

## DEALING WITH STRESSFUL TIMES, REALIZING THE SANCTITY OF YOUR LIFE

Stress is part of our everyday life. We need to acknowledge that to ourselves and to our children. Denial is not helpful. As Spiritual leaders in our churches and communities, we need to create an openness for our members, young and old, as well as our children to talk about the stressful times in their lives and receive guidance on how to handle it.

I am saying this in the light of the fact that we are entering one of those stressful times again, as we do every year - when students at tertiary institutions and learners at school prepare for exams. During this time many of our young people feel stressed, they are worried that they are not adequately prepared and will not pass the exams. Some do not know how to handle these feelings and thoughts. They might feel that they are not “allowed” to express their concerns and worries, because it will show that they do not have enough faith.

The fact is: Most of us will at certain seasons in our lives, face times that are extra stressful and can shake us to our core. You can experience stress when you worry about things like your job, money, relationships, or a friend or family member who is ill or going through a difficult time. At those times, having strong coping strategies can make a big difference.

During stressful times (always actually) it is important to **look after your physical health**, to **get support**, **tackle your challenges** and **strengthen your Spiritual life**.

- 1. In looking after your physical health**, the important factors are getting enough rest and doing some form of physical exercise. About eight hours of sleep per night and twenty minutes of exercise, like brisk walking or jogging two or three times a week, will make a big difference.
- 2. Support** can take many forms, but for most of our members, students and children it would make a world of difference if they can hear that what they experience is normal and that they can talk to someone. This might be their pastor, a spiritually mature member, or another student who will be able to really listen, give sound advice and pray



with them. It is important to allow a person to really share his/her feelings, without judging them, or telling them that they should not feel that way. Many times, young people feel that they have no one to talk to, that they are alone in carrying their burden and that there is no way out for them. That is when suicidal thoughts begin to take form.

**3. To tackle problems and challenges**, I have through the years applied this simple tool in my own life:

**A. Establish what you are really feeling.** Many times you might “feel” bad, down, or depressed – but you do not know what you are actually feeling, or why. It is just a vague, abstract feeling. Spend some time thinking about this and give it a name. For example: “I am feeling sad”; “I am feeling angry”; “I am worried”; etc.

**B. When you are clear on what you are feeling, you should ask yourself why?** “Why am I feeling angry?” ; or “Why am I feeling worried?”

This will help you to come to a place of more clarity. You might for example establish that you feel angry because of something that your mother, teacher, friend, or spouse have said to you. You might realize that you are worried because you are unsure if you have studied enough for the exam, or if you will be able to keep our job.

**C.** Now that you have established the what and the why, you must ask yourself: **“What can I do about it?”** Think of as many options as possible. You can for example go and talk to your mother, friend or teacher and ask them why they have said what they have said and if you understood them correctly. You can realize that you can only do your best at your work place, but that keeping your job is actually not in your control.

**D.** This brings us to a very important step in this process: If you realize that there are some things that you can do about the particular challenge or problem **-Do it right away.** (as Nike says: “Just do it!”) If however you realize that there is actually nothing that you can really do about it. **Take it to Jesus and leave it there. Pray about it.** Tell God



exactly what you are experiencing and (important) leave it with Him. Don't take it with you.....

The best way to cope with feelings of being overwhelmed is to take one issue or challenge at a time. Nobody can solve everything at once.

**4. In strengthening your spiritual life**, it is important to realize that you are important to and loved by God. Genesis 1:27 says *“So **God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them**”* -Our value as human beings begin with the fact that we are made by the Creator of heaven and earth, in His very own image.

Furthermore we read in Jeremiah 29:11 *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, **to give you a future and a hope**”* God's thoughts toward you is to give you a future and to give you hope.

Read your Bible, have regular quiet times before God, attend church and Pray for Gods' guidance, so that He will help you to gain a proper perspective on the challenges you are facing in context of the fact that your life is precious and holy in His sight.

I trust that his might be helpful to us as Pastors ant those that we are leading and ministering to.

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