



Part 4 Discussion Guide

Face the Issue:

We wrapped up our “New You” series with a look at our physical selves.

We previously looked at our spirituality, our emotions, and our finances. If we take all four of these areas together and try and find one common thread that can affect them all it would be stress.

Stress as defined in *Webster’s Dictionary* is a “force that strains or deforms; mental or physical tension; urgency, pressure.”

Prevention magazine says, “Almost nine out of ten adults have experienced serious stress. More than four out of ten adults suffer adverse health effects from stress, and some estimates suggest that 75 percent to 90 percent of all physician office visits are for stress-related complaints.”

In other words, we are all stressed and this stress can make us feel physically terrible.

What are some common causes of stress?

How do most people cope with stress?

What causes you stress?

Into the Word:

The Bible is full of people who faced great stress. Abraham had to leave his home, send away one son, and be willing to sacrifice another. Jacob worked seven years for a wife, then got the wrong one. Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers. Moses led a disobedient and rebellious people. David ran from King Saul, who was trying to kill him. Elijah had to face an evil king and queen. Nehemiah had to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Queen Esther had to take her life in her hands and defy the king. Job lost everything. Daniel was thrown to the lions. Jonah was swallowed by a fish. Paul faced numerous beatings, imprisonment, and eventually beheading. And, of course, Jesus died a horrible death on a cross.

What can we learn from their examples to handle our own stress?

Read Job 12:13. According to this verse, what is the first step in finding a solution to any problem?

Read Luke 5:16. Jesus withdrew and rested, even when needs surrounded him. What might you learn from his example?

Read 1 Kings 19:3–5. Elijah had just been through a huge ordeal, which caused him to despair. What did he need to learn about his body’s response to stress in order to cope?

Read Psalm 1:2. How is biblical meditation different than secular meditation?

Read Proverbs 15:30. What does this teach us about the value of controlling our thoughts?

Apply The Word

Laughter may be the best stress reducer God made.

Solomon wrote, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Proverbs 17:22).

Consider what the Mayo Clinic says about laughter:

Short-term effects: When you start to laugh, it doesn’t just lighten your load mentally, it actually induces physical changes in your body. Laughter can:

- Stimulate your organs. Laughter enhances your intake of oxygen-rich air, stimulates your heart, lungs and muscles, and increases the endorphins that are released by your brain.
- Activate and relieve your stress response. A rollicking laugh fires up and then cools down your stress response and increases your heart rate and blood pressure. The result? A good, relaxed feeling.
- Soothe tension and stomachaches. Laughter can also ease digestion and stimulate circulation, which helps reduce some of the physical symptoms of stress.

Long-term effects: Laughter isn’t just a quick pick-me-up, though. It’s also good for you over the long haul. Laughter may:

- Improve your immune system. Negative thoughts manifest into chemical reactions that can impact your body by bringing more stress into your system and decreasing your immunity. In contrast, positive thoughts actually release *neuropeptides* that help fight stress and potentially more-serious illnesses.
- Relieve pain. Laughter may ease pain by causing the body to produce its own natural painkillers.
- Increase personal satisfaction. Laughter can also make difficult situations a little bit easier.

Look for the joy and the humor in life.

Read Proverbs 15:13–15. How does a happy heart affect the physical body?

