

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



God's Stress Remover

KEY PASSAGE: Matthew 14:22-23 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1:26 | Mark 1:35 | Romans 5:7-8

SUMMARY

Stress is a killer, but we can't escape it since we're surrounded by distressing situations of all kinds.

The question is, How are we going to handle it? Many people try to escape their anxious feelings with medications, drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, or anything that brings relief. But none of these methods are truly effective. The ultimate solution only comes from God, and He has freely provided it to every one of His children.

I know this solution works because I have experienced it. At one point in my ministry, I was hospitalized three times in one year because of the stress I placed on myself. Thinking that I ought to take advantage of every opportunity that came my way, I was trying to do more than God intended. As a result, I became so tired and run down that I had to take three months off. My son and I spent six weeks on an island as I recovered. It was during this time that God taught me how to handle stress. The answer is not found in a bottle of pills, but in times of solitude with the Lord.

SERMON POINTS

Jesus also experienced stress, but He knew exactly how to handle it.

Once, after feeding a multitude of five thousand, Jesus sent His disciples away in a boat and went up on the mountain by Himself to pray (Matt. 14:22-23). In fact, seeking solitude with His Father was His customary practice, especially after dramatic situations. We also see this same example in the apostle Paul's life. After he was dramatically saved, he headed for Arabia to seek solitude with God (Gal. 1:17). Time spent alone in prayer with God is vital.

The practice of solitude

Spending time alone with the Lord sets us free from stress. This kind of isolation is not the same as loneliness. Solitude is a choice to be alone, to voluntarily separate ourselves from others. But loneliness is a painful inner emptiness that results from feeling disconnected from others. It involves a sense of not belonging and being alone in a universe of uncaring people.

The purpose of solitude is to privately commune with God. The goal is not to study the Bible or bring our petitions and concerns to Him, but to simply be with the Lord. That's when the chokehold of stress is broken, and all our tensions subside. This doesn't mean we'll never experience stress again, but solitude teaches us how to deal with it in God's way when it comes.

Reasons for solitude

The Lord wants us to be alone with Him for two primary reasons:

- **For a relationship.** God created us in His image because He wanted to have a relationship with us for all eternity (Gen. 1:26). No other creature on earth was given this privilege. In fact, God loved us so much that He was willing to send His Son to die for us in order to break down the barrier which sin created (Rom. 5:7-8). Yet despite all this, many Christians don't have time for Him. However, we won't be able to relate to the Lord if our minds are preoccupied, and our schedules are full. Solitude is the only way this intimate relationship with our Creator becomes a reality.
- **For preparation.** Solitude is also God's way of preparing us for the day ahead. That's why we should begin each morning with time alone with Him. Although reading the Word and spending time in prayer are very important, the primary purpose

of solitude is to experience God's presence. He wants to be alone with each one of us because that's when He's able to reveal Himself in awesome ways so we can know Him intimately and feel a sense of belonging.

Experiencing solitude

How do we experience solitude?

- **By opening God's Word to focus on Him.** Although solitude is not synonymous with Bible study and prayer, we do need to spend a short period of time reading the Word so our thinking will be God-oriented. This is not the time to focus on our needs and prayer requests. The point is to become more sensitive to the Lord's presence.
- **By eliminating distractions.** To prevent our minds from drifting, we need to find a dark and quiet place that is free from distractions. The goal is to be still and quiet so we can give the Lord our undivided attention. As we enjoy sweet fellowship with Him, all our worries, fears, and stress drain away, and we're strengthened to handle whatever comes.

Benefits of solitude

If we practice solitude, our lives will be changed in the following ways:

- **Makes our busy days more fruitful.** If we begin each day with the Lord, setting our minds and hearts on Him and listening for His voice, He'll guide us and make whatever we do more productive in service to Him.
- **Repairs damage.** After a hard day, when we just can't handle any more, a time of solitude with the Lord refuels us emotionally. All the troubles and anxieties are released, and we come away liberated and refreshed.
- **Equips us to face the tough days.** Time alone with the Lord enables us to face the trials, heartaches, and burdens of difficult days with calm confidence and assurance of His presence with us.
- **Creates surprising moments.** When we meet quietly with the Lord, He may unexpectedly answer

our prayers in surprising ways and reveal even more than we ask.

- **Strips us of pride.** In God's presence we begin to recognize His holiness, perfection, and power, and as a result, understand how lowly we are in comparison.
- **Protects health.** Stress affects our bodies and damages our health, but solitude with the Lord releases our anxiety so we don't have to suffer its harmful effects.
- **Makes a difference in relationships.** When we've released our stress to the Lord, our relationships with others improve.
- **Gives peace and joy.** Times of solitude with God can calm our hearts, quiet our spirits, and enable us to overcome anything we're facing in life.
- **Gives greater strength from the Lord.** He enables us to handle each day's challenges.
- **Produces greater trust in God.** We rest in the knowledge that our heavenly Father will take care of us.
- **Develops a deeper relationship with the Lord.** In those quiet times, we learn to know Him more intimately.

RESPONSE

- How do you normally handle stress in your life?
- In what way is solitude different from another form of stress relief you've experienced?
- Have you ever practiced solitude with God as a solution to stress?
- What benefits have become evident from your practice of solitude? Would you recommend it to others who are dealing with stress?

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