

Reframing Stress

Drs. Larry and Lois Dodds



Last time we were talking with you, we were talking about some strategies for dealing with overstress. I'd like to keep in that vein. Underlying everything is the physical condition of our body. This is why physical fitness and exercise is a large component of dealing with stress. Now I realize that working in some counties it's difficult to do. If you go running, you have to fight off dogs and little kids. Often times it is not safe for women to run, if they choose to do that or even walking. You may have to look for something like a sports club or work out some way of getting exercise and maintaining bodily fitness. Because when the body is fit, you are able to deal with stress much more effectively and withstand the overstress. If your body is fit, you'll be able to deal with the overstress better.

Another thing that is very useful is meditation or reflection. What are some of the promises from scripture that really sustain you? Special verses—just reflect on that. Just take one verse and reflect—chew on it in your mind and in your spirit. That will do an awful lot.

My wife, Lois, previously mentioned contemplative prayer—this is what I call a still time. Psalm 62 in the New American Standard and the New Revised Standard says, "My soul waits in silence for You alone, Oh Lord." I think this is an appropriate thing to do is to take time to sit in the Presence of God for whatever He has to say to you. Undoubtedly, when you start doing this, when you are learning how to do this, you have thoughts come in to your mind. Just let them go by, but the still time could be maybe ten minutes, only ten minutes, but it makes a big difference in your life. What I think this is really doing, is giving an opportunity for my spirit to be in good communication with the spirit of God. Brother Lawrence said some of us would be surprised if we could hear what our spirits are saying to God. This is a time to overhear what your conversation with God is really all about.

Sometimes we need to view things differently, visualize or dream about how things could be different. Not in a sense of daydreaming for escapism, but how could this be different? How could we accomplish this? Sometimes I bet you get new dreams, new ways of seeing things that in themselves become ways of dealing with the overstress. Reframing, redefining the situation is powerful.

I heard a story that a pastor was captured during the revolution. He was particularly hard-headed, wouldn't give in to the indoctrination they were doing. So they put him in a special re-education camp for particularly difficult people. His task was to collect all of the night pots and empty them into the cesspool. I don't remember the reason why, but he had to get into the cesspool every day. Because of this, he could never get completely clean. Everybody stayed away from him because of the odor. He was tremendously isolated, socially isolated. He really felt sorry for himself until it finally dawned on him one day—no one is interrupting me and I have uninterrupted time with the Lord.

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He says that was the sweetest two years because he had two years of unbroken fellowship with the Lord. He prepared sermons in his mind. He had meditations, all sorts of things. That is reframing. You take a difficult situation and redefine it.

Journal writing is very helpful thing. Writing down your thoughts, don't have to be shared with anyone, but just getting it outside of you can do an awful lot.

The next point is kind of a strange one, practice pleasure. You've all heard about endorphins—runners and runner's high. It is because we have natural substances in our body, which when they are released give us a great sense of pleasure. The way you do that is by doing pleasurable things—laughing, walking and enjoying nature, having a good time with friends. Pleasure actually makes endorphins, so you need to look for endorphin-making opportunities. And that will help a lot for managing your overstress.

Probably the last thing is—be authentic, be you. Don't try to be somebody else because that is very stressful. Just be authentic, be the person you were made to be and that will help an awful lot. So, I've listed a whole bunch of things here that can be useful for dealing with overstress, but you see the thing underneath all of this is looking both inside and outside your life to see what is really going on. I've applied this in my own life. When I get overstressed, I sit down and make a list. I write lists about my feelings—what is going on, what could be different. I've practiced these things in my own life and I know they really work.