



The Health Nugget

Soar

The majority of us cannot avoid stressors in our lives: schedules, deadlines, annoyances, trials, devastations. Rather than focusing on how to minimize stress in your life, or how physical health habits can counter or enhance stress responses, I want to explore how you and I were designed to be able to withstand and remain strong under stress.

Few will get through this life without a care in the world. While we typically think of stress in negative terms, there is positive stress, and neutral, or at least undeniable, stress. Like pain, stress can be a friend that warns us when something is out of whack, or is an emergency. It lets us know that more is required from us, and then mobilizes additional forces within to meet the crisis. For this reason, we were designed with a stress response. Feeling stress is not helpful when the stress response keeps reminding us of the crisis, or overreacts. It can be like a person reiterating your tire is flat over and over when you are in the middle of Death Valley and there's no spare in the car or service nearby. Chronic stress can be not only annoying, but crippling.

Stress, or at least our physiological response to stress, can fuel us to do better and achieve more than we would under calmer circumstances. We have greater strength to jump over that fence, out run a dog, have greater clarity to perform, make the deadline. It can heighten awareness of surroundings. But most of the time, stress keeps us from functioning at our best. When this happens, stress can actually be a hindrance to God's will in our lives.

Writing to his friends who apparently

were going through some stressful times, Paul told them, I am sending Timothy "to establish you, and encourage you . . . that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this" (1 Thessalonians 3:2-3, NKJV). There's no way of getting around afflictions. That's life. In this world you will have pressure. But to be established, comforted, immovable, unshakable and strong to bear up under trials is not only possible but is God's will for us.

At a very stressful time, I sat at my kitchen table looking out the window. The volatile storm outside felt much like the one raging within me. Pouring rain, howling wind, shaking home, falling tree branches and dark grey sky set the stage. From somewhere appeared a red-tailed hawk in the air. With her back toward me, facing the storm, the hawk remained stationary, as if in mid-flight. The hawk soared strong in the midst of torrential winds that were knocking down trees over power lines. Right before me, she soared in the same place. Though head, wing and tail adapted to maintain its position, she remained immovable. Were her feathers getting ruffled? You bet they were. But while adjusting, she remained strong and consistent in her position.

It was as if the hawk was communicating, this storm is not going to pull me down. She stayed there for several minutes. I kept coaching her from within my warm, dry perch, to find her nest and family, to flee from the storm. She moved. However, instead of finding shelter and safety, she soared higher and there returned to her initial stance.

What? Do you like the storm? Do you like the elements pelting down upon you? Do you like to feel like you're almost completely out of control? Why don't you go hide somewhere? Get out of the storm! You've got wings! I was in awe.

During our years living in Washington, we regularly drove from our home over a mountain pass to get to civilization. Our journey took us by what was left of a tree that probably had been hit by lightning. To me it looked like the silhouette of a thin woman with a sun hat on an upraised face. There it stood through 20 below temperatures and blizzards to searing hot sunshine, rain or drought. It didn't matter. There she remained, immovable, strong, surviving.

Scripture shares the same story. Those who will be troubled on every side yet not distressed, perplexed yet not feel despair, who will be persecuted and yet know that they are not forsaken, who are cast down but not destroyed, will have learned to ride the storm as the hawk. It will be experienced by those who "bear in their bodies" the proof of His love, how He lived, how He died (2 Corinthians 4:8-10).

After warning his disciples of future trials, Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace and confidence. In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you]" (John 16:33, Amplified Bible). Undaunted means to not be afraid or deterred by the prospect of defeat, loss or failure. Perhaps it comes from knowing that we will come through the storm victorious.

You see, the mountains may depart and the hills be removed. (Stressful things are going to happen. God does not promise a life free from stress.) But My steadfast love shall not depart from you and My covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you. The Lord is assuring us, I'm not going anywhere. I am not going to split when the going gets tough. I am going to be with you through it all. He will be the wind beneath our wings (Isaiah 54:10).

Typically what we don't like about stress is what it robs from us. We are robbed of peace. No longer calm, assured, secure, warm, connected or happy, we feel anxious, snappy and disjointed. God's promise is that His covenant of peace in our lives would not be moved.

My version of Isaiah 40:28-31 reads, Have you not known? Have you not heard that the everlasting God, the Lord and Creator of the ends of the earth never gets stressed out or worn out? He gives power and strength to the faint. Trials and uncertainties are even going to stress out the young (the ones who should be hopping and skipping through life). Stress will hinder their journey and prevent them from experiencing their full potential. BUT they that wait upon the Lord will be empowered to endure, to mount up with wings of eagles and soar.



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