

Life Lessons

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Overcoming Stress: 10 Essential Tips

Cast all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. I Peter 5:7. As Christians we are privileged that we don't have to allow disappointment, grief and bad news to overwhelm us. Nonetheless our world is complex and fast-paced. With all our time-savers, life has become insanely busy. I read a statistic that we make more decisions in one day than people used to make in one year. No wonder we're stressed out! And note, all this craziness and fast-track living isn't going away. So what can we do to develop a stress free lifestyle?

1. Identify your stressors. Decide to change! As long as you make excuses and blame others, you'll live a stressful life and cause others to stress. Identify your stress buttons by making a list, "I get stressed out when...." Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what causes you to overload and why. He loves to help.

2. Make an action plan to remove your stressors. After you identify your stress buttons, make a plan to eliminate them. For example, if you're always running late, set your clock 10 minutes early. This "extra" time will give you peace. If you tend to lose your keys, find a "fixed" place and develop a habit of always putting them there.

3. Plan ahead and tell people what you expect. As a parent, employer or pastor, we interact with other people. They need to know our expectations and how to achieve them. Coaching, training and creating boundaries will help those we are responsible for to know our expectations, keeping both them and you – stress free!

4. Get physical; rest and laugh. Put exercise on your weekly schedule. When you break a sweat exercising, your body releases endorphins – a natural chemical that alleviates stress. Scientists have discovered that laughter also triggers this hormone and causes stress levels to go down. Sleep is like rebooting a computer. It eliminates fatigues and stress. Experts recommend 8 hours sleep everyday.

5. Eat the real stuff. Until recently, I didn't consider much about health issues. The Lord dropped it in my heart to do

some research and I found a lot of my favorite food such as shrimp, pork and coke were not so healthy (OK I knew coke was not good for me). God helped me make radical changes. You'll be amazed how food and drink affect your body and mood.

6. Set routines and schedule time. The more we automate the smoother our life will run. Prioritize the important things in your life and make scheduled time to accomplish them. For example, schedule time for your time with God, spouse, kids, friends, business etc.

7. Be a better steward of your money. A number one cause of stress is money or the lack thereof. If you take care of the priorities first (tithes, saving, paying bills, utilities and credit cards) everything else will fall in place. Wherever possible, put bills on "auto pay" but make sure to check your statements for mistakes and extra charges.

8. Get it off your chest. Talk to a friend or partner about your stress. Sometimes just getting it off your chest can help unload some of the burden. But make sure to do the same favor back to them.

9. Stay grateful. I know an asthma patient who literally struggles to get a breath of fresh air! How thankful he is to God for every breath he can get. Take time to count your blessings and maintain an attitude of gratitude.

10. Slow Down and Lighten Up. I hear so many people say, "I don't have time..." The fact is – you will have time for whatever you want to make time for. Write down what's priority in your life right now. Don't attempt to do more than 2 or 3 major things a day. Don't get stressed if it doesn't get done. Most things can wait till tomorrow! If your life is too rigid and routine, you need to learn to relax and not sweat the small stuff.

Remember, you're not alone. The Holy Spirit is your Helper waiting to be called on. Don't blame; receive God's grace and offer the same to others!