

STRESS FRACTURES // A YEAR OF TERROR // PERFECT PEACE // LISTEN TO YOUR FEAR

lifechange

THE STRESS ISSUE



**FINDING PEACE IN A
FEARFUL
WORLD**

AN INTERVIEW WITH
STEPHEN CULLEN, M.D.

**Rx FOR
WORRY**

contents

THE STRESS ISSUE

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Back issues of LifeChange are available for the asking as long as our supplies last. Also, if you'd like to share LifeChange with friends, you can get a PDF of the full magazine at our website.

A LITTLE HELP, PLEASE?

If you feel like the man pictured on the front cover, we have volunteers who would be happy to pray with you or for you about your situation. Just call or email us.

CALL-IN STRESS RELIEF

Call (330) 723-1750 for a daily recorded encouragement, testimony or Bible passage.

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Watch Videos of LifeChange

We've posted YouTube videos of Medina families that have experienced LifeChange and have a story to share - log on to WeymouthChurch.com. And, while you're on our site, browse our other features - learn about our plan to help orphans, the "Bible Roadmap" that helps people grow in their faith, happenings in our church family, our social network communities, and of course, a host of bonus features pertaining to LifeChange Magazine.

You Tube



are you STRESSED OUT?

If you're like the rest of us, you feel pressure every day – pressure at work, pressure at school, pressure at home, pressure about future decisions, and of course, pressure about all those things you should be doing that you aren't.

Then there's the twin sister of pressure: worry, which our culture has honed to an art form. Worry about money, worry about children, worry about "what if" and "what could," worry about what will be and what might be – why, we even have statistics to tell us how worried we should be about, well, you name it!

Between all the things that could go wrong, added to all the things that are *actually* wrong, plus all the things you and I are supposed to be doing to make them better...that makes for some high-stress living. It also makes for heart problems, high blood pressure, strained relationships, and a total loss of perspective on God's design for our lives.

There's good news for those of us who've stayed up at night

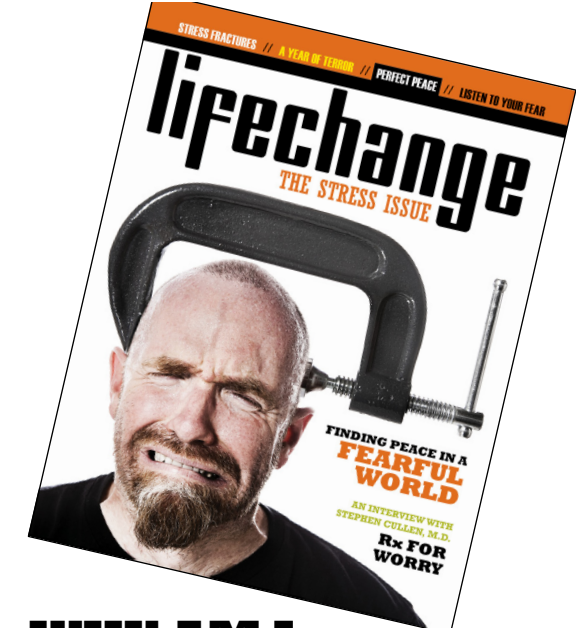
worrying, or who don't think we can bear another day at the office, or who have unspoken fears. This issue of LifeChange is all about that good news; a solution for stress and a way to win against worry. This solution isn't inside you; it comes from God and from His Words in the Bible.

My wife Keri and I decided to lead the response team for "The Stress Issue" of LifeChange because we know what it means to feel stressed, and we've seen what a difference a relationship with God can make. Opening up the Bible has helped me understand that my ambitions – really everything in my life – should be centered around what God wants me to do. Once I realized that I had a higher purpose to live for, things started to change for the better. I hope that all the people who are also living a stressful life in our community can find the real rest, peace and purpose God offers.

We, and many others in our church family, are praying for you. Even if we never meet, we are asking God to show you the path to peace. If you have questions or need someone to pray for you, see page 17 for ways we could connect.

Joe Austin
Stress Issue Response Leader

THIS ISSUE OF LIFECHANGE IS ALL ABOUT THAT GOOD NEWS; A SOLUTION FOR STRESS AND A WAY TO WIN AGAINST WORRY.



WHY AM I GETTING LIFECHANGE?

Don't worry, you weren't signed up by some anonymous friend who wanted to make a point! Well, maybe in a way you were, but we're hoping to make the same point to the *whole community*. Everyone in the area surrounding Weymouth Church is receiving a six-month, free subscription to LifeChange, produced right here in Medina, Ohio by members of our church. We're not out to get anything from you; there's no obligation on your part at all. It's just a gift.

At Weymouth Community Church, we've seen time and time again how God changes lives through biblical principles. Our prayer is that by sharing these with our friends and neighbors, we can make a positive difference in Medina and beyond.

We decided to focus our attention on six topics: Money, Stress, Romance, Forgiveness, Addictions and Life's Purpose. In each of these areas, we pray that you can experience real, lasting LifeChange, and that in some small way, this magazine will be of help to you.

LOCAL VOICES

Shortly after arriving at college, my world fell apart - panic, anxiety, and depression hit me out of nowhere, causing me to drop out. I had no idea why God was allowing me to go through such pain and humiliation. Since then I've had several bouts of depression. Now I worry that if something happens to my husband (who has a risky job), I have no college education or career to fall back on to support my family. Even though God has provided for my needs thus far, I still struggle with big "what ifs."

LIZ // MEDINA

I was molested when I was six years old, my mother died of cancer when I was nine, I was diagnosed bipolar when I was eighteen. I have three times been hospitalized for this, spent fourteen years struggling to maintain mental stability, and suffered a complete mental breakdown. Consequently, I did some jail time and probation.

JON // HARRISVILLE TWP.

As my father lay dying of cancer, I dropped much of my schedule to fully embrace with him what was left of his time on earth. Yes, I cried almost daily as I left his bedside. Yes, it could be termed *stressful*. In retrospect however, I wouldn't have traded a single visit with him for something fun, something less painful. Some of the visits we had in the seven months he lingered were the best we ever had as father and daughter. We lived in the moment, because we knew there might not be another.

SUE // MEDINA

After our first daughter was born, my wife and I realized that we had "secondary

infertility" and spent three years looking into treatments and options. We didn't know what God wanted us to do, or what medical avenues we should take. We weren't sure why this was happening to us, and it changed everything about where our family was going.

STEVE // MONTVILLE TWP.

My parents divorced when I was a teenager. I felt a lot of anger toward my father, as if he had abandoned and betrayed me. I had a lot of sick feelings, a lot of worry and fear. After talking with a Christian counselor, I learned that I needed to forgive my dad. It was the most difficult thing I've ever gone through.

JEFF // MEDINA

When my wife and I heard the word "cancer," a lot of things went through our minds. Months of operations, chemo, radiation, remission, and struggle - it brought us closer together, even though it was such a difficult time. After a long battle, my wife passed away - that happened five years ago. I had a lot of unknowns, especially how I would raise our three girls alone. I can't imagine having made it this far without God's help.

TIM // SEVILLE

I'm a wife, mother and employee at the same time. I want to give all three 110%, but something has to give. I have to decide who I'm going to disappoint - my boss, my husband, or my kids. After prayerful consideration, we decided the best thing for our family would be for me to step away from the workforce. I still have a lot of fear of the unknown and a lot of questions.

JENNIFER // MEDINA

Fill out this worksheet to get your stress-reduction plan started.

I'm Stressed About:

What I Cannot Change About This:

List the parts of this stressful situation that are out of your control.

Pause:

Pray for God's grace to accept the things you cannot change. Thank Him for the blessings He has given you, and pray for strength, wisdom and the right perspective on your difficulties.

What I Can Change About This:

List the parts of this situation that can be modified, concluded or improved.

Action Steps I Can Take:

the serenity prayer

God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.

STRESS FRACTURES

DAN JARVIS

I had a lot to think about in the MRI scanner. It was just a precautionary test, but alone in my thoughts, I had to consider the worst. As the knocking sound pulsed around my motionless body, I wondered what the operator was seeing. Was it like an episode of *House*, where senior doctors were being called in for consult about an unknown anomaly or dangerous growth?

My faith, my assumptions about my life and family, my priorities, my memories – all of them were packed along with me into a small cylinder. I had some crazy thoughts running through my mind. “Well, this test could change everything God.

Am I ready?” “What will my little boys remember about me?” “At least I have life insurance.”

“That knocking sound is a lot louder than I expected.”

“I wonder if this is taking so long because they found something.” “I bet they won’t tell me anything today anyway.”

People around me had no idea I was going in for this test, no idea that I was facing questions and feelings of this magnitude. And yet, there I was. (Thankfully, I was given the all-clear a few days later.)

I’m assuming that many of life’s stresses are like that – inside, you could be dealing with burdens so heavy and questions so vexing that you can hardly think about anything else, but outside, people think you’re having a normal day. That woman next to you in the checkout line just found out her teen daughter is pregnant. That man who ran the stoplight in front of you is late to his job; the job his boss said might get downsized next month. The kid bouncing a ball on the sidewalk is wondering why his dad hasn’t visited him lately. That elderly woman sitting on the park bench just reached the one year anniversary of her husband’s death.

The stresses we feel put pressure on every area of our lives: relationships, job performance, sleep, parent-

ing – everything. Over time, emotional stress fractures develop. They start as tiny, near imperceptible breaks in our inner selves, breaks that, remaining under pressure, will grow to become damaging. An argument with our spouse, angry discipline of our kids, a short temper with a co-worker, a spending binge to cope with pressure; these responses are the beginnings of bigger breaks, bigger fractures of our character, our peace, and our health.

How many marriages have fallen apart because of stress fractures – cracks in confidence, in joy, in stability, in patience? How many fights have erupted over “small things” that represent accumulated frustrations? Getting home late. An argument about the kids. A strained visit with in-laws. Broken promises. A harsh word. A lack of passion. A roll of the eyes. A sarcastic whisper. Then, one day, “Should we even be together anymore?”

PREPARING FOR STRESSFUL EVENTS

You know trouble is coming. So do I. One day there will be a diagnosis that makes our heart sink, or a phone call we’ll wish we could have left unanswered. There will be tragedy, heartache, disagreements, fearful situations, money problems, and more. There will be days when we’ll be too busy to think, and others when we’ll wish we had something to do so we wouldn’t have to think.

We can’t control things that happen to us, but we can control how we prepare for them.

The first and most important way to prepare for difficulty is by strengthening your relationship with God. He’s the one that can see you through any situation. He’s the one with the power to heal, encourage, protect, and love you through whatever tragedies are around the corner.

Second, prepare for difficulty by loving your family, regardless of their faults. You’ll discover that in times of need or heartbreak, your family members are the people who will matter most to you. Extend forgiveness, overlook faults, practice kindness, and say, “I love you.” Don’t let days go by without making peace

wherever you can, especially if the tragedy involves a family member. You'll have no regrets. Swallow your pride and make things right. That alone will reduce your stress significantly!

Third, prepare for difficulty by thinking through practical needs. If you're concerned about not having money for the future, do some research on the best ways to prepare. If you're wondering what to do if you lose your job, cut your spending and save some peace-of-mind emergency cash. If you're worried sick about still-secret health problems, see your doctor and get on a fitness program. If you're stressed about disorganization, ask an organized person for help setting up a new system. Many of life's stressors come from not doing things we have known all along that we *should* be doing.

Fourth, prepare for difficulty by developing real friendships. That's right. Not just acquaintances from work. Not just Facebook friends from college. Something real – the kind of friendships where you share life's journey together, laugh around the table playing games, talk about your ideas and your troubles, go on vacation together, sit in a small group Bible study while your kids play downstairs – these are the kind of people you love to be with and who recharge you emotionally. When life's push comes to shove, you'll have a network of people who care about you. There's nothing more comforting than knowing that you're not alone, that someone is praying for you, that there are people who would jump at the chance to help you through difficulty. Friendships at this level don't happen by accident; they happen as a result of your choice to make them a priority.

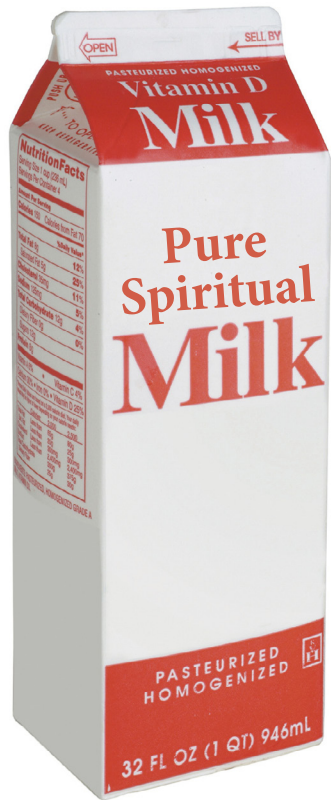
Finally, prepare for difficulty by filling your life with joy. Fill your thoughts with prayer and truth from the Bible. Fill your calendar with healthy and helpful activities that get you outdoors, involved with people and engaged with life. Volunteer to serve. Plan exciting things for the future. "But I can't because..." Stress makes us think we should disengage and sit at home. It distracts us from dreaming big or taking adventures. It holds us back from connecting with people. It stops us from doing the things that God created us to do! Grab your calendar and look at the next sixty days. What's written down that you're excited about? What's written down that helps accomplish your purpose

for life? What's written down that you've never done before? What will make you a better person, enriching your life spiritually or physically? Any meals you're sharing with another family? Any parties you've got coming up? (If you're like me, things like this have to be on the calendar or they just don't happen.) "Dan, that sounds great, but I'm just too stressed right now to get into any of that." Exactly my point.

STRENGTH FOR THE STRESS

As a kid I was taught that milk helped me grow strong bones, and I guess that's true. (What I never quite understood was why, upon drinking much milk, I'd get in trouble. "Daniel, did you drink the last of our milk?" "We went through a whole gallon, and it must have been you!" I've since grown up and now I hear the same thing from my wife, in nearly the same tone. What am I missing here?) Anyway, healthy bones can handle more pressure, and the same is true for our emotional strength.

If we want to avoid stress fractures of the soul, we need "milk" to keep ourselves strong, no matter what difficulties lay ahead. The Apostle Peter mentions this in a letter he wrote to Christians who were enduring tremendous persecution for their faith. He said, "Like newborn babies, you must crave pure spiritual milk so that you will grow into a full experience of salvation. Cry out for this nourishment, now that you have had a taste of the Lord's kindness." I believe this milk comes to us from God's Word, the Bible. If we stay nourished spiritually, we'll have the strength to endure the storms we know are coming. Rather than fractured pain and compounding worries, the stressors of life can lead us to a deeper trust in God and a richer relationship with those we love.



On a scale of 1-5, rate each stressor in your life. (1= total peace, 2= occasional concerns, 3= frequent worry, 4= daily anxiety, 5= significant pressure)

- ___ My marriage/love situation
- ___ My parents
- ___ Money
- ___ The children in my life
- ___ Less-than-ideal relationships with relatives or co-workers
- ___ My workload
- ___ The future
- ___ Trying to stay safe or avoid sickness
- ___ My current schedule
- ___ Health problems
- ___ My physical appearance
- ___ People finding out about my secrets
- ___ Maintaining my reputation
- ___ Fear of dying

Add up the numbers above: TOTAL _____

Based on these
14 common
stressors, how
much pressure
are you
under, and
what should
you do?

14-28 You're generally at peace. You probably do have ups and downs brought on by stressful situations, but in general, you don't actively feel pressure on most days. You either handle stress very well, or you have a remarkably uneventful life! If you rated any area higher than the others, consider what you could do to reduce the pressure you feel.

>Look it Up: Isaiah 26:3-4

29-40 You're normal. However, normal doesn't mean "OK." If you scored in this range, start praying to God about the areas with higher numbers, and ask a trusted friend for advice about reducing the pressure you feel. Remember, Jesus taught that worry is completely unhelpful and actually distracts us from our real purpose for life.

>Look it Up: Matthew 6:19-34

41-52 You're stressed out. Sometimes you wonder how you can escape these feelings, and you definitely need to schedule some intentional break-time in your life. The Bible calls this a "Sabbath" –

one day in seven that you set aside to rest from your usual activity and focus on spiritual things. And hey, when was the last time you had a *vacation*? It is time to slow down and re-evaluate your life. All this pressure – what are you accomplishing? Is this the way you want to feel for the next five years, or more? Begin your life-change by handing your worries over to God.

>Look it Up: 1 Peter 5:6-7

53-65 Take a deep breath! You need a radical reorganization of your life and your priorities. You're on the path to emotional and physical breakdown, if you haven't already noticed. Read the above advice, and in addition to those things, schedule an appointment with a pastor or a counselor to get some help. You are trying to control way too many things about your life; you need to turn yourself over to God and put your faith in Him. God did not design you to live like this!

>Look it Up: Psalm 42, Romans 12:1-2

Note: This is not a scientific test. Every area of stress that you feel needs attention (especially if you wrote "4" or "5" in any category). There are many different ways to identify stress in your life. It is best to begin in prayer to God and to seek the advice of someone you trust about any areas you mark with a high number. Also, it would be a good idea to ask your family doctor about stress and its impact on your life, given your own situation.

LISTEN TO YOUR FEAR

ED WELCH

In the face of fear, we want to keep moving. To slow down and *listen* to what it might be saying is counter-intuitive. But there is a logic—a language—to fear and anxiety, just as there is to most emotions.

Listening to fear is like listening to background noise. At first you think there is nothing to hear, but then you notice the wind in the trees, the birds calling for a mate, cars passing by, a plane overhead, creaks in the floors, and the water heater kicking in—there is much

more going on than we first noticed!

The same is true with fears. At first we might overlook the underlying message in our fears; but when we listen more carefully, we notice that they are speaking loudly about the things our hearts truly care about and love.

Here are two common themes:



“I am vulnerable.”

We might not have Genghis Khan sweeping across the plains, prepared to destroy everything that moves, but life is dangerous no matter where we live. Even without a sworn enemy, the possibility of accidents gives us real reason to be afraid. Think of it this way: If we live long enough, something bad will certainly happen, and there is nothing we can do to keep it at bay.

This is where fear gets interesting. Danger points at the threatening world around us. Vulnerability points to us. It’s about our lack of control.

Take someone who is accustomed to driving, and put him in the passenger seat. Watch his foot nearly do a Fred Flintstone as he puts all his weight on an imaginary brake. And hear his ongoing suggestions for the driver. That’s a person who is feeling vulnerable—out of control, and thus afraid.

Listening to this sort of fear reminds us that we are creatures, dependent on God and others around us. We have only limited control of the situations we face, no matter how much we wish it were otherwise.

Here is where fear is a door to spiritual reality. It suggests that authentic humanness was never intended to be autonomous and self-reliant. Humans are needy—dependent—by design. Will we abandon the myth of independence and seek God?

“I need (and might not get).”

There is a close connection between what we fear and what we think we need.

If we need comfort, we fear physical pain.

If we need approval, we fear criticism.

If we need love, we fear rejection.

If we need admiration for our attractiveness, we fear getting fat.

For example, money is believed to have unusual power to satisfy many of our needs, so it is a target for endless fears. Without money we feel vulnerable and powerless. With it we have confidence that we can get adequate medical treatment, love, respect, etc.

For decades my wife and I never locked our house.

We never thought twice about burglaries because we owned nothing that valuable—nothing we *really* loved. But as I began to amass a few items that were important to me, my attitude changed. I’ve even considered purchasing a safe!

Listening to our fears about losing or missing out on the things we need can reveal what we trust. Trust reveals the center of our worlds. For example, when we have fears about our financial position, we might be revealing that we trust in money. What we are afraid of can reveal that something other than God has become enthroned in our hearts.

Are your fears telling you that you love anything more than God?

WHERE IS MY TREASURE?

If we know Christ and have affirmed our allegiance to Him, worry is a sign that we are trying to have it both ways. We certainly don’t want to renounce our allegiance to Jesus, but we want to protect what we feel is our own. We’re not so sure the Lord can be trusted with some of these things, so we look for help elsewhere.

It’s easy to tell ourselves that such worry is not a critical issue. But the reality is that we can’t have dual masters. Worry is misdirected love that should be confessed. It is making life about our needs, desires, and wants. It’s time to choose sides.

Can’t you just hear Jesus say, “How would you like a place where nothing rusted, nothing wore out, and investments were guaranteed?” (See Matt. 6:19-21.) We begin by turning away from loyalty to things that promise emptiness, and confessing how these things have been our hope, security, and confidence.

Confession changes everything. When we confess to God that our worry is a sin against Him, we turn away from the kingdom of earth and put ourselves in a position to see the attractiveness and worthiness of eternal things.

Adapted from *Running Scared* © 2007 by Edward T. Welch. Used by permission of New Growth Press.



Dr. Cullen is a member of Weymouth Church and practices family medicine in Medina, Ohio. LifeChange asked him about stress and what advice he has for people under pressure.

Rx for WORRY

An Interview with Stephen Cullen, M.D.

What are the most common stress-related health problems you treat?

To tell you the truth, most of the problems I see on a daily basis are stress-related. Depression disorders, anxiety, and a host of other health concerns are at least tied to stress, if not directly caused by it.

To give you a snapshot of my typical day, I'll see chronic illnesses like high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease – and stress is usually a part of the discussion at these appointments. Then, I'll meet with people complaining of acute problems, like cough, headache, etc., and they'll still bring up anxiety issues in our conversation, whether or not it is related. It goes something like this, "While I've got you doc,"

and then a question about the stress they are under or an admission of lifestyle problems. "I haven't slept well this week and now I have this cold." Just before this interview I saw a patient about his sore throat. We spent two minutes discussing his throat and about twenty minutes talking through his anxiety issues. Knowing that most people struggle with deeper concerns than just their stated reason to visit, I'll often ask, "Is that all you need to talk to me about?"

What do you advise people to do who are obviously under significant pressure?

I'll ask about what's going on in their life - work, marital status, kids - usually people will tell me that they are overextending and not taking care of them-

selves. I have a few set questions I ask when someone is depressed or anxious, which are usually very revealing. "How are your habits regarding sleep, exercise, and eating right? What is your spiritual status?" The majority of people don't have their act together on the physical issues, and on the spiritual question I get all sorts of answers.

Knowing where they stand on these "basics," I might encourage them to exercise three times a week, start eating better, perhaps try pastoral counseling, etc. I also might recommend a follow up visit or medication.

Is there a way to know where the line is between stress that "everybody" has versus stress that is dangerous and damaging?

There are ways to sort it out. Anytime people say they have stressors in life, I like to ask questions about how they respond to that pressure. (People facing the same situations may respond very differently.) As I'm screening a patient, I'm asking questions like: "Do they feel depressed? Have they stopped enjoying things that they should enjoy? How is their energy level? Do they have disturbed sleep? Has their appetite changed? What are their feelings about the future?" I may not walk through each of these areas specifically with a patient, but this is the grid through which I am evaluating how stress is impacting their daily activities.

You mentioned that you bring up spiritual issues with patients. Why?

As a Christian, I know that this part of life is a big part of their ultimate cure. Some people do have a disease or condition that needs to be addressed medically, but you have to be right spiritually before any other treatment can be fully effective. I try to explain to people that they may need a spiritual overhaul, not just a new drug or technique they read about online.

If you came to me with a headache, I could give you pain killer, which might seem to help, but if you had a brain tumor, it would do you more harm than good to ignore the pain. If you have a cough, I could give you cough syrup; yet if I neglect to tell you about your pneumonia, I haven't helped you. In the same way, if you're filled with anxiety, I can send you to a counselor or give you a prescription, but I haven't helped you unless I give you the full answer, which includes a living relationship with God. He's the "Great Physician."

Sometimes I pray with my patients, if they are open to it. I admit I don't use that as much as I should. I probably reach for the prescription pad too often, rather than getting on my knees with the person to ask God for help.

If someone doesn't have a strong faith in God or a relationship with Him, what do you think they will miss?

I think they are missing the greatest adventure that they could ever be on, and the most important relationship that they were created to enjoy. For stress, anxiety, fear, and depression, I think they'll miss a large part of the answer. The fullness of what it means to be a balanced person involves physical, mental and spiritual health. Ignoring any one of these areas will have adverse consequences in the others.

R 1. What are you doing with your body?
Starting point: Do what you know you should be doing - eating right and exercising. Check in with your doctor about what the best steps would be for you in these areas, and ask him or her about setting goals.

2. What are you doing with your mind?

Starting Point: Make sure you are getting enough sleep, and evaluate whether the amount of media you take in every day is healthy.

3. What are you doing with your soul?

Starting Point: Consider your relationship with Christ, and how you could grow spiritually and morally. Seek out the purpose God has for your life and pursue it. Rearrange your priorities with His Word in mind.

STRESSED TO DEATH?

Many serious health problems are linked to stress. Among the most common: headache, immunity, sleep problems, digestive problems, depression, obesity, memory impairment,

back pain, chest pain, heart disease, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, decreased and worsening of skin conditions, such as eczema. // Source: mayoclinic.com

FEAR

FEAR

FEAR

FEAR

FEAR

PEACE

FINDING PEACE IN A FEARFUL WORLD

Some years ago, I was at a major university attending a Broadway-style performance competition. I was sitting in the third row watching one of the groups do their number. In the middle of the song, the tuxedo pants on one of the men suddenly split all the way around and fell apart!

To this day I can't believe he didn't leave the stage. But he felt the need to continue, desperately holding his pants together! I'll never forget the pained expression on that poor guy's face as the audience roared in laughter.

Many people are living their lives like that dancer. They're going through the dance of life forcing a smile, but inwardly they feel as if they are about to fall apart. They fret and worry and are consumed with fear.

Have you ever been there—trying desperately to hold things together in the dance of your marriage, your family, your career, or your reputation? We wonder what we will eat, what we will wear, what will happen

tomorrow, and how we'll pay for it. We try to control our circumstances and minimize our risks. On and on the cycle goes until a sense of dread permeates our lives.

The tragedy is that we can get so caught up in these fears that we forget what it means to have the peace of God. Here's what the Bible says:

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

In a world of terrifying possibilities and fearful scenarios, do not be worried! Bring your cares directly to God for help. *No fear about anything, but prayer about everything.*

And, notice that the verse says we should thank God as well. When we get on our knees, laying out all our worries before God *and thanking Him*, we are making a choice to believe that God loves us and has a purpose for the things that are going on in our lives.



**MARK
BEARDEN**

lifechange / 15

You may say, “I could never do that! You don’t know the circumstances I’m facing!” But it’s important to remember that you don’t have to be delivered from the problem before you can thank Him. Your prayer might be as simple as, “Lord, I feel trapped in my fears, but I’m making a choice today to trust You, to lay my problems before You, and to thank You.”

For those who take this step of faith in God, He reserves a blessing that goes beyond anything we could have anticipated: God’s supernatural peace. I know a man who lost his young wife to disease, leaving him a widowed dad with four children. I asked him if, at any point in the process, he lost the peace of God. His reply: “The only times I lost peace were the times I started thinking, ‘What if . . . ?’ God doesn’t give you grace for *what if*; He gives you grace and peace for *what is*.”

The peace of God guards our hearts so we can stay focused on Him when frightening circumstances encircle us. It guards our minds so we won’t give in to despair. If we will hand our worries and fears to the Lord in prayer, He will guard and protect us from the pitfalls of a fretful, fearful, faithless existence. He will enable us to live a joyful, peaceful life in a stressed-out world.

HOW TO RESPOND TO FEARS

LIST YOUR FEARS

They may be very tangible things. Some people find themselves getting up at night to re-check the doors, even though they’re already locked. Others hold back their generosity because of fear they’ll go broke. Many fear failure, the loss of reputation, or the rejection of a family member. What do you fear?

Worry feels deceptively necessary, but remember: it accomplishes nothing. Jesus asked, “Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?”

It reminds me of those funnels that you put a coin in to watch it whirl around and around before it disappears into a hole in the middle. That’s kind of like worrying; it distracts me for a little while, accomplishes nothing, and leaves me a little bit poorer!

IDENTIFY THE TRUTH

What does God’s Word say? What are the truths that counter the fear-producing lies I am being tempted to believe?

I started looking up every verse I could find on fear. I discovered that the truth is summed up in a question from the book of Psalms: “What can mere mortals do to me?” Human beings don’t hold the keys to my joy, success, happiness, fulfillment, or eternal destiny. As long as God is with me, then like Joshua entering the Promised Land, I can “be strong and very courageous.”

FOCUS ON GOD

The Bible speaks of two women who met Jesus - one was busy and bothered, the other sat at Jesus’ feet to learn and worship. Which woman are you? You can’t be a worrier and a worshiper at the same time. Worship will replace your worry.

RESPOND IN FAITH

Responding in faith is important because fear wants to avoid faith at all costs. Fear tells us to avoid risks and hide our vulnerabilities. Fear causes us to make faith-less decisions—the wrong decisions! It keeps us from the abundant life Jesus promised to those who follow Him. As you pray through your fears, you may hear God asking you to face one of them head on. He may require you to do precisely what you’ve avoided for so long.

The only alternative to a life of fear is a life of *faith*. Once we accept the fact that we can’t control everything (no matter how hard we try), we’re ready to place our confidence in Christ to hold us, guide us, and walk with us through the valley of the shadow of death. Only then are we free—from midnight worries and countless “what ifs,” from holding back and “playing it safe”—finally we can love and worship God.

In the end, faith in the face of fear is a choice, not a feeling. Fear is a natural emotion, and when it is felt, we must walk in bold obedience to the Lord. Only then can we enjoy His peace.

Bible verses referenced, and for further study:

Matthew 6:32, Philippians 4:6-7, Matthew 6:27, Psalm 56, Joshua 1:7, Luke 10:38-41, John 10:1-10

Mark Bearden is a conference speaker who challenges people across North America to renew their commitment to God. Adapted with permission from *Revive Magazine*, LifeAction.org.

Begin Your JOURNEY TO PEACE

GET IN SHAPE // EXERCISE GROUPS FORMING

Call us or register online to enjoy one of our indoor exercise or outdoor running groups, meeting around the Medina area. **Physical activity is important for reducing stress**, and our groups can provide the accountability and motivation necessary to get moving and get fit. Our scheduling varies and we have multiple options available, so let us know that you’re interested and one of our volunteers will contact you.

GET RELIEF // TALK WITH SOMEONE

Are you going through hard times? Not sure who to trust? Would you like someone to pray for you? One of the best ways to relieve stress is to talk it out and get some outside perspective on your situation. We have trained volunteers who would be willing to give you a listening ear on the phone or in person, or even online. They will pray for you, offer you assistance or ideas wherever possible, share their own experiences of overcoming fear, worry or difficulty, and point you toward biblical wisdom. You can also call in daily to hear a recorded encouragement, prayer, testimony or Bible passage that can help you refocus.

GET FREE BOOKS // LEARN MORE ABOUT DE-STRESSING

We’d love to give you a free packet of stress-relief materials, without any obligation or expectation, while our supplies last. We also have easy-reading New Testaments we can pass your way, if you’d like to begin learning more about the life-changing truth of the Bible. To receive either of these resources, let us know by calling or emailing us.

GET STARTED

FOUR INSTANT WAYS TO GET STRESS-RELIEF TIPS

1. Text FOLLOW LCSTRESS to 40404 to receive daily stress-relief tips
2. “Like” our Facebook Page and share your ideas
3. Follow LCSTRESS on Twitter
4. Call (330) 723-1750 for a recorded encouragement or testimony

CONTACT US

Email: lifechange@weymouthchurch.com
Click: www.WeymouthChurch.com
Watch: www.youtube.com/lifechangemagazine
Call: (330) 723-1750

WRITE OR VISIT

Weymouth Community Church
3398 South Weymouth Road
Medina, Ohio 44256

5 mi. north of the Medina Square,
Just off of Rt. 3 near the I-71 interchange

Call (330) 723-1750
for a recorded encouragement,
prayer or testimony about
overcoming stress.

Text FOLLOW LCSTRESS
to 40404
to receive daily
stress-relief text tips.

(These will come as free
messages from Twitter, and you
do not need an account to receive
them. Your phone’s standard text
message rates may apply.)

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A YEAR OF TERROR

Kidnapped by the Abu Sayyaf in May 2001, Martin and Gracia Burnham spent 376 perilous days of captivity in the Philippine jungle. Facing near starvation, constant exhaustion, frequent gun battles, and cold-hearted murder, they endured the ultimate test of faith in the face of fear. On June 7, 2002, in a firefight between their captors and the Philippine military, Martin was killed; Gracia was wounded but freed.

LifeChange editor Dan Jarvis spoke with Gracia Burnham about being a hostage, the fears she felt, and her advice to fearful hearts.

In the initial moments when the kidnapping occurred, what fears were running through your mind?

Gracia: Well, when you are first taken hostage, you don't do a lot of thinking. You go into survival mode. I was doing exactly what I was told. I knew we were in big trouble. But the specific fears hadn't set in. I was just trying to stay alive.

As the days wore on, what worries did you face?

Gracia: I started wondering how long this would last, and whether or not these people were as bad as the media portrayed them. We had heard that they beheaded people and raped women. There were certain things I didn't allow myself to worry about, like our career, our ministry, our children; I knew God would have to take care of those things.

Were there any particular Bible verses that God used to calm and comfort you?

Gracia: Every once in a while, a Scripture would just pop into my mind at an opportune time. I remember one day I was mad at Musab. He was the religious leader of the group, and he forced us to carry extra stuff. Martin had to carry extra rice, and I had to carry two mortars, one in each hand, as we climbed straight up a mountain. I was angry. That's when the verse came to mind, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, and let us fix our eyes on Jesus." In that moment I was weighed down—that's why I was mad; but the real weight was my anger. I had to lay it aside and run the race with patience to get to the top of the mountain. I had to look toward Jesus in the midst of my problems. It was the perfect verse for that moment.

What were your prayers in those days?

Gracia: When you have nothing, you have nothing. Everything you need, you have to ask God for. If we needed a drink of water, we had to ask God. We prayed for the next thing that was going to help us survive. Here in America, if I need water, I go to the tap. I don't ask God for it, because I've already got it. In the jungle, we brought every care to God.

Do you still struggle with any worries?

Gracia: I would love to say that I don't fear a lot of things

because of what I've been through. But honestly, some mornings I lie in bed thinking, "I need courage and strength to get through today. Can I make it?" I realize that makes no sense. The same God who got me through the jungle is going to get me through a day in Rose Hill, Kansas!

What differences do you see in the lives of Christians in the West versus those believers who live under threats or persecution?

Gracia: For me to address this question is difficult because I've never suffered. Even in the jungle, I knew that if and when I got out, people would be very nice to me, and I would go back to my middle-class lifestyle in America. Christians suffering in closed countries are being persecuted for their faith, and they don't have that hope of rescue at all. Their only hope is eternity. I've noticed in America that we're really happy to fight for our rights. If someone tries to limit our freedom, we'll stand up and fight. But persecuted Christians don't have that option. They are more focused on loving their enemies.

What would you tell someone today who is facing a frightening situation? What principles should guide them?

Gracia: Keep your eyes on Jesus. Read all the Scriptures on fear. You can choose to not be fearful; that choice is based on God and His faithfulness. Don't look at your circumstances; look at God. If the mountain you've got to climb is right in front of you, turn around and look at how big God is in comparison to the mountain.

How about for someone who is living a relatively safe and comfortable life today? Is there anything they should be doing to ready their hearts for certain difficulties in the future?

Gracia: I wasn't ready for what happened to us. But I knew the Lord, and I knew the Scriptures. Although, sometimes the Bible wasn't comforting. I would think about verses like, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." I asked Martin one day, "Why is that in the Bible?" It wasn't happening for us. I thought of the psalm where David wrote, "I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread." And yet, here we were begging for food, starving, and feeling forsaken. The key word in your question is *certain*—difficulties are bound to happen. We have been told that in this life we will have problems. If you want your "emergency procedure" so that you're armed with the right verses and can do all the right things in order that you won't have to suffer as much or it won't last as long, I think that's the wrong motivation. You're just wanting a "cushion" that will make the problem smaller. But if you want to be prepared for suffering so that God can get the maximum amount of honor from the situation, that's the right motive. The worst thing that can happen is that God doesn't get the honor. If we can arm ourselves with an attitude that says, "Lord, I want You to be glorified, and I want Your will to be done," then maybe we'll be ready for whatever comes around the corner.

Bible verses referenced:
Hebrews 12:1-2, John 14:14, Psalm 37:25, John 16:33



Gracia has written two books about her experiences and the lessons she learned: *In the Presence of My Enemies* and *To Fly Again*. Visit www.GraciaBurnham.org to learn more about her family and ministry today.





What about stress relief tactics?

It depends. There are a wide variety of “tactics” out there – from squeezing a ball to religious meditation. Some tactics are practical in nature, and they make a lot of sense. If you feel yourself getting frustrated, take a deep breath and count to ten to calm down. If you feel the need to get some energy out, take a brisk walk around the block. If your day is too busy and you are feeling pressure, take a break and read a Psalm from the Bible to refocus yourself.

Where people can get into trouble with stress relief tactics is when they allow them to replace a relationship with God as the real answer for stressful situations. Certain exercises may help refresh your body, but they can’t answer the deepest needs of your soul. Taking a break may diffuse some frustration,

but it can’t provide lasting peace. These are needs that only God can fill; and only a heart honest enough to admit its need for God can ever enjoy the sort of peace and serenity we each long for.

What about demanding people in my life?

It’s common for parents, bosses, spouses and even friends to pressure us into more hurried, discontented lives. Produce! Perform! Win! Try again! Work harder! Sell more! It’s enough to stress anybody out, and at the end of it, what do we have? Just more demands, more needs to meet, more trophies to aim for.

There’s nothing wrong with striving for higher productivity – in fact, achieving and succeeding can bring honor to God and joy to life. However, there are limits, and we need to exercise wisdom so we don’t overdo it. Before you bow to the demands of others, check those demands against your own priorities. What matters most to *you*? What purposes do you think God has for your life? Some people live in so much fear of what others think of them that they never have a chance to live their own lives or pursue their own dreams. They sacrifice themselves to impress or placate others. (Like the guy who buys things he doesn’t need with money he doesn’t have to impress people he doesn’t even like!)

If an authority figure is asking you to do more than you can maintain, appeal to them gently and see if there’s another way to arrange things. If you’re feeling pressure from friends or family, tell them you appreciate their enthusiasm but that you have to pace yourself. Don’t feel bad about saying, “No thanks,” or “How about another time?”

How can I make my home peaceful?

Home was designed by God to be a place of rest, refreshment, acceptance, and peace from the storms of the world around us. But some of us hear that description and laugh – “Not my home!” Some people even *avoid* going home when they need to relax; home is more “work” than work!

Imagine living in a household with three other people who each believe the world should revolve around them (you may not need to imagine!). The kids fight over toys, the adults fight over spending money, the whole family bickers over chores, and nobody wants to share the remote! The cause of all this centers on just one letter of the alphabet: I.

The recipe for a peaceful home starts with *selflessness*. Selflessness is real love, where you put the needs and wants of other people above your own. Imagine each person in your household having an attitude like that!

There may be a lot of individual factors in your household that make “peace” difficult to imagine:

addictions, debts, bitterness, conflicts, etc. You aren’t going to overcome those by yelling a little louder or asserting your opinion one more time. In fact, the best way to start your household on the path to peace is to change *yourself* first. Start giving, listening and smiling a little more. Think of how others in your home are feeling and start praying for them. Make an effort to say one encouraging or complimentary thing to each member of your family, every day.

Is it okay to push my child toward success?

Kids have an in-born desire to please their parents (despite significant evidence to the contrary in teenagers), and most are thrilled to make a parent proud. That means some children will go to dramatic lengths to win the favor or catch the smile of a mom or dad, even if they go about it in all the wrong ways. You should use your influence to motivate kids in the right direction, but be sure that you:

- 1. Affirm that your love is unconditional.** Children need to sense that their parents are in love with them, in good times and bad. They need to feel total peace and never need to ask the question, “Do you still love me?” If your child’s success in academics, behavior, or sports is necessary for you to give them the best of your affection, you’ll do far more harm than good.
- 2. Help them recognize what areas of life matter the most.** “Success” is important, but not all-important. Your child’s desire to fulfill God’s purpose for his or her life is far more important than a drive toward earth-bound “success.” The best way to teach right priorities to your child is to adopt them yourself!
- 3. Leave plenty of time for family play (T.V. doesn’t count).** Many kids have schedules stacked with demanding activities: school, sports, music – it’s a full-time job of making people happy. Be sure that when they come home, they get some time off to be themselves and to enjoy their childhood. And if there isn’t enough time, cut some activities!

Feeling **SAFE**

Pace depends entirely on security, doesn't it? Imagine that you settle in to your warm bed, breath a sigh of relief from a busy day, and shut out the lights. You are drifting peacefully to sleep. Suddenly, you hear something – you're not quite sure if it was real or imagined, but now your eyes are wide open and your heartbeat is picking up the pace. In that moment, there's probably only one thing you can do to get back to almost-sleeping: get up, turn on the lights, and check it out. Until you feel safe, you won't feel sleepy.

The frustrating thing about life on earth is that despite our attempts at feeling safe, *nothing really is*. Even if it's encrypted, locked, hidden and password-protected, it's still at risk. Think of how much money is spent on things, real or imagined, that we are worried about; think of how many dangers we're told to watch out for on a daily basis. At best, enough safeguards, information and money might give us a "feeling" of security, but never a guarantee.

Alarms can be disabled, systems can be hacked, money can disappear, the weather can get ugly, protections can fail, health can go bad, random accidents could happen – and we could each spend the rest of our lives worried and afraid. Or, we could turn to the one Person who offers complete personal and eternal security. Consider the words of Jesus: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand."

Sheep are probably some of the dumbest animals God ever had the pleasure of creating; they'll wander off from the flock without any recognition that they are in grave danger. The shepherd, then, is charged with their protection and provision. The sheep go on with their activities day-to-day, having no idea of what their shepherd does to protect them.

That's why Jesus used this metaphor. We wander into situations that are highly dangerous, and sometimes, we may not even realize when our Good Shepherd rescues us. But that's the beauty of following Him. The Bible speaks of a "peace that is beyond understanding" available to those who trust in God. It's the peace of knowing that even if the worst should happen, we still

can count on Him to fulfill His promises to us. It's the security of knowing that even when this life is over, we can spend eternity with God in heaven.*

If you're sick with worry and stress, the promises of God are the only lasting remedy. He says, "I will never leave you or forsake you." He says, "No one can snatch you out of my hand." He says, "I can even work out the bad things in life for your ultimate good." Without this sort of faith in God, the blessings of peace will be hard to find, and impossible to maintain.

Real peace is only possible when you have the most power on your side, "peace through strength." Think of it: the Creator of the universe is promising to keep you securely in His hand, as long as you are among those who hear His voice and follow Him. Could you ask for more security than that?

So that is where we must begin. We must listen for His voice and follow Him. Isaiah, a biblical prophet, wrote: "All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own." And, just like sheep, the only time we're truly in danger is when we aren't following the Shepherd.

When we make the choice to repent, to turn away from "our own paths" and to put our faith in God to lead our lives, we can learn what it means to have true peace. Jesus put it this way: "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."

Difficult times will come. Perhaps even a few of the things you've been worried about will happen. But if you stick close to the Good Shepherd, you can rest assured that He is watching over you, that He is guiding your steps, and that even in difficulty, He wants to demonstrate His great love to you. And best of all, you can know that He will bring you safely to an eternal home of peace and joy in the end.

Bible Passages to Study: John 10, Romans 5. *Did you know that assurance of heaven is possible? Most people "hope" they'll gain entrance when they die, but they don't know for sure. There is good news! John the Apostle wrote a letter about all the ways a relationship with Christ is life-changing, and then said, "I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life." Read the book of 1 John in the Bible to learn more.



LOVE THAT NEVER FAILS

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death...No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither

death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. // **ROMANS 8:35-39**

REAL WORLD

WHAT WILL PEOPLE THINK?

Jackie admits that she's in bondage to fear and wishes she could change her life. We asked three women from the Weymouth Church family to offer personal advice for her situation.

THE SCENARIO

My life is controlled by other people. They don't know it - they might not even know me. But almost everything I do is about pleasing them; looking good in front of them. The way I handle myself, the things I buy, even the way I discipline my children - it's all centered on the opinions of others. I want them to believe that I have everything together. I want my kids to wear the best clothes, I want them to be above average, I want to be the model mom. I want to impress my friends. I feel like I have to keep up, stay fit, and even fake riches if necessary, all so that I can be acceptable to people.

I don't know where this started. Maybe it was with my mother, who I couldn't seem to please no matter how hard I tried. Maybe it was because I got teased for being chubby in grade school. Whatever the cause, I hate the way my life feels. I hate being worried about what other people are thinking, people I'm passing by on the street. I have to fake smiles and tell people I'm fine, when I'm not. I hate the fact that I don't even have my own dreams for the future anymore, because I'm spending so much time playing a part.

Are they looking at me, judging me? Or do they even care? I'm not sure if I want to know the answer. I just wish I could be myself.



**DONNA
LURTZ**

Mother of three
Medina, Ohio

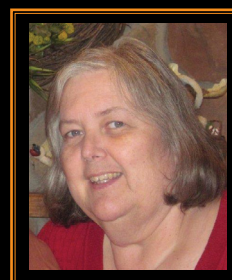
Jackie, I am so sorry to hear about you being in bondage to fear. God intends for us to live our lives in peace and freedom, not the way you are living! When we come to Jesus and trust in the work He did to save us and change us, we receive a new life from God that is not about fear, but about love. God tells us in 1 John 4:18, "Perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love."

God's love is perfect. That's why you can take your worries to Him with confidence. It's why you can trust Him more than you can trust anyone else. In Philippians 4:6-7, God tells us: "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Jackie, looking at the truth - about yourself and your bondage - is a step toward freedom. Whatever is holding you back right now, whatever doubts you have, bring it all to Jesus. He will break every chain and allow you to experience and enjoy His forgiveness. It is faith in the promises of our loving and almighty God that will bring the grace of confidence, boldness, and courage into your life.

Cast your fears upon the Lord throughout the day as they appear before you. It must become a daily part of your life to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus through studying His Word and through praying to Him for help.

God is faithful and will keep all His promises. He will give you the faith you need to face the adversaries in your life. He loves you so much, Jackie. And even though we've never met, I love you and will be praying for you. You're not alone.



**SUE
JARVIS**

Female Chaplain
Medina County Jail

Instead of looking at life through God's eyes, you are constantly imagining what others are thinking about you - and this robs you of any joy! You let your imagination run wild with theoretical possibilities, always assuming that other people are taking the time to look at you and pass judgment.

The Bible tells us that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." That includes you, Jackie. God designed you with your looks, your intelligence, your personality, and your mannerisms. If you want to be all that you were made to be, without having fear of what others are thinking or saying, you have to "get comfortable in your own skin."

Look in your mirror each morning and thank God for what you see and for what you are able to do. Thank him for your loved ones. Remind yourself that the people you love aren't perfect, and they don't expect you to be perfect either.

Look at other people in a restaurant or at a store someday. See how many of them are looking at you. Not many! If you stare at them long enough, they may glance back at you, but they may not even notice. They are too busy with their own errands, agendas, families, and problems to be worried about you or what shoes your children are wearing. Life is too short to spend it worried about what others think.

I'd also encourage you to pick two female friends that you can be totally honest with. If you feel tired, say so. If you are worried about your husband's job, say so. If you wonder what they really think, ask them. See how they respond with kindness. It may surprise you, but they actually care about the "real" you.



**KERI
AUSTIN**

Mother of three
Medina, Ohio

I know exactly how you feel, Jackie. Often times I would sacrifice the feelings of my children and husband in order to make others happy. I never let my kids just "be kids" for fear of getting their expensive clothes dirty. I also felt like if those judging me knew the whole story, they would not judge me so harshly.

I also realized that my fear of others judging me stemmed from me harshly judging others. I had the same expectations of others that I had of myself; I needed to have an attitude change about how I viewed people. I also allowed the opinions of men regarding my appearance to dictate my self-worth; the more men that found me attractive, the better I felt about myself. This only led to more heartache.

I finally dropped my burden into the hands of Jesus. I learned that I was made with care and precision for a purpose. Who was I, or anyone, to judge how the Creator made me? Everything we have has been given to us. My heart was touched to know that God gave me the personality and gifts I have to fulfill His greater purpose. His opinion is the one that matters the most! He chose me to be a wife for my husband, a mother to my kids and a friend to you. He accepts me just the way I am. Now I get to celebrate the uniqueness of others instead of holding them under the microscope.

ACTION POINTS:

1. Keep a journal of your feelings and perceptions each day, especially noting the things or people in your life that you are thankful for.
2. Write down Proverbs 29:25 and carry it in your purse: "Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety."
3. Change your focus from external appearances to character qualities. Instead of, "How does this make me look?" ask, "What could I do today to serve another person?"

PARENT CONNECT

TEACHING KIDS ABOUT STRESS

LAUREL LINDEN, RN & MOTHER OF 3

A care-free childhood? Hardly! Don't fool yourself into thinking your kids don't get stressed. Kids experience pressure every day, so don't discount their need to have good coping mechanisms in place to deal with stressors in healthy ways.

Preschool Aged Child—What could be stressful about playdough, crayons and dress-up? More than you might imagine. Young kiddos are learning to communicate, and are often very frustrated because they can't communicate what they are feeling. Also changes in routine such as potty training, moving into big-kid beds, and starting preschool can put pressure on them. Make sure they know you love them unconditionally and that you are always available for cuddles and hugs. Their struggle is to be independent while they still want to sit in your lap. Teach them simple things like taking deep breaths when they feel like blowing up.

School Aged Child—It's not uncommon to have a child involved in many activities in addition to school. Consider a child that partakes in gymnastics, soccer, dance, church, *and* their regular school day. Then throw in their developing social relationships; learning how to make friends and stay friends with peers – who each are involved in their own slew of activities. Make sure they have some down time each day to unwind, and *don't be afraid to cut back on the number of activities they are involved in*. Kids in this age group will develop their own interests—so don't force yours on them. Think of it this way, if your child is coerced into an activity you like but she doesn't, you are sending the message that you don't love her *just as she is*. School aged kids want to please their parents, so don't let “trying to keep Mom and Dad happy” add to their stressors.

Affirm them daily, let them know how proud you are of them, and what you love about them. Talk with your child about stressful situations: “What scenarios make you angry? Afraid? Worried? How do you think you should handle those feelings?” Encourage your child to relax, and to pray for help.

Teenagers— If I could go back to high school knowing what I know now. I'd tell myself not to worry so much about everything. (But I probably wouldn't listen to myself anyway!) Teens' “small worlds” consist of their friends, so any change in that world—a breakup, a spat with a friend, a rivalry—really throws them off. We try our hardest to open their eyes to the world at large and show them people and situations that are far worse off, but it is hard, hard, hard for them to see much beyond themselves. You can help your teen to manage his stress by teaching him to set priorities. School, work, church, and commitments they've made need to take priority. Walk your teen through goal-setting and time-management. Your teens are not always going to want to share with you everything that stresses them out, but you can still emphasize that God knows all their struggles, and He is always ready to hear their prayers.

SOME BIBLICAL WISDOM

“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.”

—Ephesians 6:4

feature

THE STRESS ISSUE

WORRY- PROOFING



“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.” (Philippians 4:8)

The first phrase of that verse is the most potent antidote to fear: fix your thoughts on what is *true*. Worry doesn't deal in the realm of the real. It's just your mind's way of dwelling on the stress of the unknown. The majority of what you worry about will probably never happen. The next time you're feeling afraid or anxious, pause the fright for a moment and consider the facts. Fix your mind on the truth of your situation, minus the imagination of worst-case outcomes.

“What if” questions can ruin your health, sour your attitude, cause mistrust in your relationships, and even shipwreck your faith. Worries of this sort are like self-imposed stress extenders – taking potentially stressful situations and milking every ounce of fear from them! And think of it, at the end of a night of worry, what have you gained? Jesus put it well: “Can all your worries add a single moment

to your life? And if worry can't accomplish a little thing like that, what's the use of worrying over bigger things?"

HOW TO STOP WORRYING

1. Think about what is, rather than what if.
“If” thinking can only raise your blood pressure, while “Is” thinking (whatever is true) can help you make smart decisions. If you are sick with worry, it's not a bad idea to list on a sheet of paper the things you know to be true about the situation, no “ifs” allowed! Once you have a clear picture of the truth, you can take some calculated steps to remedy the situation without letting your emotions get out of control.

2. Remember that God is bigger than your problems.
Whether it's a category five storm system or a rebellious child, a terminal disease or a financial crisis, God is bigger. He never promises that problems will disappear, but He does promise to stay with those who have faith in Him, no matter what trials they face.

3. Dwell on good things.
Our minds tend to wander toward negatives when

left unattended. We must *choose* to think about what is true, honorable, etc., just as Philippians 4:8 says. What we think about is a choice we make moment-by-moment. Are your choices leading you toward joy and gratefulness, or toward anxiety?

4. Give God your worries.
The Bible says He wants them: “Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you.” Determine to let God deal with all the unknowns. After you've done the best you know how to stay safe or to prepare practically for some difficult situation, let God have the rest entirely. He can take better care of “whatever it is” than you can anyway. Begin by making a list of your top fears, concerns and worries, then transfer the ownership of each worry to the Lord.

The words of Christ are a fitting summary of what we must do: “Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and God will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY:
Matthew 6:19-34, Philippians 4

WORRY-PROOFING CHECKLIST

- ✓ Whenever a worry comes to mind, combat it with a prayer of thankfulness to God for the blessings He has put in your life.
- ✓ Reduce your intake of the news media. News is primarily negative and is fertilizer for worry. To begin, see if you can go for five days without any news.
- ✓ Read through the Bible and make a list of positive promises God has made and any conditions He has set for their fulfillment.
- ✓ Start praying about your concerns, rather than fretting about them.
- ✓ Ask for help. If you're prone to worry, ask a trusted

friend or someone from your church to meet with you to talk about it.

✓/WORRY-PROOFING



As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for God, the living God. When can I go and stand before him?

Day and night I have only tears for food, while my enemies continually taunt me, saying, “Where is this God of yours?”

My heart is breaking as I remember how it used to be: I walked among the crowds of worshipers, leading a great procession to the house of God, singing for joy and giving thanks amid the sound of a great celebration!

Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again—my Savior and my God!

Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember you...I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your

waves and surging tides sweep over me. But each day the Lord pours his unfailing love upon me, and through each night I sing his songs, praying to God who gives me life.

“O God my rock,” I cry, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I wander around in grief, oppressed by my enemies?” Their taunts break my bones. They scoff, “Where is this God of yours?”

Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again—my Savior and my God! >Psalm 42

Daily Peace
The book of Psalms in the Bible is a collection of the prayers and songs of God's people. Reading a Psalm every day, and using it as a starting point for your own prayers, is a great way to find peace and rest for your soul.



You weren't made for a high-pressure existence. You were created to walk with God in peace and find joy in His presence.

Perfect Peace?

A biblical prophet prayed long ago, "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!"

The more we get to know God, and the more we study His Word, the more this statement makes sense. A focus on God fills us with faith and optimism to face the challenges ahead. Knowing that the Creator loves us, and even cares about the stressful details of our lives, is the first step toward peace.

You weren't made for a high-pressure existence. You were created to walk with God in peace and find joy in His presence. Yet, so many of us think we can do life better on our own. So we try. We strive, and we stress, and we worry.

But even for us who have walked away from God (or even if you've never been close to Him), Jesus makes an amazing offer.

"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

It doesn't matter who you are or where you've been. It doesn't matter how many sins you've committed or how many times you've turned your back on Him. It doesn't matter how heavy your burden may be. God desires to sit down with you, to speak to you, to be a friend and to walk life's difficult road with you.

Jesus once told a wayward church, "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends." Could He also be knocking at your heart's door?

It's no secret that human beings fall short of God's perfect standard. Our pride, selfishness, anger, lust, hate, and envy have plunged our world into despair. That's why things like fear and worry exist in the first place. But you can leave that life behind with a simple choice to believe in God's plan. Jesus died as a substitute for you, to pay the eternal penalty of your sins, so that you could be released from your bondage to guilt and fear. He made this incredible sacrifice out of love, so that rather than the fierce judgment of God that awaits His enemies, you can experience His eternal love in heaven. Perhaps it's time to admit your need for God's help, for forgiveness, and for life-change. Why not begin today?

In this world you will still have trouble, of course. But through it, if you keep your focus on God, you can live in perfect peace. You can live with confidence that God is with you no matter what happens on earth, and that He will carry you safely to heaven someday.

PRAYER: Lord, I know I've gone my own way and broken your commandments. Today I want to ask your forgiveness and turn away from my sins. I want to fulfill whatever purpose you have for my life. Thank you for dying for me and for rising from the dead to show your power over evil. I know that if I am a part of your family, I have no reason to fear. I want to give you my life so that you can be my Lord forever.

There is so much more to learn about what it means to trust in God and what Jesus' sacrifice was all about. Read the New Testament in your Bible* to get the whole story. And, feel free to call or email LifeChange with your questions, or if you'd like someone to talk with you about your new relationship with God.

SELF-EXAM

- ___ My family members comment on me being worried frequently.
- ___ I think a lot about what others are thinking of me.
- ___ I am scared that someone will find out my secrets.
- ___ I am afraid of death, so I try not to think about it.
- ___ I tend to dwell on worst-case scenarios.
- ___ I usually suspect the worst about people I don't know.
- ___ I'm not marking these items; I'm worried someone will see them.
- ___ I apologize all the time because I think I'm inferior or inadequate.
- ___ My first instinct when I get into tough situations is to panic and give up.
- ___ I don't do well in crowds, so I try to avoid public places.
- ___ I get angry easily, to the point where people avoid me sometimes.
- ___ I put pressure on my kids to perform so I'll look like a good parent.
- ___ I have nervous habits that come out when I'm stressed.

I deal with stressful situations by:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting angry | <input type="checkbox"/> Complaining |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Praying to God | <input type="checkbox"/> Taking deep breaths |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ignoring the problem | <input type="checkbox"/> Blaming other people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Swearing and cursing | <input type="checkbox"/> Going shopping |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Holding it inside | <input type="checkbox"/> Deciding not to care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talking to a friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Getting violent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Overeating | <input type="checkbox"/> Drinking or smoking |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pills | <input type="checkbox"/> Running away |

Things I have felt stress about lately:

- ___ unknowns in my future
- ___ broken or tense relationships
- ___ shame and dark secrets
- ___ bad money choices
- ___ not enough time to get everything done
- ___ low self-confidence
- ___ current events
- ___ my weight and personal appearance
- ___ poor choices my loved ones are making
- ___ fear of dying and not being ready for what awaits
- ___ knowing that something is missing in my life



How Stressed Am I?



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public speaking/flying/incarceration/
eviction/fight with spouse/
inheritance/medicine/bills/caution/
holidays/aging parents/angry
neighbors/changes at church/
work/government/news/layoffs/
STRESSED OUT?
envy/addictions/bitterness/
investments/arguments/
weather/disaster/war/
nuclear threats/uncertainty/
starting a business/
finding a job/
foreclosure/kids
going to school/
guilt/past hurts/
risks/family conflict/
misunderstandings

