

For as long as I can remember there has been some level of stress associated with me doing a job. As a very small boy I can remember the discomfort I felt when I was told to go wash my hands. And the worst ever was when it was time to clean out my toy box. I would have to empty the whole thing, wipe down the inside and then put things back that belonged, and even throw out things that I didn't use anymore. As an older boy, in the summer I would be sent out to weed two whole rows of the garden before I was allowed to do anything fun. I can remember the dread of having to move firewood or rake leaves and that same discomfort in my gut would plague me. And then, as a teenager, I started doing work for money. I would get paid real money to do the work! But even still, as the lawn that needed to be mowed stretched out in front of me or the trays of dirty dishes that needed to be washed streamed in from the restaurant dining room faster than I could possibly wash them, that **familiar feeling churning my innards** would come back. I have learned that feeling is called stress. And surely most of us reading this are familiar with it.

The word stress is a shortened form of "distress." Stress has a physical or mechanical connotation (like pre-stressed concrete, put stress on a syllable of a word, stress fractures, or when you "stress a point" to show how important it is.) But, in the 1950's the psychological meaning we are referring to today was coined. In terms of our health and mental state, **stress is not necessarily a bad thing**. It is a natural reaction to a perceived threat. It triggers the release of certain hormones that prepare us for a fight, or for running away. The problem for us is when we experience this heightened state of alert too often and for too long. There is much evidence linking chronic stress to serious health problems like high blood pressure and heart disease.

While there are many sources of unhealthy stress in the world, the most common being financial worries, I am personally plagued with work related stress. As an adult professional, I've become accustomed to deadlines for projects at work. As my career has matured, I am given more responsibility and more authority to get the job done. This is the natural progression and quite welcomed, but **I have yet to be in charge of that deadline**. The deadline, it seems to me, is the root of the stress. It is that point in time that looms large and never moves. And I feel like the tasks needed to be accomplished before that time are always underestimated and always increase as the project develops. A perfect recipe for stress every time.

I have the great blessing of working with some folks who love God. One man created a regular meeting on Wednesdays at lunchtime for us to be with God and each other. We explore our relationships with Him and share our experiences. We often watch an inspiring video with a message that we can take with us for the rest of the week. And because this group has in common the company we work for, the work-related source of stress I mentioned often shows up in our fellowship. Recently I was whining about my deadline and how unreasonable it was and expressing my incredulous disbelief at how impossible it will be to meet it. Yes, for this project, my stress level was high. That day **my friend was a conduit for God to deliver a message to me**.

He asked me, "You were made in according to God's likeness and image right?" Yes. "And Moses asked God at the burning bush what he should say when the people asked him who sent him? God said 'I am.' Remember? So, created in His image, you are, not was. You are, not will be. **You, created in His image, are. Now.** And that's what you need to focus on. You don't know what this project will look like in the end. But He does!" This idea of living in the present and not dwelling on the past or future is not new for me, but what my friend told me was quite novel and is worthy of some meditation. Regardless of the result of that meditation, the idea that God knows the outcome of a situation is a comforting stress-buster!

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; (Isaiah 46:10)

Here in the Northeast we get snowstorms that require us to clear the snow before we can leave home. I have a gas powered snowblower to help me with that job. After a snowstorm I'll check the gas tank of the snow blower and even if there's a third of a tank, I'll start the job knowing that I don't have enough fuel to finish. Not finishing the job is problematic because we either have to drive through deep snow to leave the house **or get out one of those old-fashioned manual shovels and do some real hard work**. But generally I don't stress about running out of gas. That's because I know that in the shed is a gas can I will use to fill the snow blower ensuring that I can complete the job. In other words, the immediate situation may look bleak, but there is an abundant supply to ensure the job will be completed. Do you see where I'm going? Much like my gas supply, God's creation is abundant. And that abundance is not limited to food or clothing or shelter, God's abundance encompasses all things.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; (2 Corinthians 9:8)

The stress we may experience on any given day is probably the result of our over-active imagination. There is great benefit to life, and potential for success, when we **anticipate** a problem or a challenge; we have an inherent and valuable ability to imagine a sequence of possible events and see a potential result. This skill is valuable because it can allow us to modify our behavior to affect a preferable outcome.

The prudent sees the evil and hides himself, But the naive go on, and are punished for it. (Proverbs 22:3)

There is a problem, though. At least with me, **I tend to abuse this ability**. In other words, I regularly overthink the situation, my imagination runs off toward the worst-case scenario, my mental simulation often ends up in flames. And that is not beneficial. Anticipation is a necessary action while driving in traffic; it minimizes the chance for surprises. It is also an essential skill when playing soccer, to inform you of where you should run to on the field. But there is a common progression of **anticipation turning to worry** that we should work to avoid. "Worry is a down payment on a problem you may never have" says Joyce Meyer (Christian author and speaker.) When you are anticipating the outcome of a situation, don't get sucked into a state of worry. In Matthew 6:25-34, Messiah tells us to not worry about life. That is not our job. Place your burden on Him. Go to Him, all of you who are weary and heavy-laden, and He will give you rest. (Mat11:28)

"So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:34)

Unlike "stress," which can have some benefit, "worry" is a useless, waste of resources. The ancestor of the word worry is the Old English verb *wyrgan*, which means "to strangle." **Don't strangle yourself!**

"A great storm is like a sunny day to a person of great faith. A gentle wind is like a great storm to a person of great fear." Matshona Dhliwayo (author, philosopher)

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:2)

Peace to you and glory to God!

-Nate

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