

Stress

SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 17:2–4, 15, 16; 19:1, 2; Mark 6:31–34; Gal. 6:2; John 15:13.*

Memory Text: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (*Matthew 11:28, NIV*).

Stress touches everyone. Demands at work, family crises, guilt, uncertainty about the future, dissatisfaction with the past—these all are hard enough. All this, along with the general events of life, can put enough pressure on people that it affects their physical and mental health. Researchers Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe developed the social readjustment rating scale, which lists life events with corresponding stress values for each: the death of spouse—100; personal injury or illness—53; change in residence—20; etc. A person accumulating 200 or more points at any given time runs a 50 percent chance of becoming ill; someone accruing 300 or more will reach a point of crisis. Moderate amounts of stress are necessary to increase performance, but beyond a point, stress becomes a health hazard.

Jesus shows by precept and example that seeking God at a quiet time and place is the best remedy for life's stresses (*Mark 6:31*). If we will allow Him to, the Lord will help us deal with the pressures that are such an inevitable part of life here.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 15.*

Exciting Life Events

How did God provide for Elijah's survival during the long drought in Israel? *1 Kings 17:2–6, 15, 16.*

In the midst of a long famine, Elijah must have felt very close to the Lord, who took such personal care of him. First, he had the opportunity to witness ravens (normally nasty birds) come twice a day to feed him. Talk about a miracle! Then he saw endless rations of bread coming from a little oil and meal—enough food to feed three persons for two years. How much more evidence of God's providential care would anyone need?

Ellen G. White applied the lessons of this story to God's faithful people in the last days: "I saw that our bread and water will be sure at that time, and that we shall not lack or suffer hunger; for God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness. If necessary He would send ravens to feed us, as He did to feed Elijah."—*Early Writings*, p. 56.

What were some of the other things that happened to Elijah, and what lessons can we draw from them for ourselves? *1 Kings 17:17–22; 18:23–39, 45.*

God used Elijah to resurrect the widow's son. What a test of faith, and what a vindication of God's power over life and death! Next, the test at Mount Carmel was an irrefutable and spectacular demonstration of God's power. Finally, heavy rain after a three-year drought was another manifestation of God's involvement in human affairs. Elijah's life was full of direct and divine intervention. It's hard to imagine how anyone, after all that, could not fully trust in the Lord; yet, not long after all that, Elijah was swept up in the symptoms of stress and discouragement (see tomorrow's lesson).

Thus, there's an important lesson here. Regardless of the miracles in our lives, we always will face obstacles. No one, not even a prophet like Elijah, is immune to the troubles that life brings.

Are success and achievement bringing you stress? A long series of exhilarating events (even positive ones) may add much weight to your load. At the same time, why must we be careful not to be too self-satisfied during good times?

Bitter Life Events

Read 1 Kings 18:40. Whether or not Elijah took part himself in the killing of hundreds of people, he was clearly in charge of the operation, and that must have been an emotionally devastating experience. This act was permitted by God as the only way to eradicate the idolatry, which included the sacrifice of children (*Jer. 19:5*). Nevertheless, it surely must have taken an emotional toll on the prophet.

On top of the stress of that ordeal, what else did Elijah face? *1 Kings 19:1, 2.*

From the beginning of Ahab's reign, the wicked queen had been adamant that her husband should "serve Baal and worship him" (*1 Kings 16:31, NIV*). As a result, all of Israel had fallen into idolatrous practices. Jezebel was instrumental in restoring the worship of Ashtoreth, one of the vilest and most degrading forms of Canaanite idolatry. Now, with the death of all the priests, Jezebel felt impatient and enraged.

How did Elijah react to the message brought from Jezebel? *1 Kings 19:3, 4.*

How could this man of God, after having witnessed a series of wonderful miracles, be in such a state of despair? How did he reach the point of asking God to take his life? After all, look at the miracles he had seen and even had been involved in!

"Satan has taken advantage of the weakness of humanity. And he will still work in the same way. Whenever one is encompassed with clouds, perplexed by circumstances, or afflicted by poverty or distress, Satan is at hand to tempt and annoy. He attacks our weak points of character. He seeks to shake our confidence in God, who suffers such a condition of things to exist."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 120.

How often have you done the same thing: forgetting the incredible way the Lord has worked for you in the past? Why is it so important, especially during times of despair and stress, to cling to the memories of how God has worked in your life in the past? Why do we so easily forget what the Lord has done for us? How can praise and worship help you through difficult times?

God's Therapy

Read 1 Kings 19:5–9. What were the simple remedies provided for Elijah during this stressful time in his life? What can we take from this for ourselves? How are our physical actions impacting, either for good or for bad, our mental attitude?

Sleep. Eat. Sleep again. Eat again. And then engage in intense physical exercise—forty days and forty nights; from Mount Carmel to Mount Horeb. How interesting that proper sleep, exercise, and a healthy diet often are prescribed to combat psychological stress.

A common treatment for mood disorders is called activity scheduling. It consists of developing a rigid timetable that contains pleasant and purposeful activities that will force a depressed person to organize, anticipate, and carry out events. Such a regimen helps the person fill time positively and avoid self-pity. Physical exercise often is included in the activities, because it helps produce endorphins, morphine-like natural chemicals that enhance mood and temporarily relieve depression.

With heavenly guidance Elijah was led into the steps that would restore his normal mental health. As with Elijah, we need to be open to divine leading. As soon as Elijah sat down under the broom tree, he prayed. Yes, it was the wrong kind of prayer (asking God to take his life), but at least it was a prayer, a desire for God to take charge.

Over time Elijah overcame his terrible discouragement, and God still was able to use him (*see 1 Kings 19:15, 16; 2 Kings 2:7–11*). Before being taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah was given the great privilege of anointing his successor, and of witnessing the separation of the waters of the Jordan River, thus permitting him and Elisha to cross the river on dry ground.

Finally, Elijah was taken to heaven, without ever having to die himself. Kind of an ironic “end” for a man who, not too much earlier, was asking God to take his life!

What are we missing out on if we pray only in times of discouragement and despair? Contrast the benefits of a life of constant prayer as opposed to prayer only in emergency situations. How can you learn to live more consistently in an attitude of constant prayer?

Jesus' Method to Manage Stress

With the blossoming of cell phones in the mid-1990s, a veteran Adventist minister said, "I will never have one! As I visit churches and listen to people's problems, I get weary and distressed. But when I return to my car, I find refuge. If I had a cell phone, I wouldn't find rest even in my car." Every follower of Christ needs a quiet hiding place to find calm, to pray, and to listen to God through His Written Word.

Read Mark 6:31. What lesson can we take from this for ourselves? How often do you do this for yourself, or do you always have an excuse?

Speaking of Jesus, Ellen G. White wrote: "His hours of happiness were found when alone with nature and with God. Whenever it was His privilege, He turned aside from the scene of His labor, to go into the fields, to meditate in the green valleys, to hold communion with God on the mountainside or amid the trees of the forest. The early morning often found Him in some secluded place, meditating, searching the Scriptures, or in prayer. From these quiet hours He would return to His home to take up His duties again, and to give an example of patient toil."—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 90.

What other sanctuary did Jesus have? *Matt. 21:17, Mark 11:11.*

People may be a source either of distress or of peace. Jesus found peace with friends who brought comfort and affection to His life. This He found at the house of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. "His heart was knit by a strong bond of affection to the family at Bethany. . . . Often, when weary, thirsting for human fellowship, He had been glad to escape to this peaceful household. . . . Our Saviour appreciated a quiet home and interested listeners. He longed for human tenderness, courtesy, and affection."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 524.

How can you apply Jesus' stress management method to your life? What advice would you give to a city dweller who needs to travel for hours to find nature? Or to someone who lives in an extended family with a large number of people under the same roof? Whom would you go to, among your family/friends, if you found yourself disoriented and in need of emotional support?

Bringing Relief to Others

What are the specific features about Jesus' behavior that Peter used to describe his Master? *Acts 10:38*.

Jesus' style was fundamentally selfless. He utilized all His energy to serve others, to bring them relief through His kind words and healing power. Jesus never used His divine powers to benefit Himself. This must have made such an impression on Peter that his description of the Savior was of someone who “ ‘went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil’ ” (*vs. 38, NIV*).

In the majority of cases, the pressure brought about by work, relationships, money, etc., is self-centered. Focusing on others (rather than on oneself) is a good way to remove personal pressure. People who engage in voluntary work, community projects, etc., report greater feelings of well-being and satisfaction than people who do not.

Read Galatians 6:2, Philippians 2:4, and John 15:13. What message is in there for us?

John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937) provided an example of how to survive stress by moving the focus from oneself to others. By 1879 his company, Standard Oil, handled about 90 percent of the refining in the United States. By the age of 50, he was the richest man alive. But in 1891, he had a nervous breakdown and was near death. However, he recovered from his illness in just a few months.

How?

Apart from a simple diet, rest, and exercise, he decided to give away his fortune and spent the remaining 40 years of his life as a philanthropist. Early in the twentieth century, his personal fortune peaked at nearly \$900 million. At the time of his death, his estate was valued at \$26 million. His donations did a lot of good in the world. And as for himself, he extended his life by nearly another fifty years, living in contentment to the age of 97.

What has been your own experience with the blessings that come from serving others? Why not make a concentrated and prayerful effort to do more?

Further Study: “Utterly wearied, he [Elijah] sat down to rest under a juniper tree. And sitting there, he requested for himself that he might die. . . . A fugitive, far from the dwelling places of men, his spirits crushed by bitter disappointment, he desired never again to look upon the face of man. . . . Into the experience of all there come times of keen disappointment and utter discouragement—days when sorrow is the portion, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind benefactor of His earthborn children; days when troubles harass the soul, till death seems preferable to life. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt, the bondage of unbelief. Could we at such times discern with spiritual insight the meaning of God’s providences we should see angels seeking to save us from ourselves, striving to plant our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills, and new faith, new life, would spring into being.”—Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 162.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Have you ever had times during which you clearly saw the hand of God working in your life, and your faith was strong, only to sink low right after and find yourself filled with doubts about God and His leading in your life? What have you learned from that kind of experience that could help others who might be facing the same thing?
- 2 What is it about helping others that makes us feel better? Why is that so often the case? At the same time, why is it so hard to give of ourselves to others? How can we learn to be more willing to die to self in order to serve the needs of those around us better?
- 3 Take a good look at your own health habits. What are you eating and drinking? What kind of exercise program are you on? How much leisure time do you have? What changes can you make that could help you feel better emotionally, as well as physically? Though in some cases, people have very serious psychological needs that must be professionally addressed, many times a change in lifestyle habits can make a big difference in how we feel.
- 4 How much “spare” time do you have? What do you do with that time? How could you better utilize that time to enhance your relationship with God?

The Prodigal

by ALBERTO VILLANUEVA

As a youth growing up in Mexico, I found no reason to live. I was deeply into alcoholism and was having problems with my family.

Then I met a Seventh-day Adventist man who gave me an old, well-marked Bible. I read the Bible, especially the marked verses, and was amazed that God's Word was so alive, so vital! I began attending church with the man and continued reading the Bible. God rescued me from my hopeless life and gave me a ministry to help people who are living as I once lived.

I met a family who was distant relatives of my wife. The husband and I became friends, but when I asked him for permission to study the Bible with his family, he said no, explaining that they were members of another faith. As we talked, I prayed that God would open this man's heart. As I prepared to leave, he said, "Come back soon and share the Bible with us!"

When I returned to study with this family, Jorge, one of the sons, stomped angrily from the room. Whenever I went to visit the family, Jorge would leave the room. But we continued studying together, and the family members accepted the Bible truths they discovered. Then one evening Jorge joined the Bible studies. And when seven members of the family asked to join the church, Jorge was among them. Only later did I learn that Jorge had been so angry about the Bible studies that he had plotted to kill me.

I shared the gospel with people in a mountain village some distance from my home. One day I noticed that some men were following me to the home of an interested family. The man I was visiting saw the men and warned me to be careful, that these men were dangerous.

Then he told the men who had followed me, "Leave him alone. He's a missionary who has come to share God's love with us." The thieves didn't bother me again. Eventually, seven people in this village joined God's church.

I love sharing the gospel with others as someone shared it with me. I praise God that He has led me to some 50 people who have committed their hearts to Christ.

Please pray for those who still live without hope. And remember that your mission offerings help make a difference in the lives of those who need to know about God's love.

ALBERTO VILLANUEVA *shares his faith in Morelos, Mexico.*