

A few newsletters ago I wrote about stress and distress. To summarize, stress is the stuff that is inevitable. Annoying as it may be at times we actually need it for survival. It motivates us to act upon something. It signals us of physical, emotional and spiritual danger. Distress, on the other hand, is the pain we inflict upon ourselves. We do this by tenaciously clinging to belief systems that are not rational, thereby leading to unhealthy thinking, followed by unhealthy acting, followed by painful feelings; this is distress. I talked about ways to identify our faulty beliefs, challenge them, and replace them with healthy, Godly Truths. In this newsletter, I would like to suggest that we also are not powerless over the more common stresses in our lives. Many people I see in my practice come in stressed to the point of a "nervous breakdown." (Actually there is no such thing as our nerves breaking down; it just feels that way). Those individuals are definitely in need of outside help. However, with the more common, every day stress, there are a few things to consider doing to alleviate your problems. I will address five of them.

ALTERING

Is there any way you can alter your situation or environment? Not always do we have to give in to the stressful scenario in our lives. Many times we can creatively alter our environment. I worked with a woman who was devastated by the negativity of the woman who worked in the cubicle next to her. We devised a simple plan in which she moved her work station to the other end of her long desk. This simple alteration resulted in a dramatic reduction of stress. She no longer directly faced her negative cohort. It became very inconvenient for the lady to constantly gripe to my counselee. This woman had to literally get up from her station and walk over to her in order to complain. Soon the woman was seeking someone else out. Simple, but highly effective. So the question you must ask yourself here is, "How can I remove the source of my stress?"

AVOIDING

I may receive letters on this one, but I believe that the concept of avoidance has unduly received the harshest criticisms of all coping mechanisms. It is discouraged by almost all lay and professional people helpers. In the right situations, I am a fervent advocate of avoidance as a coping mechanism for stress. This is not about evasive denial; it is about taking enough control of your life to stay out of harms way. Let's take our same example of the woman who was constantly irritated by her negative co-

worker. She was further able to thwart the stress by arranging her break time to be a half hour later than her negative co-worker. This is a classical example of avoidance, and a strategy that produced positive results.

ACCEPTING

Can you learn to live with the stress? In many cases the answer to this is yes. Some irritations are inevitable and a change in our thinking and behaving is in order. Let's take the stressed out person who has to drive through rush hour traffic in Denver to go to work. There is probably no immediate alternative such as a different route or quitting their job. In this case, one can learn to take advantage of the extra time. They can listen to wonderful tapes, learn relaxation techniques or use the time for prayer. Here is an example of accepting the stressful situation and making the most of it.

ASSISTING

How can you build up your resistance to stress? It is common understanding that our ability to affectively handle life's stressors is directly proportional to how immune we are to outside attacks (physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and mental). If we are physically strong, we are much better able to fight off viruses and physical illness. Likewise, if we are mentally and emotionally healthy, we can much better handle pressures of life than those who are not. And perhaps those best equipped to handle life's stresses are those who are well grounded in their relationship with God. The point here is that we can greatly assist ourselves by tending to our physical, spiritual, mental and emotional well being. We do this through exercise, nutrition, good sleep, prayer, study and the development of good open communicative relationships. This will all go a long way in handling the benign stressors of life.

ADJUSTING

Here, we take a good look at our thought processes. This is probably the most powerful of all the coping mechanisms. *As a man thinketh in his heart, so he is* (Pro 23:7). *Be transformed by the renewing of your mind* (Rom 12:2). A ancient Greek philosopher named Epictitus said "Man is not disturbed by his circumstances but by the views he takes of those circumstances." Perhaps we need to do some healthy confronting of the irrational beliefs that we hold concerning the circumstances in our lives and replace them with the truth of the Word of God.