

Real Life Studies

From Stress To Success




Church of Christ
Marsalis Avenue

Real People Serving the Real God

Real Life Studies
From Stress to Success

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Table of Contents

<i>Preface</i>	1
<i>Lesson 1 – From Stress to Success</i>	2
<i>Lesson 2 – Ready for the Roaring</i>	6
<i>Lesson 3 – Perspective Matters</i>	12
<i>Lesson 4 – Chill Out</i>	17
<i>Lesson 5 – Take Your Medicine</i>	21
<i>Lesson 6 – You’re Invited</i>	26
<i>About the Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ</i>	30

Preface

Stressors are unavoidable. Whether it is job stress, school, a pending deadline, relationship, or a flat tire, we each experience stress. It is how we approach those stressors that makes the difference between us handling stress or stress handling us.

This *Real Life* study, From Stress to Success, focuses on mindsets that can help us effectively deal with stress. As we embark upon this study, we will be confronted with real issues that real people face. Throughout this study there are reflection questions that will encourage you to dig deeper. Whether you are a Gen Z-er, Millennial, Gen X-er, or Baby Boomer, this series will challenge you to examine your life and grow where God desires growth. It is our prayer that God uses this series of lessons to transform lives for His glory! We also trust that those who are not connected to God in Christ will see the importance of being a Christian. It is because Christ lives that we can move from stress to success!

*Note: All scripture references will be from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise stated.

Lesson 1 From Stress to Success

Lesson Text: 1 Peter 5:6-7

Feelings of stress, worry, and anxiety have never been higher in our lifetime. No one is immune to stress. Everyone experiences periods of stress, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, social class, or age. Typically, adults tend to think that children and youth are oblivious to and exempt from stress. Many adults minimize and dismiss the feelings of stress that youth feel. However, the reality is that everyone faces stressful situations.

In 1 Peter 5, we learn how to go from stress to success. Peter writes to God's people, who are experiencing suffering and persecution. There is uncertainty all around them. Their lives do not look how they thought they would look at this point in time. They didn't think that being a Christian would be so challenging and costly. Confidence is low, while stress and anxiety are high. God has a word for them and for us that will help us deal with stress. In order to move from stress to success, we must adapt appropriate mindsets.

If you want to move from stress to success, be humble. First Peter 5:6-7 states, "Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."

There is a truth expressed in verse 5 that leads to the spirit of humility in verse 6. God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Beware of your pride, because God fights against the proud. But He gives His favor to the humble.

You have to ask yourself, "Do I want to receive opposition from God or do I want to receive grace and favor from God?" There are blessings that we receive through a spirit of humility that cannot be received by those who possess a spirit of pride.

"Therefore, humble **yourselves...**" You are the only person that you have the responsibility or the authority to

humble. You don't have the authority to humble your family members, your teachers or the other kids at school, your spouse, your boss, employees, or co-workers. It's not your job to humble the preacher, the shepherds, the deacons, or any other member of the church. I cannot humble you. The shepherds cannot humble you. You have the responsibility to humble yourself so that God does not have to humble you.

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God..."

The mighty hand of God is described in Deuteronomy 5:15, 6:21, and 7:8. The mighty hand of God is the hand that delivers, frees and elevates the humble.

On the other hand, the mighty hand of God is the hand that can crush, defeat, and destroy the proud. Humble yourself enough to trust that one who is strong enough to deliver you and defeat your enemies. And when the time is right, God will elevate you. He will lift you up. God knows when the time is right to exalt you. There are some things that God doesn't give us when we want them. We think we are ready for them, but God knows that we are not.

Have you ever prayed for something and God's answer was not yet, but later God gave you what you prayed for? When we are in the midst of a situation, we really cannot tell the difference between God saying, "No" and God saying, "Not yet." When you are living it, "Not yet" looks like "No". If you have ever prayed for something one year and God gives it to you three or four years later, when you look back, you will often discover that you weren't ready for it when you first asked for it.

Waiting on the proper time requires humility. When things take too long, we tend to get prideful. We feel like we deserve certain things and that God should have moved by now. And if God or others are taking too long, we take over.

We must be intentional about humbling ourselves, because the natural tendency is for us to exalt ourselves. If we are going to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, we must be

willing to admit that our knowledge is limited and incomplete. Understand that in due time is always in God's time, not ours.

One way we show humility is by not worrying. We demonstrate humility by casting all our anxiety upon God. Worry is a form of pride. When Christians are filled with anxiety, we are convinced that we must solve the problems in our lives in our own strength. When we worry, our actions are saying that we don't trust God. When we throw our worries upon God, we are expressing trust in His mighty hand, acknowledging that He is Lord and Sovereign over all.

Humility means that I trust God to take care of me. We give anxieties to God because God cares and God can. He has us on His heart and is concerned about our lives. He cares about every detail of our lives. He can handle it all. God loves us too much to be irresponsible with our anxieties.

Casting communicates the idea of throwing it. Have you ever thrown rocks into a lake? The goal is to see how far you can throw it. After you throw the rock, you don't go back to get the rock. Often, when it comes to our worries, fears, and concerns, many of us want to play catch with God. We throw them to God and open our hands to signal that we want them back. Make the decision to give God your cares without retrieving them again.

We are to casting **ALL** of our anxiety on God. Which anxieties and cares are you holding on to because you don't trust God with them? Are there certain areas of your life you have not turned over to God?

Do you trust Him with your job situation, but not with your dating? Do you trust Him to keep you safe at school, but not to pass the tests at school, so you cheat? Do you trust God to bless you in your health, but have yet to give Him your marriage? Are we giving God both the big and the small worries? There is no worry too small, nor is there one too big.

When you cast your cares upon God, you now put the responsibility on God to handle what you give Him. You are

going to have anxiety. What will you do with it? Are you going to keep it or are you going to cast it?

Here are some practical ways to handle stress.

1. Check your relationship with God. Do I trust Him? Is my disobedience a reason for my stress?
2. Pray about what's stressing you. Make a list of all that is stressing you and give it to God.
3. Remember that your inner attitude does not have to mirror your outward circumstances. Just because your circumstances stink, that doesn't mean that your attitude has to stink.
4. Change your perspective. The only thing that you can control is yourself, and you need the Holy Spirit's help to do that. Learn to release control to the One who is in control.
5. Prioritize and delegate. When overloaded with work, delegate what you can to others. Delay what is not pressing. Get rid of unnecessary stressors in your life (see Exodus 18:17-18).
6. Schedule time for rest, fun, and reflection.
7. Exercise regularly. Eat healthy. Sleep sufficiently.
8. If you are married, enjoy the benefits of it. It is scientifically proven that sex relieves stress.
9. Assess if your stress is acute or chronic stress.
 - Is it short term or long term?
 - What is my plan for addressing the stressors that I can change?
 - How will I cope with the stressor that I cannot change?
 - What is the lesson that God wants me to learn?

As you seek to release your stress to God, give yourself grace. There may be times when you will have to remind yourself that you have given something over to God.

Lesson 2

Ready for the Roaring

Lesson Text: 1 Peter 5:8-9

8 Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

9 But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

You are going to have anxiety. What will you do with it? Are you going to keep it or are you going to cast it? Humility allows us to cast our worries and stressors upon the Lord instead of playing catch with God when it comes to our stress. Hopefully you are evaluating your life to make sure that you are not carrying what you should be casting.

If we are going to move from stress to success, we must be ready. Trusting God with your worries does not mean that you can just check out and live aimlessly.

“I don’t have to pay my bills; God’s got it.” “I am going to just eat whatever I want to, because when it’s your time, it’s your time.” “I am not going to worry about working. The Lord will provide.” That is not what it means to trust God with our anxiety!

We must live life with purpose. We must be ready. If we are going to move from stress to success, we need to be ready to face the enemy. In order to ready we must be sober and alert.

To be sober means to be in control of our thought processes. Those who are sober will not fall into irrational thinking. Being sober means exhibiting characteristics that are the opposite of those exhibited by a person who is drunk.

You may be thinking, “I got being sober under control because I don’t drink, which means I can’t get drunk.” You don’t have to be drunk to exhibit the characteristics of a drunk person. If you look back at moments in your life, there are likely times when you weren’t drunk, but you weren’t sober.

Your blood alcohol level can be 0.00 yet you exhibit a lack of control. You don't even have to be tipsy to have impaired judgment. You don't have to have a little liquor in you to have a lack of caution. You don't have to be buzzed to say things you shouldn't say, or get a little too loose and free with people.

When you are sober you exercise self-control, sound judgment, and caution. When you are sober there are some words that go unsaid. There are some places that your feet don't take you when you are sober. There are some establishments that you don't frequent when you are sober. There are some crowds you don't run in when you are sober.

Be sober and be alert. Be aware of your surroundings. Don't get caught sleeping or slipping. Watch your blind spots. We all have areas of potential vulnerability. Know what yours are and look both ways. Expect Satan to come at you. Expect him to throw temptations your way that appeal to you. Be alert.

To be sober and alert requires both preparations and precautions. Offense and defense. On offense I need to plan my strategy before I get into the situation. I also need the discipline to avoid certain situations. On defense I need to be ready to fight back when I am attacked.

A clear head and an alert mind reduce your stress. When you think clearly, you are often able to avoid stress inducing situations or keep them in their proper perspective. Sobriety and alertness reduce the likelihood that you will put yourself into stress inducing situations.

There are some stressors that are just part of the human experience. They are existential stressors. They are just a part of life. COVID, political uncertainty, job issues, mean kids and bad food at school are just a part of life. These types of stressors must be managed, but really cannot be avoided.

Then there are some stressors that we bring into our lives. We introduce them into our environment. Of course, when we engage in the activity, it is not our intention to bring stress into

our lives. The stress is a product of the activity. We don't look at something and say, "Let me do this because I need some extra stress in my life." Our plan is to have fun, meet a need, do something for self, or help a friend out. But the by-product is that we bring stress into our lives. We didn't read the warning label before we took the bait. We didn't realize that the activity would come with some side-effects.

When we fail to be sober-minded, we end up having a spiritual hangover. That's why we have to be sober and alert. Self-control, sound judgment and caution will keep you from having a hangover.

Being sober and alert will keep you from swiping your credit card now and being stressed later trying to figure out how you are going to pay for what you could not afford to buy. It will keep you from swiping right when you know that the person is Mr. or Miss Wrong. Being sober and alert will keep you faithful to your spouse. It will keep you from taking your own life when life seems too much.

As a young person, being sober and alert leads you to call your parents to pick you up when that party you are attending starts getting out of hand. Being sober will lead you to do what is wise and keep you from doing dumb. When we are sober and alert, we will not put ourselves in situations that cause stress and disrupt our peace.

Your sobriety and alertness are necessary for your survival. You have an enemy! Satan is an enemy, not a friend. He is our adversary. He stands in opposition to us. The devil roars like a lion to induce fear in the people of God. In the context of 1 Peter, persecution is the roar by which he tries to intimidate believers, hoping that they will quit in the face of suffering.

In the wild, lions roar when they are looking for something to devour. They do not roar when they have found something to devour. When lions hunt, they stay hidden for as long as possible while they approach their prey.

Satan is not going to attack loudly. He wants to sneak up on us and catch us off guard. The longer he can stay hidden, the more likely he will be able to catch us slipping. That's why we have to be sober and alert.

The contrast between God and the devil is quite striking. God tenderly cares for His children, inviting us to bring our worries to Him so that He can sustain us. God promises to protect His flock in all our distress. But the devil's aim is not to comfort us, but to terrify us. Our adversary does not want to deliver us from fear but to devour our faith through fear.¹ He devours those who are not sober and alert. Satan devours the unprepared.

Who are the unprepared? The arrogant are unprepared. The disconnected are unprepared. The more isolated you are, the greater your danger of being devoured. That is one reason it is important to be in the assembly with the people of God. The unaware are unprepared. There are some who don't realize that there is a fight going on and that they are in it. Others don't know how to fight. Stress often comes because we are unprepared.

When we feel alone, weak, helpless, and cut off from other Christians, we can get tunnel vision. We become so focused on our troubles that we forget to watch for danger. When we indulge in pleasures and distractions, we are vulnerable to attacks. These attacks come in various forms, temptation, fear, loneliness, worry, depression, persecution. Satan wants to hit where it will hurt. He wants to find your weakest spot.

But all is not lost against this enemy. He can be defeated. Resist him! Resistance is not passive but represents active engagement against a foe. You will not triumph over the devil if you remain passive. You can't let him push you around. When Satan attacks, don't back down or give in. Don't give him an inch, because if you give him an inch, he will try to take your life.

¹ Schreiner, T. R. (2003). *1, 2 Peter, Jude* (Vol. 37, p. 242). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

We resist the devil by being firm in the faith. We do not stand in our own strength, but in the exercise of a faith that depends upon the strengthening and protecting power of God. The moment we stop believing is the moment that Satan attacks and devours us.

If we want to go from stress to success, we must trust God enough to resist the devil. Resisting the devil means that we remain firm in our faith and trust in God. We triumph over the devil as we continue to trust God, believing that God truly cares for us and will sustain us until the end.

We resist the devil by keeping our experience in the proper perspective. The believers of Peter's day were suffering terrible attacks from Satan, attacks that had broken out in severe persecution.

How do Christians stand against so much? By keeping in mind that other believers are also being attacked, and many are faithfully resisting the devil. Others are standing steadfast in their faith. Therefore, their example encourages us. We are not alone in the world. There are others suffering the very same afflictions of the devil as we are, and they are resisting faithfully. They are standing fast for Christ. Therefore, we must let their example stir us to firmly resist the devil. We must use their example to arouse us to stand fast for Christ.

Some of our stress stems from us thinking that we are the only ones. You are not the only one going through this. It is not that God hates you or doesn't love you. Suffering is an experience that is common to every Christian. Sometimes the comfort comes in knowing that you are not the only one. And when we stand firm, we become the inspiration that others need to know that they are not alone.

Reflection Questions

What types of situations in your life have challenged your sober perspective?

What are some boundaries that you can set that will help prevent unnecessary stress in your life?

Consider an area of weakness in your life. What strategies can you use to resist the devil in that area?

Lesson 3 Perspective Matters

Lesson Text: 1 Peter 5:10-11

¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

¹¹ To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Believe it or not, your experience of suffering and stress will not last forever. As mentioned in the first lesson, there are two types of stress: acute and chronic.

Acute stress is short-term stress. There is a situation that occurs that generates stress. It could be a disagreement with a friend, being involved in a fender-bender, a deadline that is approaching, a job interview, receiving a speeding ticket. The acute-stress response is immediate and intense in that moment, and in certain circumstances it can be thrilling.

A single episode of acute stress generally doesn't cause problems for healthy people. However, severe acute stress can cause mental health problems — such as post-traumatic stress disorder. It can also cause physical difficulties such as tension headaches, stomach problems or serious health issues — such as a heart attack.

Mild acute stress can actually be beneficial — it can spur you into action, motivate and energize you. The problem occurs when stressors pile up and stick around.

Chronic stress is long term stress. Examples of chronic stress are poor working conditions; ongoing financial difficulties; constant conflict with someone; continuing health problems; and other ongoing burdens.

Stress resulting from repeated exposure to situations lead to the release of stress hormones. This type of stress can cause wear and tear on your mind and body. This persistent stress can lead to health problems, such as headaches, depression and

insomnia. The effects of chronic stress may be longer lasting and more problematic than the effects of acute stress.²

Both acute and chronic stress can be managed. The key is to have a plan to change or cope with your stressors. We need to be willing to accept the things we cannot change, have the courage to change what we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

Our mindset and perspective will help determine how we respond to stressful situations. A mindset of humility, readiness, and hope allows us to go from stress to success.

According to 1 Peter 5:6-11 suffering is part of the equation. Jesus reminds us of this in John 16:33. "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

Jesus never said we wouldn't have problems. In fact, He said just the opposite. Since we exist in this world we will have tribulation. Trouble, sufferings, drama, mess, and confusion are found in the world. You don't have to go looking for it, it finds you. Suffering is inevitable.

We would be less stressed out if we stopped trying to avoid the unavoidable and escape the inescapable. In the world, we will have tribulation. But notice what else Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you that you may have peace." These things. Well what things?

In talking with His disciples starting in John 13:31, Jesus shares with them words of comfort, encouragement, and

² Sparks, D. (April 17, 2019). *Mayo Mindfulness: Know Your Triggers for Stress*. Mayo Clinic
<https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/mayo-mindfulness-know-your-triggers-for-stress/#:~:text=A%20single%20episode%20of%20acute,as%20post%20traumatic%20stress%20disorder.>

empowerment. So now He tells them in John 16:33, I have told you all what I told you so that in Me you may have peace.

Brothers and sisters, in Christ you abide in the Prince of Peace, therefore your heart should be saturated with peace. Yes, you will have trouble, but your troubles won't have you because Christ's peace is greater than the world's troubles. Therefore, be courageous. Be bold because Jesus has conquered the world, stripping trouble and tribulation of the power to harm you.

To paraphrase Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 the Contemporary English Version says, "We often suffer, but we are never crushed. Even when we don't know what to do, we never give up. In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again."

"After you have suffered for a little while..." Suffering is temporary. Even chronic stress is short in relationship to the eternal glory that awaits. It won't always be like this!

Suffering has a purpose. There are some lessons learned in suffering that can never be learn in times of comfort. There are some spiritual muscles that get worked out in sorrow that don't get exercised in times of ease. God is strengthening us even in moments of sorrow.

"After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace..." God is the God of all grace. There is grace even in suffering. God's grace is greater than your suffering.

The God of all grace called you to His eternal glory. You have been called to something bigger and better than your stress. You have been called to God's eternal glory. God wants you to forever abide in His presence. The suffering is temporary, but the glory is eternal.

God's grace and God's call to eternal glory will keep us through all the sufferings of this life. No matter how much Satan attacks us, no matter how severe the suffering, God will keep us. The God of all grace will give you all the grace you need to make it through.

God is working through suffering. God takes it upon Himself to transform your future from suffering to glory. God moves us from stress to success. He will perfect you!

This is not the word that is typically translated as perfect, meaning to make mature or complete. The word used here means to fit or join together. To adjust and restore. God will take all of the displaced joints and broken limbs of life and like a good chiropractor, make some adjustments. He realigns us with His purposes. He will use the brokenness in our lives to adjust our character. He uses all the trials and temptations, difficulties and persecutions – all the sufferings of life – and makes us more and more like Christ. He will perfect us, fit all the parts of life together and lead us to glory.

He will support you. God will support you so that you will not shake. He anchors you to Himself so that you have the stability that you need. He will strengthen you. God will make you strong so that you will not break. He will establish you. God will give you a firm foundation, so that you will stand in the face of an earthquake. God is able to make us secure through all the sufferings of life, no matter what they are. He is able to settle and secure our nerves, thoughts, and fears – all the uneasy and unnerving emotions that disturb us.

The God who has called believers to eternal glory will strengthen and fortify us, so that we are able to endure until the end. He will fulfill His promise to save and deliver us.

In verse 11, Peter concludes with a doxology. He takes a praise break to acknowledge that God has eternal reign and dominion over all that occurs in the universe, including our lives. The God who permits suffering in the lives of His children, is the sovereign God. He is the God who delivers with His mighty hand. He exalts and elevates at the proper time. He is the God who cares for us.

God assures our salvation – despite all our sins, failures, shortcomings, weaknesses, and frailties – He is the God of all

grace. God calls us to eternal glory. He restores us, supports us, strengthens us, and establishes us. He sustains us through all the temptations, trials and sufferings of life. He is the God who possesses all power – power which no one or no thing can defeat. He is God, the glorious and Sovereign Majesty of the universe. "To Him be glory and dominion forever."

Reflection Questions

In what ways has suffering developed you?

How does knowing that God is sovereign affect how you view suffering?

Lesson 4 Chill Out

Lesson Text: Ecclesiastes 7:8-9

8 The end of a matter is better than its beginning; Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit.

9 Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools.

It seems like angry people are everywhere. Angry at the mall. Angry at work. Angry at school. Angry at home. Angry on social media. Angry on the freeway. Angry at the city council or school board meeting. Here they're angry, there they're angry, everywhere they're angry angry!

Let's be clear. Anger in and of itself is not a sin. It is not forbidden in scripture. Anger is a legitimate emotion. The issue is not so much that people are angry. It is that people are so angry so often and get angry so quickly. The issue is that people act like fools when they get angry. If you want to move from stress to success, learn to chill out!

There are several scriptures that highlight the foolishness of anger. One is found in Ecclesiastes 7:9. The Christian Standard Bible (CSB) states, "Don't let your spirit rush to be angry, for anger abides in the heart of fools."

Beware of knee-jerk reactions. Don't let anger be your go-to reaction. Don't walk around ready to go off. Anger can be a doorway that leads to sin and foolishness. Be careful not to rush into anger.

Those who get angry quickly have anger living within them. Whatever lives in you comes out of you. Too many people are letting anger live rent free in their hearts. Anger stays as long as you let it and always takes up more space than it should. Anger doesn't just live in a corner or a room. Anger takes over. It doesn't just leave, you have to evict it. You have to kick anger out.

Proverbs 14:17 tells us about the foolishness of anger. “A quick-tempered person acts foolishly, and one who schemes is hated” (CSB). What’s the harm in anger being your immediate reaction? It leads you to act foolishly. People who get angry quickly or easily, who make no effort to control their tempers, fail to demonstrate wisdom in their actions. Short-tempered people act in the heat of the moment, entirely upon their emotions, not on facts or reason. Therefore, they deal foolishly with situations and with other people.

In our anger we can say words that we can’t take back, no matter how much we apologize. We mistreat people. We make big deals out of small matters. Anger gives way to foolishness.

The foolishness of anger is further highlighted in Proverbs 19:19. “A person with intense anger bears the penalty; if you rescue him, you’ll have to do it again” (CSB). Your anger will keep you in trouble. If you have friends who have intense anger, you will find yourself constantly being put in situations where you will have to step in and rescue him or her. An individual’s anger has community impact.

One of the reasons that I need to get a hold of my anger is that **my** anger brings drama to **your** life. It can be emotionally draining and financially burdensome to help someone who is unable to control his or her anger. It can get to the point where even those who love us don’t want to be around us. You have to deal with anger and not just ignore it.

One way to deal with anger is to appropriately name your anger. Anger is what is known as a secondary emotion, meaning that there is another emotion that leads us to feel angry. The emotions that lead us to feel angry are often unidentified and unnamed. You have to ask yourself, “What is really behind my anger?” Is it sadness, fear, disappointment, rejection, frustration, stress, grief, loneliness? Once you know what is behind the anger, then you can then begin to deal with the primary emotion.

An alternative to the foolishness of anger is the wisdom of self-control (see Ecclesiastes 7:8). Those who are patient in spirit get angry less often. We can often avoid anger by having the patience to let the situation play out. We can reduce our anger by listening to the whole story. The end of a matter is better than its beginning.

Often, when I don't listen all the way to the end, I am angry because I feel like I know where the story is headed. This is indicative of a haughty or proud spirit. Listen to the end of the matter!

Proverbs 20:3 states, "Keeping away from strife is an honor for a man, but any fool will quarrel." The honor is not in getting into a fight. It is in avoiding or ending a dispute. Any fool will fight. They will pick fights, start arguments, and create conflicts where none exist.

The wise are seeking resolution. The wise understand the need to stay away from people who thrive on conflict so that they are not drawn into their destructive behavior.³ Beware of having friends who are quick to quarrel. Followers of Christ are called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). People who fear the LORD exercise self-control. They are not prone to make the damaging mistakes of the foolish who are so quickly angered.

"He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who is quick-tempered exalts folly" (Proverbs 14:29). A quick-temper and an understanding heart cannot co-exist. The person who would be slow to anger says, "Let me make sure I understand before I react."

We often get angry because we are filling in the blanks for ourselves and not getting understanding. We think that the explanation we hypothesize is the only explanation that there is, so we jump into anger. Then once we get the facts of the situation, our response makes us look foolish. Get an understanding before

³ Leadership Ministries Worldwide. (2012). [Proverbs](#) (p. 309). Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide.

you get upset. You will often discover that once you get an understanding, there is no reason to be upset.

Proverbs 16:32 teaches, “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.” There is power in self-control. The real hero is the one who conquers his anger. It is worth more to be master of oneself than to be master of a city.

“A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression” (Proverbs 19:11). A person who has *discretion*, insight, a good sense of reasoning – will be patient and slow to anger. This quality enables us to distinguish between offenses that should be dealt with and ones that should be simply overlooked. Consequently, patience becomes our honor or *glory*. In other words, patience and self-control enhance our beauty. The ability to ignore minor transgressions brings respect from others.

When you have understanding and insight you come to learn that sometimes it ain't even worth it to get upset. It's not worth losing peace. It's not worth being angry. We don't need to address every little thing someone does to us. We should learn to overlook some offenses. Don't be petty, oversensitive and take everything personal. Reduce the level of stress in your life by learning to chill-out.

Reflection Questions

On a scale of 1-10, how well do you do at hearing a matter to its conclusion before you respond?

Which primary emotions are typically behind your anger?

What is the value of putting yourself in the other person's shoes or looking at a situation from their perspective?

Lesson 5 Take Your Medicine

Lesson Text: Proverbs 17:22

22 A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.

You've likely seen and perhaps even use a pill organizer. It has seven compartments, one for each day of the week. It is designed to help people remember to take their medicine daily. And it works well, as long as you remember which day of the week it is and where you put your pill organizer.

The medicines that people take are prescribed to help them manage their medical conditions. There is medication for high blood pressure, diabetes, anemia, arthritis, bipolar disorder, depression, acid reflux and a host of other conditions. For most conditions, there is more than one medicine that could be prescribed to treat that condition. Doctors typically prescribe the one that they believe will provide maximum benefit with minimum side-effects.

There is a condition that we all have. This condition does not discriminate. It affects young and old, and everyone in between. You don't have to be unhealthy to have it. It doesn't care if you are of African, Asian, or of European descent. This condition hits just as hard in Highland Park as it does in Highland Hills. It is found in Oak Cliff and in Oak Lawn. The condition that touches us all is the human condition. We all have been diagnosed with the disease of difficulties and the plague of problems.

The ultimate escape from the human condition is found in Christ. Those in Christ will one day exchange our problems for God's permanent peace. Until that day comes, as long as we are in this world, we will be faced with challenges, disease, wars, problems, pandemics and uncertainty. While we are awaiting our

eternal home, we still have to live in this world with the human condition.

Since we have to live with it, God has provided us medicine to deal with it. The Great Physician has written a prescription to treat the human condition. The divine prescription for the human condition is joy. God is the giver of joy. We can have joy because we are in Christ and have an inheritance in heaven protected by the power of God. Our joy is rooted in the future and based on the hope of eternity. We can have joy in the present based on what will happen in the future.

There is also medicine that we can take right now to have joy in the right now. The prescription has already been written and filled. We just need to take the medicine. Laughter, fun, and enjoyment are God's prescription for joy in this life.

"A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones." A healthy, happy heart or mind is the key to a life of wellness. A broken or crushed spirit takes the life out of you.

You may be thinking, "If joyful things happened to me, then I would be joyful. But my spirit has been crushed by life. So, the reason that I don't have a joyful heart is because life has taken my joy."

But notice what the text says. A joyful heart is good medicine. When do you take medicine? I have never heard anyone say, "You know what, I am feeling perfectly fine, I think I will take me some medicine now." You take medicine because you have a condition. If things in your life have to be good before you have joy, you will hardly ever have any. Your joy will be infrequent and short lived. Don't wait on life to get better before you live it.

The challenges, chaos, difficulties and disappointments in life are reminders for us to take our medicine. We all have reasons to be broken and bitter. Maybe you are battling sickness. Perhaps you live alone and are isolated from your friends and family. You may have had significant loss this year. Maybe you are nervous,

anxious and just down right worried about the school year. Maybe you were laid off months ago and don't know how much longer you will have unemployment benefits. You have been putting in applications, but it doesn't seem like anyone is hiring. If you can relate, it is time for you to take your medicine.

Lena Horne once said, "It's not the load the breaks you down. It's the way you carry it." If we don't learn how to carry our load, the disease of the human condition is going to suck the life out of us. It's time for the medicine of laughter, fun, and enjoyment in your life.

Like taking any medicine, enjoyment should be intentional. We can have moments in the process of our day when we have a good laugh or have a pleasant experience that catches us by surprise. But if you are waiting for fun to happen to you, you may be waiting for a long time. We must be intentional about time for fun and enjoyment. If you want the medicine to benefit you, you have to take the right dosage at the right time.

As strange and counterintuitive as it sounds, in times of stress, pain, grief, when we are feeling down, that's the right time for the right dosage of enjoyment. Fun should not just happen to you. It should happen through you. Have a disposition of joy. Be intentional about scheduling time to do things that bring you joy.

Enjoyment is rewarding Ecclesiastes 8:15 states, "So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun" (NKJV).

Solomon commends, recommends, approves of enjoyment. There is nothing better than to enjoy life. He did not say that there is nothing more important or that there is nothing more meaningful. But as you live life on earth, the best thing you can do for yourself is to enjoy it. Life is hard. Life is short. Life is uncertain. Enjoy it while you can. Fun makes work more

enjoyable. The moments of happiness allow us to make it through the moments of sorrow.

Solomon is not teaching that we should ignore our reality or be indifferent about the struggles and sorrows of others. He is not telling us to just indulge in pleasure and make pleasure and enjoyment our purpose. He is clear that our purpose is to fear God and keep His commandments. He is saying that enjoyment is fuel for the spirit. It is good for us because it is the gas that helps us get to where we need to be. Our disposition makes the difficult more bearable. Find the opportunity for joy even in the tough times.

Some people feel guilty smiling or laughing in the midst of sorrow. Be free from guilt. It's alright to smile through your tears. Laugh through your fears.

Have you even been down and something happens that gets you laughing? Afterwards, what do you say? "Whew, I needed that!" Laughter and enjoyment are the medicine that you need to help you get through the pain and sorrow.

Proverbs 17:22 does not just say that it is medicine, but that it is good medicine. It gives you the desired benefits. Laughter has been shown to have medical benefits. Laughter is like amlodipine, it can lower blood pressure. It is like fish oil, it can reduce stress hormones. Like vitamin C, laughter can boost your immune system. Like Advil it can relieve pain. And like an antidepressant, it can improve your mood. Laughter is rewarding.

In 1 Timothy 6:17 Paul writes, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy."

Enjoyment is spiritual. We hope in God, but hope in God leads us to enjoy what God supplies. We should take advantage of what the God we hope in provides. We trust God to ease the

pain. We must understand that God can ease the pain without delivering us from the source of the pain.

God richly supplies us with all things to enjoy: A cool breeze on a summer day. A comfortable place to live. Reliable transportation. Disposable income. A good meal. Iced tea on a hot summer day. A beautiful sunset. Dessert! Time with friends and family. Games, art, sports, and recreational activities are all gifts from God. We don't hope in or put our confidence in money or any of these things. We trust God, knowing that God has given us blessings to enjoy.

Enjoyment is not the goal of life, but should be a part of life. Jesus even had fun (see Matthew 11:18-19). We can't allow unspiritual Christians to take our joy. A spirit of enjoyment, fun, and laughter attracts people to us and ultimately to Christ.

We conclude with a warning from Jesus. "Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you suddenly like a trap" (Luke 21:34). Honor God in your fun. Don't let your heart be weighed down by the worries of life. Stop feeding your soul extra worries. Lighten the weight on your heart by lightening up. Take your medicine.

Reflection Questions

How do you strike a balance between laughter and a focus on the things of God?

In what areas do you think you can lighten up?

What will you do this week to bring laughter, fun, and enjoyment in your life?

Lesson 6 You're Invited

Lesson Text: Matthew 11:28-30

28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." You're Invited

People are tired. Tired of bad news. Tired of pandemics. Tired of racism. Tired of crime. Tired of busyness without productivity. Tired of foolishness. Tired of talking about everything that has them tired.

To everyone who is tired, Jesus extends an invitation. Jesus invites us to approach Him: "Come to Me." The weary and the burdened are promised rest if they come to Jesus. To be weary means to be exhausted as a result of work or a difficult endeavor. The heavy burdened are those who have been overloaded. We become weary through the work that we do and the energy that we expend. We are heavy burdened due to the weight of the load that has been put on us.

If you can relate to being weary or heavy burdened, Jesus invites you to approach Him. This invitation does not exclude anyone. No matter what your trouble is, you are invited to Jesus. All who are exhausted are invited. All who have been loaded down are invited. All who are carrying around too much are invited. All who feel like if you don't hold their family together, it will come apart are invited. All who feel like they are at their breaking point are invited. All who are ready to give up are invited. All who feel you are always there for others, but in your

time of need no one is there for you are invited. Jesus says, "Come to Me."

"...And I will give you rest." I will refresh you. I will give you a break so that you can recharge. Jesus is not talking about rest after death. He is talking about rest right now. Jesus is the exclusive supplier of soul rest. There is no hope for soul rest by going to any other source of help.

In the context of Matthew 11, in verse 20-24 Jesus spoke of those who rejected His message. In chapter 12, we see that there were those who were imposing manmade rules on others in the name of religion to the point where people experienced the burden of manmade rules instead of the blessing of fellowship with God. Jesus says, what you are looking for can only be found in me.

Unfortunately, we often look for rest in places where it cannot be found, which makes us even more tired, weary, and burdened. Jesus invites you, but you must be willing to show up and come to Him. Jesus invites us to approach Him.

Jesus invites us to accept Him: "Take My yoke upon you..." Yoke here is used to symbolize submission to the authority of Christ. Jesus was talking to people who had submitted to a system of religion that weighed them down instead of raised them up. He was talking to those who were weighed down by sin and could not save themselves.

Jesus is inviting you to exchange the oppressive yokes of performance and pleasure seeking for His yoke of significance and purpose. You have to take it upon you. Jesus is not going to force you into submission to Him. You must place the yoke on yourself. You must cooperate with Jesus. You must accept what He is offering.

Resisting Jesus only makes life harder. Don't expect Jesus to help you carry a yoke that is not His. Take off every other yoke

and accept His. Accepting Christ's yoke provides rest by making the work easier. The rest is found in His work.

We are often restless because we are not engaged in His work. We often find ourselves weary and burdened because there is no sense of eternal significance in our activity. If we are doing the work of the Lord, it will lighten the load that we are carrying because Christ is empowering us to do His work. We must be willing to accept Christ and His work.

Jesus also invites us to appreciate Him: "...learn from Me." Jesus shares His heart with us. What is the heart of Christ? He is gentle and humble. Learn from His strength under control. Learn from His humility. The more you learn from Jesus, the more you will see Him for who He really is.

We should appreciate Jesus enough to become His disciple. To be totally committed to Him. It is not enough to say that we would like to be a follower of Jesus. We should commit ourselves to the life-long learning process of knowing Him.

In verse 28, Jesus says I will give you rest. Verse 29, you will find rest for your soul. The rest is found in taking His yoke and learning from Jesus. Don't just learn about Him. Learn from Him. He is both the teacher and the subject matter. He is the professor and the curriculum. Spend time in the Word, especially in the gospels, learning the heart of Jesus. His heart is filled with love, compassion, grace, truth, faith, and humility. Learning from Jesus allows us to live life as He lived it.

As His students, we will grow to be more and more like the Master Teacher. Our hearts will be filled with love for God and a genuine love for others. Learning from Him fills our hearts with compassion, grace, truth, faith, and humility. Learning from Him prepares us to handle challenges as He would, with divine wisdom.

Living life with humility under the strength of God frees us from the weight that pride and self-reliance places on us. It frees us from the guilt that we experience when we fail at trying to do it all and be it all in our own power.

Don't be mistaken. The pursuit is not a pursuit of rest. It is a pursuit of Jesus. And a result of pursuing Jesus is finding rest for your soul. Jesus is inviting us to off-load our heavy burden of busyness and accept the easy burden of His daily business and the rest will follow. His yoke is good and pleasant. It is not harsh. His yoke is custom made to fit you properly. Jesus does not call people to a burdensome and worrisome existence. He will not over-burden or overload you. When compared to what you have been trying to carry, what Jesus asks of you is light because He will help you carry it.

Will you accept His invitation? This rest is available to those who are in Christ. One gets into Christ through faith in the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-8), repentance, confession that Jesus is Lord, and baptism (Acts 2:36-38). If you have not been baptized into Christ or have questions about what it means to be in Christ, please reach out to us at 214-941-2531 or at marsalisavenuecoc.org. If you want the promises of God in your life, you must be in the place where God promises to grant those promises.

About the Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ

We pray that this study has been a blessing to your life. If you are in the Dallas area, we invite you to come and experience the power of connection at the Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ!

Connect to God

We worship because God is worthy! We believe that worship connects heaven and earth. As we worship God in spirit and in truth, it is our prayer that even the unbeliever among us *will bow down before God and worship Him, declaring, "God is really among you."* (1 Corinthians 14:25)

Connect to the Church

Brother and sister are not merely terms of respect; these words define our relationship with each other. We are family and as God's family we have fellowship. Through our worship, Bible classes, ministries, connection groups and more, we connect to one another.

Connect to the World

The Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ seeks to glorify God by making a difference in our community. We find opportunities to impact lives through ministry and community focused activities like our Family Conference, Community Fair, working with area schools, and providing counseling and life management skills.

To obtain copies of other editions of *Real Life Studies*, contact the Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ at 214-941-2531 or marsalisavenuecoc.org. Other studies include: *Defeating Family Dysfunction*; *In Times Like These*; *Help for Our Hurts*; *Unstuck*; and *Money Wise*. You can find additional resources at our website, marsalisavenuecoc.org, and on our YouTube Channel, Marsalis Avenue COC.

Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ is continuously striving to be a God focused, Christ imitating, and Holy Spirit filled household of faith that is multicultural and intergenerational.

We assist in nurturing and developing God-centered families and individuals. We offer a variety of ministries that are designed to equip people of all ages with tools to be successful in all aspects of their lives.

Our mission is to make and develop followers for Christ. We believe that all people should be believers in Christ, that all believers should become disciples of Christ, and that all disciples of Christ should make disciples for Christ.

**Lamont Ross, LPC
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