

## Stress from a Religious Perspective.

- Stress is a motivator to draw closer to God
- Stress is a test of the personal relationship with God.
- Stress reveals the depth of faith in God.
- Stress results in degrees of self-examination.
- Stress can lead to repentance and new life in Christ.
- Stress fosters use of personal resources.
- Stress may lead to despondency if excessive.
- Stress can lead to personal exhaustion.
- Stress will produce positive or negative responses.
- Stress is to be expected in certain situations.
- Stress may be welcomed as a challenge.
- Stress tests personal limits of ability.
- Stress is cause for reliance on a God.
- Stress has varying levels of intensity.
- Stress may arise unexpectedly and suddenly.
- Stress produces different individual reactions.
- Stress may bring out the best in a person.
- Stress may be the downfall of the emotionally frail.
- Stress may induce a panic attack.
- Stress demonstrates the strength of a person's resolve.
- Stress deserves consideration in plans of action.
- Stress may have a multiplying and ripple effect.
- Stress affects more than the person experiencing stress.
- Stress well-handled is a lesson for others.
- Stress embraced by saints and martyrs have lasting results.
- Stress is best handled with faith and prayer.
- Stress handled well reveals the grace of God.
- Stress leads to a search for the mercy and love of God.
- Stress brings a person to an encounter with God.
- Stress is a basis for giving thanks to God.
- Stress leads to a savoring of the miracles of God.

## **Stress in Contemporary Life**

Stress is common in present day life. Parents have the stress of providing for their children and caring for their children in what seems to be an increasing complex, costly and dangerous world.

Illness or tragedy can strike a family creating unanticipated stress. Economic conditions appear to be changing daily. Stress occurs in the workplace, in the neighborhood and in the community.

The threat of violent crime can cause stress to individuals wherever they may live. Crime is not always particular to a specific neighborhood. International conflicts between nations can bring distress to innocent people.

Causes of stress do not always originate with the individuals experiencing stress. Learning to deal with stress is essential if there is to be peace of mind, peace of soul, peace of heart and health of body.

Unless stress is addressed in a healthy manner, adverse effects will occur. Stress need not be viewed adversely. Stress can be a motivating force for positive steps in life.

God provides the peace necessary to deal with stress. God provides the vision to see stress for what it is and the best way it can be managed and addressed. The Lord Jesus Christ said: "With God all things are possible."(Mt.19:26)

Stress need not be overwhelming. Individuals with faith in God do well to heed the experience of the Holy Apostle Paul. The Holy Apostle Paul said: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."(II Cor.12:9)

Individuals do well to study the life and writings of the Holy Apostle Paul. Individuals do well to love Christ and witness for Christ as did the Holy Apostle Paul. When Christ is central in life, life is most meaningful.

The Holy Apostle Paul said: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."(Gal.2:20)

Each person chooses how he or she will address the stresses of contemporary life. Parents need to address how they will raise their children in a world where values taught at school or prevailing in the neighborhood or community come into conflict with the values most dearly held in the family.

Individuals must come to terms with ethical issues in the workplace which conflict with the teachings of the Church. When a violent crime touches a family member or friend, life changes for everyone. The stress of being a victim is long lasting.

The Risen Christ provides hope when situations appear hopeless. Clinging to the vision of the Risen Christ is fundamental for Christian believers. Faith in God is strengthened in stressful situations through the reading of the Holy Scriptures and partaking of the Precious Body and Blood of Christ.

Fasting can help put stress into perspective and give proper order to the priorities of life. When a family member is stricken with a life-threatening illness, family life changes dramatically.

Dire situations can bring out the best in Christians. Help can appear from unanticipated sources. Love can be manifested in ways hitherto unexpected. Joyful greetings and expressions of support can come from individuals considered least likely to do so.

The goals a person has will affect the handling of stress and the view of stress. A person choosing the goals set by Christ to “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”(Mt.6:33) will address stress with God fully in charge of the efforts.

A person firmly believing in God will look to God for strength and direction to manage and deal with stress. A firm believer in Christ will seek to strengthen the relationship with Christ in times of stress.

Christ is not only the Source of help in times of stress. Christ is always the Goal of serious believers and perhaps this is most pronounced in times of stress.

A person’s faith is most tested during the periods of heightened stress. A person’s depth of faith is best known in times of heightened stress. The faith of Abraham was best revealed when he was ready to sacrifice Isaac in an act of faith.(Gen.22:1-14)

The faith of the youths in the fiery furnace is cherished through the centuries because it was so dramatically revealed in what must be considered the most stressful of circumstances. The three youths had confidence in God.(Dan.3:1-30)

Confidence in God enables individuals facing threats to their existence to be at peace in their hearts, minds and souls. The Serbian Deacon Habakkuk was faced with choosing Islam or facing death. Deacon Habakkuk told his mother: “A Serb is Christ’s; he rejoices in death.”<sup>1</sup>

What a parent does when he or she finds out a son or daughter is using drugs or abusing alcohol will reveal the parents depth of faith. What a parent does when learning a son or daughter has a serious illness or is in a serious accident will reveal the depth of faith.

---

<sup>1</sup> St. Nikolai Velimirovic. *The Prologue of Ohrid*. Translated by Fr.T.Timothy Tepsic. Vol. II. Serbian Orthodox Diocese of Western America, Alhambra, California. 2002, p. 672.

What a person does when experiencing a problematic relationship will reveal the person's sense of faith. When faced with an ethical dilemma in the workplace, the response will reveal the person's depth of faith.

When children seek to test the limits of a parent and want to engage in behavior that is contrary to Christian beliefs, the parent's response will reveal the degree of faithfulness to Christ.

When a loved one dies or a job is lost, how a person handles the stress reveals the depth of faith. Stress can make a person stronger in faith. Stress can bring a person closer to God.

When an alcoholic causes a serious accident or injury or is faced with the loss of family and friends, sometimes the stress of the situation can cause a dramatic turn-around in behavior.

God can help a person through the transition from drinker or drug addict to soberness. God can help change a person from being an abuser to being a good person. God can help a person turn from being materialistic to being concerned for the soul.

Not everyone chooses to follow the ways of God. Not everyone shares the love of Christ. Not everyone is peaceful toward neighbors. An anti-Christian environment can cause stress. God can bring peace at such times.

If a person looks to God for peace, God will provide the peace. The Holy Apostle Paul told the Colossians: "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."(Col.4:6-7)

Specific steps can be taken to manage stress and deal with stress constructively. When facing stress, do a careful self-analysis. Determine your own capabilities and the course God would have you take in the situation.

Weigh the alternatives and make the choice appearing to be most pleasing to God. Take time to read the Holy Scriptures particularly the Holy Gospels and the Psalms.

Reading the Psalms and Holy Gospels brings a sense of perspective and resolute peace. A person enters into God's space, a person unites with God through the attentive reading of Holy Scriptures. Change occurs.

Immersing one's self in the Holy Scriptures is the way to improve the personal worldview. Immersing one's self in the Holy Scriptures is the way to see God at work in the world and to feel the presence of God in daily life.

Stress is reduced when God is welcomed in the heart, mind and soul of a person. Fear of outside threats and attacks by the devil are alleviated. The Holy Apostle and Evangelist John wrote centuries ago: "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."(I Jn.4:4)

Going to church is always a good step to alleviate stressful situations and to make them more manageable. Coming to a quiet church to pray brings peace to the soul. Come early before a Divine service.

Come during the week and be alone. Place yourself before God and listen for the “still small voice” as the Holy Prophet Elijah listened centuries ago. Answer honestly the question Elijah was asked by God: “What are you doing here?”(I Kings.19:9-18)

Light a candle in prayerfulness. Turn to the holy icons and enter into the lives of the saints, seeking intercession before the Lord God. Turn to the Mother of God in prayer that she will intercede with her Son as she did at the wedding of Cana(Jn.2:1-11)

Attend Divine services of the Church throughout periods of stress. Do not limit attendance to the Divine Liturgy. Attend other services as they are available. All services of the Holy Orthodox Church are rich in content and are beneficial to the soul. Learn of these services to enrich and strengthen yourself personally.

Take time to visit a monastery to gain an additional perspective regarding stress confronting you. Visiting a monastery is uplifting to the soul. Stress is viewed differently after a visit to a monastic setting.

Throughout the year be attentive to the fasting periods of the Church and be active in almsgiving. Abiding by the fasts of the Church keeps a person grounded in Christ. Fasting sharpens a person’s insight and thoughts regarding God.

Almsgiving has a positive effect on a person’s life. The Holy Apostle Paul told the Corinthians: “God loves a cheerful giver.”(2 Cor.9:7). Cheerful almsgiving will bring delight to the heart and soul.

Being generous towards others in genuine sincerity is a true guard against times of stress. Almsgiving has a way of reducing stress and bringing joy to life. Almsgiving has a way of bringing the best out in others.

God gives each person a mind. Each person is the steward of the mind. The way a person uses his or her mind will determine the development of the mind. If the mind is filled with prayer, if the mind is filled with the teachings of the Church, if the mind is filled with thoughts of Christ, the mind will be adept at dealing with stress in ways pleasing to God.

If the mind is filled with wasteful thoughts, if the mind harbors evil thoughts, if the mind is fed with images contrary to God, the mind will not be of much use in helping to address stress in ways pleasing to God unless there is a desire for a radical change in life.

Desire to live in ways pleasing to God is necessary for stress to be of benefit to a person. God will not disappoint the person who faces stress and seeks to live in ways pleasing to God.

Stress deserves discussion in Christian settings. Stress is a part of contemporary life. Individuals may not identify stress in their lives while at the same time experiencing the symptoms of poor adaptation to stress.

Anxiety and discomfort can occur. Depression can occur. Tiredness can occur. Hopelessness can occur. Too much stress can wear a person down and thoughts of suicide can develop in extreme instances.

Excessive eating, drinking, illegal drug use or sleeping can be used as poor ways to deal with stress. Believers need to learn from the lives of the saints and martyrs, from the writings of the Holy Fathers of the Church how to address life's problems in the most effective manner.

Stress is not something new which has arisen in this century. Think how difficult it was to live centuries ago before modern technology provided ways for improved shelter, transportation of water, heat in winter and air-conditioning in summer.

Think of the abundance of food that can be produced today through modern technology as well as the ability to communicate long distances. Hunger and homelessness exist in many parts of the world now including in America, a land of abundance.

Centuries ago there were no supermarkets, There were no Departments of Public Welfare. There were no homeless shelters. Food had to be grown. Hardware stores and lumber yards were not available to provide supplies to protect against the elements.

Through the centuries individuals have had to face the stresses of their times. The Church is a constant presence to provide direction in times of stress. The Lord "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever."(Heb.13:8)

Each century has had its wars. Each century has had its criminals. Each century has had the threat of poverty and personal tragedy. Each century has had its saints and martyrs to point the way to Christ.

Each century has had Christ and the Holy Spirit to inspire, to save, to direct believers. Each century believers have had the opportunity to pray. Observant individuals recognized God everywhere present in daily life.

A person only need read St. Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic's book Prayers by the Lake to have an improved understanding of how to see God in a serene setting.

God is at work in our lives. Stress is a phenomenon that enables us to grow spiritually. By properly reacting to and dealing with stress, we can become one with Christ in ways we never imagined.

Let us remember always the words of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians: "Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."(I Thess.5:1-18)