

OUT OF THE DARK SERIES: DARKNESS OF CRUSHING STRESS

PASTOR NATHAN ELMS

NO ONE KNEW THE REALITY OF STRESS MORE THAN JESUS CHRIST HIMSELF.

He knew physical stress...
spiritual stress...
people lying about him...
people threatening his life...
his own family didn't believe...

Until his heart broke from the stress, the pain, the sheer spiritual tension.

YET THE GREATEST VICTORY THAT HAS EVEN BEEN WON WAS WON BY A LAMB, NOT A LION...

I want to look at the life of Jesus and learn

FIRST STEP OUT OF THE DARKNESS: KNOW WHO YOU ARE

IDENTIFICATION

Jesus said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life"* (John 8:12). *"I am the door"* (10:9 KJV); *"I am the way and the truth and the life"* (14:6); *"I am the good shepherd"* (10:11); *"I am God's Son"* (10:36).

Christ knew who he was! The first principle for handling stress in your life is this: Know who you are.

It is the principle of identification.

Jesus said, *"I know who I am. I testify for myself"* (see John 8:18).

This is critically important in stress management because if you don't know who you are, someone else may try to tell you who they think you are. If you don't know who you are, you will subconsciously let other people manipulate you and pressure you into believing you are somebody you aren't.

A lot of stress in life results from our hiding behind masks, living double lives, being unreal with others, or trying to be somebody we're not. Insecurity always produces pressure in our lives, and when we are insecure, we feel coerced to perform and conform. We set unrealistic standards for our lives, and even though we work, work, work, we still can't meet those unrealistic standards.

Tension and pressure naturally occur as a result. The first way to balance stress in my life is to get an internal balance of who I am.

And I know who I am by knowing whose I am.

I am a child of God. I was put on earth not by accident, but for a purpose. I am deeply loved by God. I am accepted by him. He has a plan for my life, and because he put me here, I am significant. And because he put you here, you are significant. To handle stress you must know who you are. Until you handle this issue, you will be hindered by insecurity.

SECOND STEP OUT OF THE DARKNESS: KNOW WHOM YOU'RE TRYING TO PLEASE

John 5:30: *"By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me."*

The principle is this: Know whom you're trying to please. You can't please everybody, because by the time one group becomes pleased with you, another group gets upset with you.

Even God doesn't please everybody, so it's foolish to try to do something that even God doesn't do!

"I'm going to please God the Father."

And the Father replied, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"* (Matt. 3:17 KJV).

I am yours and you are mine.

When you don't know whom you're trying to please, you cave in to three things:

1. **criticism** (because you are concerned about what others will think of you),
2. **competition** (because you worry about whether somebody else is getting ahead of you),
3. **and conflict** (because you're threatened when anyone disagrees with you).

If I *"seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,"* then all the other necessary things of life will be added unto me (Matt. 6:33 KJV).

This means that if I focus on pleasing God, it will simplify my life.

I will be doing the right thing—the thing that pleases God—regardless of what anybody else thinks. We love to blame our stress on other people and obligations: "You made me ... I have to ... I've got to."



Actually, there are few things in life (apart from our jobs) that we must do. When we say, "I have to, I must, I've got to," we may really be saying, "I choose to, because I don't want to pay the consequences."

Hardly anybody makes us do anything, so usually we can't blame other people for our stress. When we feel pressure, we are choosing to allow other people to put us under pressure. We are not victims unless we allow ourselves to be pressured by other people's demands.

THIRD STEP OUT OF THE DARKNESS: KNOW WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH

Here is Christ's clue to the third principle for dealing with stress:

"Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going" (John 8:14).

The principle is this: Know what you want to accomplish. Christ said, *"I know where I came from, and I know where I'm going."*

Unless you plan your life and set priorities, you will be pressured by other people to do what they think is important. Every day, either you live by priorities or you live by pressures. There is no other option. Either you decide what is important in your life, or you let other people decide what is important in your life. It is easy to operate under the tyranny of the urgent, to come to the end of your day and think, "Have I really accomplished what I was put on earth to accomplish?"

FOURTH STEP OUT OF THE DARKNESS: GIVE YOUR STRESS TO CHRIST

This is a spiritual principle of surrender.

In Luke 15:11-32 is a picture of what it means to surrender to God. The son gives up on his way of life and runs back to the father hoping to be a servant.

His surrender is met with rewards beyond his expectations. He is received with open arms, lavish love, and a new life as a restored son. But not until he surrenders.

Jesus lived a life of continual surrender to the Father. As he said, *"Most certainly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing of himself, but what he sees the Father doing. For whatever things he does, these the Son also does likewise" (John 5:19).*

And as He said to the Father when the time came to surrender his life, "not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

Walking with Christ means continual surrender, trusting that the God who made your children has a plan for them and loves them more than you. and giving up control.

Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 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. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30).

Give your stress to Christ. You will never enjoy complete peace of mind until you have a relationship with the Prince of Peace.

Step One was Identification – you receive this as a divine promise.

Step Two was a Personal Choice – you decide that you are going to please God.

Step Three was acceptance of a mission – I am going to accomplish what God says I was placed here for.

Step Four was surrender – I give myself, my future, my past, to you God.