

# FROM THE PASTOR'S PEN



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## CHRISTIAN STRESS ATTENTION

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I recently returned from a short vacation with Leslie and Andrew. The vacation wasn't one that was particularly planned in advance – it was admittedly odd timing. I realized that I hadn't taken a break since July. I was exhausted, not handling stress particularly well, and becoming impatient – not a good combination for a pastor at all. So, we took a break and the timing turned out to be a blessing.

It got me thinking about the ways in which stress affects our attitudes, our decisions, and our relationships. Stress tests in the medical field are intended to see how the body will respond to being pushed. Similarly, in the realm of our Christian walk with the Lord, life-situation stress tests are being administered all the time.

Invariably, everybody in our church is going through stressful circumstances of a number of varieties. The question is not if stress is present, but the degree of intensity and the variable of timing. Stress in job situations is strong right now for quite a number of people, particularly with concerns about the future. Family stress in the midst of strained relationships is quite frustrating and discouraging for many. Health problems from minor though consistent ailments to the all-out chemotherapy fight has been and will continue to be a constant reality in the midst of a community of human people.

How does our faith in Jesus Christ inform and guide how we respond to these varying degrees of stress? How do we treat others in the midst of these times of stress?

If we're honest with ourselves, we must admit that we don't handle stress as well as we should. More troubling, is that on negative side of these results we usually allow stressful circumstances to justify or excuse any behavior on our part. We get short with each other, our anger surfaces more easily, hurtful words fly out of our mouths without consideration. We even are tempted to run others down,

criticizing them in a subconscious hope that this will make us feel better. Yet, biblically, there's no exempt clause for allowable sinful behavior in times of great stress. And, on top of that, it's not as if the damage done in times of stress can be simply forgotten. As if we can say, "oh, don't pay attention to that – I was just stressed." Rarely is damage ever done when our emotions are under control.

If we believe our faith in Jesus Christ cannot help with "real life" stress tests, if we become cynical about the way in which God's word is *actually intended* to be of help in the midst of stress – then we ignore our greatest hope in our times of greatest need.

Sometimes getting away is necessary, though rarely is it a cure-all. For many of you, the stress you are dealing with will be present for months if not years. Most importantly, is the need for self-examination, to diligently pay attention to how stress affects us and understand the points at which we are most vulnerable to break. This can only happen through diligent times of prayer and study. Prayer is needed so that God will open our eyes to ourselves, to a real knowledge of not only our strengths but our weaknesses. Bible study is needed so that God will open our eyes to Him, a real knowledge of who God is and the help that He intends to offer those who come to Him.

When Jesus said, "Come to me all you who are weary and heavy-burdened – I will give you rest," it assumes both of what was just said. It assumes a knowledge and understanding of ourselves as those who *are* weary, who *are* heavy-burdened. And it assumes a knowledge of a God who in Jesus Christ desires to give us rest, to lift the burden, to see us through.