

Getting Off the Road to Burnout Learning to Manage Stress

Hudson Taylor said, *“It matters not how great the pressure is, only where the pressure lies. As long as the pressure does not come between me and my Savior, but presses me to Him, then the greater the pressure, the greater my dependence upon Him.”*

Stress is a part of life. Stress can be a beneficial thing in our lives, because without a sufficient amount of it we may be unmotivated to do the things we need to do. Healthy stress pushes us toward goals or toward God. It pushes us to accomplish things and to be purposeful and productive. The right kind of stress feels positive and energetic.

If stress that motivates is a good thing, can you know when your stress level is in danger of becoming a negative thing in your life? How do you know when you are no longer simply motivated by it, but are instead on the road to burnout?

Stress becomes a negative thing in your life when you begin to feel irritable and indecisive. You may not be able to sleep, or may sleep too much. You may begin overeating or not eating enough. You may start noticing that you have less ability to concentrate. You may even feel like your “on” switch can’t be turned off, even temporarily.

Negative stress also may be the cause of some physical symptoms. High blood pressure, tension headaches, ulcers or muscle aches, could be the result of too much stress in your life. It is important to pay attention to what your body is telling you, and make changes accordingly.

Those symptoms, like the light on your car dashboard, warn you that something needs to be attended to and changed. There are also some other symptoms that, if you are experiencing several of them, may be signals to you that you are on the road to burnout:

- Overwhelmed with responsibility
- Becoming unproductive
- Withdrawing from relationships
- Lack of enthusiasm
- Depression
- Easily losing perspective
- Indecisiveness
- Irritability

When you see the danger signs in your life, and you believe you are on the road to burnout, what should you do?

The first thing you should do is stop and evaluate your life habits—healthy eating, regular exercise, and adequate sleep. If you come up short in those areas, then make the necessary changes to get back to healthy habits.

Next you should evaluate your priorities. Make a list, and then put them in order of importance. Remember that no one can “do everything,” so you will need to choose those things that are the most important in your life and let the rest go. Determine not to say yes to everything. Don’t give yourself or allow anyone else to give you unreasonable deadlines. Actively work at avoiding the adrenalin rush that comes from believing that everything is an urgent matter.

It is also important to make sure you are nourishing yourself spiritually. Are you taking time to feed your soul? Is there regular time in the word of God? Are you talking to God, or more importantly, are you listening to Him? If you are not taking the time to listen to God, then you are not availing yourself of the finest “compass” when it comes to making decisions about your time, activities, priorities, and choices. Seek to do His will and you will find that doing His will does not lead you to burnout.

Next, you should evaluate to see if there are unhealthy motivations that are leading you to stressful living. Do you give into pressure from people in your life? Do you try to raise your self-esteem by hard work in order to get approval of others from what you do? Are you trying to avoid being criticized?

If you are feeling stressed because of pressure, fear of criticism, or trying to earn approval, acceptance or love, then you need to take measures to turn from that. God and His will should be your motivation, and anything beyond that is a sinful way to get your needs for love and approval met. Acknowledge those wrong motivations, confess them, and ask God to help you do only what He wants you to do.

Additionally, ask Him to help you see your circumstances as He sees them. Ask Him if there is something in the stress that you can learn from. Make it a practice when you feel stressed to **evaluate**, take the time to **nourish yourself spiritually**, **evaluate your motivations**, and then make some adjustments if necessary.

When you feel overwhelmed with stress, that may be a signal that you have given into the unrealistic expectations of yourself or others. If so, it is a call to return to living your life to please God and find out what His will is in your life, doing only those things that He desires.