

## The Way Out of Stress

### Welcome/Prayer

### Foreword

Throughout our study of the second book of the Bible, *Exodus*, we've discovered that our God can and will provide us a "way out" from anything and everything that holds us captive. The central figure in the Book of Exodus, Moses, had a many demands placed upon him in his role as leader of the Israelites. We, too, live in a demanding world; yet, the issue for us isn't whether we're going to experience stress; rather, it's how we get a handle on it so that it doesn't get a hold on us.

### Introduction

Several sources define *stress* as "physical, emotional, or mental strain or tension that results from the demands placed upon us by our environment, circumstances, or relationships." Undoubtedly, stress takes a tremendous toll on our lives, and it isn't only for adults; it afflicts children and adolescents, as well (e.g., academic and social pressures). If not kept in check, stress can take hold of us and enslave us to our own demise...physically, emotionally, and/or mentally. As we look at Moses' experience with stress, we're going to see that, just as God brought him relief, we, too, can find "the way out of stress."

1. What are the sources of stress in your life, and what adverse effects have you experienced from those stressors?
2. How would you rate your current stress level on a scale of 1-10 (1=no worries; 10="loco")?
3. What helps you reduce or eliminate stress in your life?

### Preparation

Read the following text related to today's message:

#### **Exodus 18:13-24 (NLT)**

<sup>13</sup> The next day, Moses took his seat to hear the people's disputes against each other. They waited before him from morning till evening. <sup>14</sup> When Moses' father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he asked, "What are you really accomplishing here? Why are you trying to do all this alone while everyone stands around you from morning till evening?" <sup>15</sup> Moses replied, "Because the people come to me to get a ruling from God. <sup>16</sup> When a dispute arises, they come to me, and I am the one who settles the case between the quarreling parties. I inform the people of God's decrees and give them his instructions." <sup>17</sup> "This is not good!" Moses' father-in-law exclaimed. <sup>18</sup> "You're going to wear yourself out—and the people, too. This job is too heavy a burden for you to handle all by yourself. <sup>19</sup> Now listen to me, and let me give you a word of advice, and may God be with you. You should continue to be the people's representative before God, bringing their disputes to him. <sup>20</sup> Teach them God's decrees, and give them his instructions. Show them how to conduct their lives. <sup>21</sup> But select from all the people some capable, honest men who fear God and hate bribes. Appoint them as leaders over groups of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, and ten. <sup>22</sup> They should always be available to solve the people's common disputes, but have them bring the major cases to you. Let the leaders decide the smaller matters themselves. They will help you carry the load, making the task easier for you. <sup>23</sup> If you follow this advice, and if God commands you to do so, then you will be able to endure the pressures, and all these people will go home in peace." <sup>24</sup> Moses listened to his father-in-law's advice and followed his suggestions.

### Break it Down

The Book of Exodus shows us that stress is not a modern invention. Moses was overwhelmed by his responsibilities and stressed out. Many of us can probably relate. When we consider the advice offered

by Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, that same counsel will provide us the guidelines to use as we allow and trust God, our Counselor, to show us "the way out of stress."

### **Streamline.**

The first step in finding the way out of stress is to determine if there is some task that we don't have to be doing. Jethro suggested to Moses that he should prioritize his time and responsibilities. Sometimes that means saying, "No." Pastor and Bible teacher, Chuck Swindoll, makes this claim: "Efficiency is increased not only by what is accomplished, but also by what is relinquished." To relieve stress, it is imperative that we streamline or cut back on the non-essential tasks.

1. What are some of your critical/central roles and responsibilities?
2. Where might you be able to cut back or streamline some of the "non-essential" ones?
3. Why do you think people have trouble saying, "no" to others?

### **Share.**

Jethro recognized the tremendous burden that Moses was bearing on his own and thus advised Moses to delegate. For many of us, that's not an easy concept to embrace because it means we have to ask for help or relinquish control (gasp!). However, sharing responsibility is the biblical model for leadership. We are created to be in relationships, especially those that revolve around a common purpose (Jesus). Consider Jesus' earthly ministry—He taught others about the Good News and then charged them to go and make disciples of His work. The way out of stress for us is letting others into our lives and sharing our burdens so that others can help us carry them.

1. Why do people resist seeking help or assistance?
2. How has sharing responsibilities with another helped reduce stress in your life?
3. Think of a burden you feel that you're bearing alone or one that is weighing on you. Consider sharing that with your group when you're ready...because your group is ready to help you carry it.

### **Seek Shelter.**

Jethro's simple statement (v. 19a) illustrated for Moses that it was not enough for Moses to prioritize (streamline) and share his responsibilities in order to find a way out of stress. Neither will we find a way out unless we seek shelter in the One whose presence brings a peace that surpasses all understanding. In the words of the psalmist, we should "[b]e still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for Him to act" (Psalm 37:7 NLT). Our shelter is found through prayer and repentance; as we seek His shelter, we must learn to trust Him (in all matters) and wait patiently for Him to act.

1. When and how has God's presence brought you peace?
2. How have you learned to seek Him in the "little things" of life?

### **Conclusion**

We will find the way out of stress when we learn to trust God ALL the time. We begin by streamlining our lives, sharing our burdens with others, and seeking shelter in the everlasting arms of the Lord. As in the concluding advice Jethro gave Moses in our lesson's text: "If you follow this advice, and if God commands you to do so, then you will be able to endure the [stress], and all these people (yourself included) will go home in peace." (v. 23)

1. If you're not currently involved in a stable, close-knit community, you're invited to reach out to our Discipleship Pastor, Terry Tatum (terry@myLHUMC.net).
2. What is one thing you can do to seek God on a regular, daily basis? Get started on it this week.
3. Commit to let go of one of your "non-essentials"—even if it's only for one day or one week—and watch how God works in your life.

### **Close in Prayer**