



LOOKING AT LIFE

Help! I'm Stressed Out





Help, I'm Stressed Out!

Is There Comfort for the Anxious?

JACK HASN'T BEEN SLEEPING WELL. He tosses and turns in bed, unable to get his mind off the bills he has to pay, the bank loan he's taken out to buy an apartment, and the failing health of his parents. At work, he has yet to prepare for an important presentation.

Jack has also been feeling grumpy and short-tempered. Recently, during a meeting, his heart started racing for no apparent reason. He felt his chest tightening and he had trouble breathing. He excused himself and stayed in the toilet until the spell passed, but he felt embarrassed, as he couldn't explain what had happened.

The incident sparked a new fear: What if it happens again during the important presentation? Was it heart disease? What if the company decides that he is unfit to keep his job?

Not Alone

DO YOU FEEL LIKE JACK? Have you cried or lost your temper? Do you feel like you want to hide somewhere or run away from everything? Do any of these words describe your experience—overwhelmed, helpless, doomed, desperate, out of control, confused, lost, panicked, fatigued, empty, depressed? Have you felt physically unwell or nauseous, struggled with sleeplessness, or suffered unexplained pain or other ailments?

These can all be signs of stress, and you are not alone. Across the world, more than 4 out of 5 adults say they are stressed, and 1 out of 10 finds it unmanageable.

What's Going On?

TO UNDERSTAND OUR STRUGGLE, think of stress as the strain of summoning available resources to meet a particular challenge.

That's not always bad. Studies show that our bodies are wired to respond to challenging situations in ways that



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improve our chances of success or escape. Our muscles tense up and our hearts beat faster to pump blood, readying our minds and reflexes for action.

Stress can thus be a positive motivator for change or improvement. An athlete, for example, can channel the pressure he feels before a race into being disciplined in training.

But when the challenge seems to be too great, or we feel we don't have enough resources to cope, we can feel the negative effects of stress. This can happen suddenly, such as when our usual routine is upset. Or it can happen gradually, when challenges add up over time.

A common response to stress is anxiety—feelings of fear or intense worry that may also be accompanied by physical symptoms like sweating or a racing pulse. Jack probably experienced a panic attack—an episode of violent physical reactions triggered by anxiety. When we suffer negative stress over a prolonged period, it also unbalances the body's production of hormones, which can cause unhealthy behaviour such as thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

Coping with Stress

WE COPE WITH STRESS in many ways. Jack, for example, escapes his troubles by hitting the gym and binge-watching TV dramas on weekends. Many people turn to stimulants or distractions—or procrastination—but these offer only temporary relief.

Some techniques that can help you manage stress include:

- **Re-evaluate your goals:** Not everything is worth pursuing. For instance, Jack might do better in a job more suited to his temperament.
- **Manage your time:** Try to prioritise your tasks, set realistic deadlines, and cut down on commitments, so that you don't struggle to do everything.
- **Take care of your body:** Exercise, a nutritious and balanced diet, and sufficient rest can improve your mental health.
- **Look for support:** The company of good friends can help relieve stress. They offer us a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on, or share helpful insights or practical help.

Talking to healthcare professionals may also help. With their training and experience, they can help you with care plans that may include counselling and medication.

Not Enough

NO MATTER HOW HARD WE TRY to manage our circumstances, however, we will always struggle with stress. Why? It is because we will not always have the power or means to control everything around us. Neither will we always have enough resources—whether it is time, ability, or money—to deal with our challenges. At some point, all of us will fall short. And that's when we will feel overwhelmed.

At the heart of the problem, then, is an inescapable truth: because you and I are human and finite, we have limitations. There will always be situations too big for us to handle.

Does this mean that we are stuck with a lifetime of stress and worry?

If we think we can solve our problems by being better prepared, being more educated and wealthy, or acquiring



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more skills—that is, striving to be *more than* what we are—then yes, life is likely to be always stressful.

As long as we rely on our own strength and effort, then sooner or later we will become exhausted, frustrated, or discouraged when things fall apart because of people and events beyond our control.

But what if, instead of being defeated by our human limitations, we realise that our inadequacies show us that we all need a power infinitely greater than our own? What if we can find such limitless power in someone who is genuinely interested in our welfare? And what if we could come to know such a person, and forever receive his love and care?

No Ordinary Friend

YOU MAY BE INTERESTED TO KNOW that such a person exists. Reliable accounts of what he said and did are recorded in a book we call the Bible.

In one incident, this man, Jesus, was crossing a lake in Israel in a boat with his followers when a sudden storm hit

them. Huge waves threatened to sink the vessel, but Jesus seemed unaware of the danger and continued sleeping at the back of the boat. His friends cried out, “Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?”

Can you hear the panic in their voices? Can you imagine their fear—and their disapproval? The circumstances look overwhelming and they might die, but their leader is doing nothing! *Teacher, don’t you care that we’re going to drown?*

Jesus’ answer, however, is surprising. You might have expected him to get up and help to bail out the water, as most human leaders would. But these men had no ordinary leader. Instead, Jesus got up and gave instructions to the wind and the waves—and *they obeyed him*. In an instant, the Bible records, “there was a great calm”.

Jesus commanded such power over nature that he could save the men’s lives. No wonder they started to ask each other: “Who is this man?”

What about you? Has this account got you wondering who Jesus is, too?

Peace that Lasts

THE BIBLE'S ACCOUNTS REVEAL that Jesus is God himself. He came to earth to show us that mankind has turned away from recognising God as the supreme authority, to living by our own standards instead. This attitude is known as sin, and it has broken the perfect relationship between us and God. As a result, we are separated from God.

Jesus came to mend this broken relationship. He took the punishment for our sin by dying on our behalf, so that all who believe in him can be reconciled with God. Jesus rose to life three days later, and some day, he will return to bring all his followers with him to that perfect, eternal life. The Bible tells us in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What does this mean for us now? How will it help those of us who are overwhelmed by stress?

For a start, Jesus offers us genuine and everlasting peace. While we will not



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stop facing difficult situations in life, if we believe in what Jesus has done, we will have the assurance of a mended relationship with God.

This means that whatever our circumstances, we will have a friend in Jesus, who not only cares about what we are facing, but also has perfect power and absolute control over our situations. When we go through something unpleasant or painful, we will not have to endure it alone. Jesus will be with us.

Comfort for the Anxious

AFTER THE STORM BROKE, Jesus asked his followers: “Why are you afraid?”

Who in their right mind wouldn't have been terrified? Yet Jesus was really asking them: Were you fearful because of where you put your trust? Or where you *didn't*?

You see, Jesus was suggesting to his friends back then—and to all who would like to be his friends today—that they could look beyond their circumstances if they realised who he was and what power he had over nature.

If we look only at the threats around us, we will surely feel stressed and anxious. But if we fix our eyes on the friend who travels with us, cares for us, and has full control over the universe, we will feel different. Jesus is saying: *If you knew who was with you, you wouldn't be scared at all.*

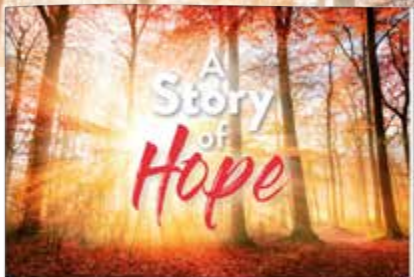
Will God always remove our problems, just as he calmed the wind and waves that day? He is fully capable of doing that, of course. But what if he wants us to just trust his goodness and power? What if he wants to show us that his comfort, which we will receive as we go through the storm, is far more permanent and powerful than we can imagine?

God does not promise that Christians will not be stressed. But he does promise us his presence and wisdom for practical living. God wants us to see that stress is powerless to harm us when we trust in someone bigger. *If you knew who was with you, you wouldn't be scared at all.*

Would you like to find out more about this Jesus? Instead of fearing and fighting stress on your own, why not discover the unlimited power and good purposes of the one who loves you deeply?

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