNOW WHO WE ARE. Jesus said: "I am God's son." Paul said: "I am an apostle of Jesus Christ." If we don't know who we are, there is always somebody else who will tell us who he or she thinks we are. Socrates said: Know thyself! We are vulnerable to allowing others to define us. Stress can come from our wearing masks, being unreal with others, trying to be somebody we're not. Insecurity always produces pressure in our lives. Our faith says: "I know who I am because I know whose I am. I am a child of God. I am loved by God. I am accepted by God. I was put on earth not by accident but for a purpose, to praise, to witness, to enjoy fellowship with God and God's people and to serve God."

SECOND, KNOW WHOM WE'RE TRYING TO PLEASE. Trying to please everyone is a cause of stress. Jesus said: "By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and My judgment is just, for I seek not to please Myself, but Him who sent Me." We know we can't please everybody. Just about the time we get one person or group pleased, another person or group gets upset with us. The old maxim is true: We can please some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but we can't please all of the people all of the time. By "pleasing" I mean the "obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5; 16:26). Dr. Gary Deddo explains this as "*a response to the revelation of God's good will and ways that coheres with God and his goodness. Seen within this relational framework, disobedience is always a departure from God's good will and ways and thus aligns with what is evil – what is opposed to God's goodness*" (Source: <http://thesurprisinggodblog.gci.org/2020/02/avoiding-chains-of-legalism.html>).

When we are confused about whom we're trying to please, we can quickly cave in to three things: *criticism*, because we are overly concerned about what others will think about us; *competition*, because we worry about whether somebody else is getting ahead of us; and conflict,

because we're threatened when anyone disagrees with us. If we focus on pleasing God, it will simplify our lives.

THIRD, KNOW WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH. Jesus said: "I know where I came from and I know where I'm going." Unless we plan our lives and set our priorities and goals, we'll be pressured by what other people's ideas are about what we should be doing. We'll be led to follow other directions which we may not feel in our hearts are right for us.

Every day we either decide what is important in our lives or else we let other people tell us what is most important. We set our own priorities or we live by the pressures, expectations and priorities of others. As someone once put it: "Preparation prevents pressure, procrastination produces it."

Spend time each day in prayer talking with God. Look at your schedule for the day or week or month and decide, "Is this the way I want to spend my time? "Lord, is this what you want me to do? Praying for God's guidance can bring us peace.

FOURTH, FOCUS ON GOD. Keep Jesus at the center, know whom we truly worship and serve! Sometimes in the midst of life's burdens, decisions and pressures we lose our focus. When we see God and God's power, love and grace we will be much healthier people. When we are out of focus, stress can build up. Make a commitment to, make a habit of, maintaining a regular pattern of worship and personal prayer.

FIFTH, RELEASE OUR FRUSTRATIONS. Talk them out! Holding on to them makes us sick. We need other people for emotional support. The most stressed out people are loners. We need friends to help us to keep from coming unglued. Companionship is essential. When something worries us, don't bottle it up; share it with our trusted friend and brother Jesus Christ who is both full man and full God and who is unified eternally in the bond of love with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

SIXTH, WORK OFF OUR STRESS. Do something constructive with the stored-up pressure and worry. In addition to getting enough rest and relaxation, we all know the proven value of regularly exercising. Some physical activity like walking, jogging or aerobics can be of help.

SEVENTH, DO SOMETHING FOR OTHERS. If we find ourselves worrying about ourselves all the time, let's try doing something for somebody else. When we turn our attention away from ourselves, our problems and our difficulties, and we look to serve others, while turning at the same time to the resurrected and glorified Christ, we will be surprised at what will take place in our lives. Some of our problems will take care of themselves. We will begin to see them in a new perspective as we participate in Christ's service for His and our fellow human beings.

May the psalmist inspire us: *"So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So, I will bless you as long as I live, I will lift up my hands and call on your name. My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips, for you have been my help and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy, my soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me."* (Psalm 63:2-8). □