

**Dr Mutiso : Notes on a lecture given at the Pastors' conference Morogoro Sept 2008,
entitled 'Stress Management'**

MANAGEMENT OF MINISTRY STRESS AND STRAIN

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion that one can live a stress free life is both unrealistic and unchristian. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth, " We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8 – 9). Again he catalogues his hardships in ministry (2 Cor. 6:3 – 10).

Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, David and many Bible giants are good examples of men and women who were in one way or other stressed out.

This life we live (after the garden of Eden and before the new Jerusalem) is one characterized by trouble, trials, tribulations and a host of challenges.

2. DEFINITION

- "Major life experience which creates the need for change in the person's (people's) life"
- "A nonspecific response to any demand"
- "A prolonged series of everyday hassles"

Stress per se is not bad in and of itself. We all need a certain degree of stress for optimum functioning.

Some stress is actually essential for survival. This is often called the fight or flight instinct. During such times the body goes into instant red alert; the heart rate increases, blood pressure is elevated, blood from the periphery is withdrawn and directed to vital organs only, adrenaline is poured in huge quantities and one is ready for fight or flee. The whole scenario is reversed once the emergency is over. This is normal stress. However, if this becomes the normal way of responding to normal issues then we have a problem. Some people go through life as though it was a major emergency. They are in a constant state of panic.

There is another type of stress called **eustress**. This is the good positive stress one experiences in times of happiness, fulfillment and satisfaction e.g. a bride on her wedding day experiences eustress.

The third type of stress is called **distress**. Here we are dealing with excess demanding level of stress over prolonged periods. This is harmful and it will be the burden of rest of this seminar.

3. CAUSES

3.1 God

Everything in our life is under his sovereign supervision.

Job was probably one of the most stressed individuals in the Bible.

- Was blameless and upright
- Feared God and shunned evil
- Was immensely rich

- God initiated a discussion in heaven concerning Job (Job 1:8)
- God went on to give Satan permission to take all he had (Job 1:12)
- Then he suddenly lost it all: Livestock, Children, workers, property, all
- Job's response (Job 1:20 – 22) - tore his robe, shaved his head and then worshipped God.
- Job 23:10 "But he knows the way I take; when he has tried me I will come forth as gold". Read vs 11.

Isaiah 48:10-11 "I have tested you in a furnace of affliction....."

- God will refine us thoroughly where his glory is at stake.

John 15:1 –2

- God prunes us to make us fruitful. This is often painful.

3.2 Myself

- Disorganization
- Basic distrust of others
- Temperament:
 - For the choleric idleness is stressful.
 - For the Sanguine deadlines are very stressful.
 - For the melancholic his perfectionism generates stress.
 - For the phlegmatic crisis decisions are stressful.
- Eager beaver syndrome. For the eager beaver work is pleasure. What stresses him is tiredness which keeps him from functioning.
- Indiscipline.
- Poor health: Bad eating habits
 - Bad living habits – inactive lifestyles
 - Bad sleeping habits
- Unresolved conflicts.
- Sin (Psalms 38: 3 – 11)

3.3 Others

- Unrealistic expectations from others whether real or imagined.
- Emotionally draining relationships.
- Unresolved conflicts.
- Lack of approval and appreciation.
- Inability to say "No" either because we are ignorant of our capacities or because we are afraid to hurt others.
- Deadlines.
- Extended family demands in time, money and emotion.
- Nuclear family demands.
- Societal expectations especially in living standards – where you live, the car you drive, where our children go to school.
- Multiple roles: manager, husband, father, uncle, grandfather, elder, clan leader etc.

3.4 Satan

1 Peter 5:8 "be sober be watchful"

- Points of vulnerability
- Demonic infestation (Luke 4:33 – 35)
- Demonic caused illness (Luke 4:38 – 39)
- Curses (Deut. 28:15 – 68)

- Idolatry
- Witchcraft – sorcery, spells, divination
- Ancestral bondages
- Back-lash and counter attack (1 Kings 19: 1-9)

4. SYMPTOMS

4.1 Emotional

- Disillusion
- Sense of failure
- Negativism and cynicism.
- Feeling not appreciated
- Irritability.
- Irrational anger
- Frustration, hopelessness, helplessness.
- Apathy
- Reduced concentration
- Forgetfulness
- Confusion
- Depression
- Discouragement

4.2 Physical

- Migraines
- Hotness, coldness, fullness & heaviness in the head
- Insomnia
- Anorexia
- Multiple body pains that will not respond to analgesics
- Low energy and fatigue
- Morning inertia
- High blood pressure

4.3 Others

- Trouble keeping up one's usual activities
- Low output in spite of increased efforts
- High rate of absenteeism
- Conflicts at work, socially, home and Church

4.4 Example of Elijah (1 Kings 19:1 –10)

- After Mount Carmel
- Elijah was afraid
- Left his servant a foolish decision
- Disillusioned
- Wanted to die
- Very tired
- Distorted perception "I am the only one remaining" (vs 11).

5. MANAGING STRESS

What you don't know drives you but what you know you can do something about. The key here then is identifying the cause (s) so that appropriate steps can be taken.

5.1 Pressure from Myself

- Know your capacity, gifts and training. Do not take on more than you can handle. Do not take on that for which you do not have skills to handle. Dare delegate, hire help if need be. Learn to say "No". (Gen 18: 7ff)
- Get organized. Have a place for all and have all in place. Keep a diary, keep realistic timetables, plan jobs with deadlines well, keep a "things to do list".
- Prioritize (Luke 10: 38 – 42)
- Find out stress outlets work for you:
 - Leisurely walks in open spaces
 - Jog away a stressful day or situation
 - Other recreation
- Rest:
 - Take regular breaks. The more intense a job, the more frequent should you take short breaks. (Mark 6:30 – 32)
 - Take your leave regularly and go on vacation
 - Sleep well and enough at least 7 hours per day
- Health:
 - Eat regular balanced and whole some meals
 - Keep optimum weight not too little and not too much
- Keep fit
 - F - Frequency - alternate days
 - I - Intensity - break into a sweat
 - T - Time - 20 to 30 minutes
- Get regular medical check-ups

5.2 Pressure from Others

- Promote team interdependence where everybody is important and they know it. (Rom 12: 3ff)
- Exodus 18:13-24
 - What are you doing (v 14-15)
 - What you are doing is not good (v 17)
 - Select capable men to serve (v 21-22)
 - You will then stand the strain (v 23)
 - Moses listened (v 24)
- Clear policies reduce tension and facilitate efficiency
- Suggested guidelines eliminate confusion, misunderstanding and acrimony
- Help others excel in their area of expertise
- Conflicts should be faced head on even if they cannot be immediately resolved
- Do not compare yourself with others or others with each other (Gal. 1:10)
- Plan together
- Play together
- Laugh together
- Cry together

5.3 Pressure from the devil

- Be sober be watchful (1 Peter 5: 8)
- Be under the blood
- Be fully armed at all times (Eph 6:10ff)
- Be constantly in God's present (ps 11:1ff)

- Make a clean break with the devil:
 - Recognize
 - Repent
 - Renounce
 - Release

5.4 Pressure from God

Job said "He knows the way I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold" (Job 23:10)

"I know you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2)

Hab. 3:17 – 19 Joyful surrender and submission

Let God be God

Everything in our life is under his sovereign supervision.