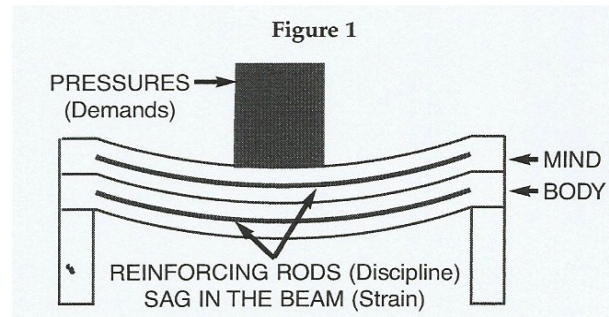


Biblical Living (5) – Pressure, Stress, Panic-Attacks

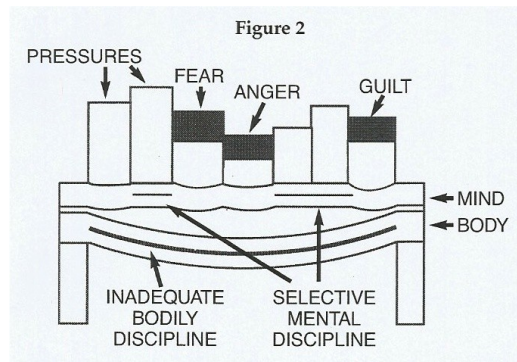


(adapted from Jim Berg *Changed Into His Image* and *Quieting a Noisy Soul*)

1. Mishandled pressure may result in a number of symptoms in the mind: depression, listlessness, boredom, apathy, irritability, compulsive behaviours (excessive exercise, perfectionism, eating disorders).
2. Wrongly handled pressure by the mind is then borne by the body: muscular tensions, headaches, insomnia and chronic fatigue, appetite changes, heart palpitations, ulcers, stomach disorders.
3. The stress response of the body:
 1. The alarm stage. This is the initial response of the body during the first few minutes after it senses a demand. The sympathetic nervous system (SNS) is activated, sending neural and chemical messages to various organs putting the body on “high alert” status. More specifically, the hypothalamus in the brain stimulates the pituitary gland, which in turn signals the adrenal glands to produce what are commonly called “stress hormones.” The most familiar of these hormones to most of us are epinephrine (adrenalin), norepinephrine, and cortisol (a natural steroid similar to cortisone). These in turn notify other parts of the body of the emergency. As a result, pulse quickens, pupils dilate, digestion stops as the blood supply is sent to the muscles rather than the stomach and intestines, heart rate and blood pressure increase, muscles tense, and thinking quickens. Fats are released into the bloodstream as sources of emergency fuel, and the thyroid increases the metabolic rate of the body. All of this is a part of the body’s way of readying itself for “fight or flight.”
 2. The adaptive/resistance stage. After the initial emergency passes, the body attempts to return to its former resting state because of its built-in mechanism to seek homeostasis. If the emergency persists, the body continues to produce the stress hormones. Extended cortisol release results in increased blood sugar levels, weight gain, bone loss, elevated blood pressure, digestive problems, sleep deprivation,

decreased sexual drive, and a weakened autoimmune system making the body more susceptible to viral and bacterial infections, fungal infections, and allergies. Worry and anger keep the body in this state of emergency, and eventually serious physical problems develop as adaptive resources are depleted. This extended alarm state eventually leads to the final stage—the exhaustion stage.

3. The exhaustion stage (overload). In this stage all of the above effects—weight gain, autoimmune dysfunction, and so forth— become elevated as the body shuts down because of depleted resources. Extended illnesses, chronic fatigue, thyroid depletion, inflammatory disorders, heightened allergies, coronary complications,

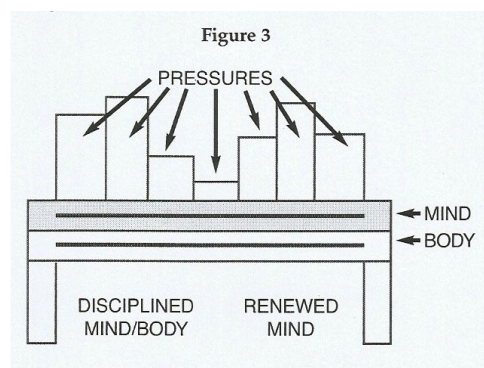


and insomnia, though not always caused by exhaustion and stress are nonetheless worsened by extended stress. These deteriorating physical conditions tempt the individual to more worry and anger and therefore, place even greater strain on the body. It is a deadly spiral. It is important to understand that the stress response of the sympathetic nervous system does not “turn off” until the nervous system detects that both the body and the mind are at rest. When that signal is received, the parasympathetic nervous system begins to counteract all the effects of the emergency mode of the sympathetic nervous system.

4. Secular books teach goal-setting, prioritisation, bodily exercise. While these are 'reinforcing rods', the biblical truth is that God never intended man to handle life's pressures on his own (John 15:4-6, 2 Cor 3:5).
5. We must deal with the pressure of an overcome conscience. The burden of a continual sense of guilt is the greatest burden of all (Ps 32). Known sin must be confessed and forsaken (1 John 1:9; Prov. 28:13). The believer with an oversensitive conscience must not seek out *suspected* sin. He must rest in the fact that a God is greater than a condemning heart and knows all things (1 John 3:20). He must repent of doing the Holy Spirit's work for Him, and trust that God will convict using His Word, not through perfectionistic feelings, or an over-reliance on feelings of peace.
6. We must deal with an overcommitted life (Ps 127:2). Remove responsibilities we have assumed outside the will of God. The hyper-diligent believes everything he does is necessary. We almost certainly need outside counsel to evaluate if we are overcommitted. Using good counsel, evaluate your life priorities from God's Word,

determining that ultimate, necessary, possible, and extraneous. Use the counsel of others to determine if your roles and responsibilities in life are God-given, or if you have independently added some.

7. We must deal with an under-disciplined life. The lazy man believes the necessary is an unfair imposition on him. He believes he is always about to burn out. This is because he has inadequate bodily and mental discipline, so he always feels overdrawn.
 1. A mentally disciplined believer evaluates all pressures, and the resources to meet them, from God's point of view. A carnal mind evaluates problems and pressures from a purely human perspective. It will make evaluations like the following:
 - "That's one more crummy thing I have to do this week. I'll never make it." • "I think this requirement is stupid, but if that's the only way I can get what I want, I'll put up with it." • "This kind of stuff always happens to me! Doesn't anybody care?" • "I've got enough to worry about already. I don't need this!" • "He can't get away with that. I don't have to take it!"
 Do your pressures always seem larger to you than God seems to you? See 1 Chronicles 29:12, Luke 1:37, and Ephesians 3:20. 2 Pet. 1:3) (2 Cor. 9:8, 12:9-10.
 2. A believer with a renewed mind accepts God's purposes for pressure (2 Cor. 4:16-18; Heb. 12:1-3; James 1:2-3; 1 Pet. 1:6-7). *What is God doing by sovereignly allowing this? Will there be enough grace to handle this? Will this pressure be permanent? What sort of example should I be during this time? What affections should I exhibit to please God and enjoy Him?*
 3. A physically disciplined believer understands the importance of maintaining his body with a balance of training and rest. This includes getting enough rest (Ps 127:2), but not too much (Prov 20:13), eating well but avoiding chronic over-indulgence (Prov 25:16), and including physical exercise, since we sit too much. He orders his life around structured routines, which allow him to use his time as best as possible. Physical discipline includes counteracting the physical stress response with physical responses – such as deep breathing exercises, and proper relaxation coupled with meditation.



If you do not establish a regular time of meditation on God's Word, allowing Him to teach you Who He is and that He is more than enough, and if you do not respond to Him personally with trusting

submission and hopeful petition for your troubles, your soul will not rest and your body will not relax. Meditation will by itself calm your soul, and, eventually, your body. When mind and body are at rest, your parasympathetic nervous system will turn off the adrenalin—and all the other stress hormones—and activate the “rest and digest” response. You can hasten this process by adding a program of physical relaxation to your daily routine. The world offers many flavors of relaxation techniques that should be avoided—many of which are tainted with Eastern mysticism or New Age thinking.

It is important to distinguish between different kinds of leisure (in terms of relaxation);

Amusement: this is using computer games, movies, TV, Youtube as pure diversion or distraction. It passes time, though little benefit will be reaped in terms of restoring the soul.

Recreation: all kinds of activities that are restorative. Exercise, a walk, travel, a good book, all forms of 'play' that restore body and mind.

Entertainment: in the strict sense of the word, this is where our minds 'host', or *entertain*, another's creative work (or better, they host us) – a good book, listening to a beautiful piece of music, considering a beautiful painting. The true, the good, and the beautiful truly entertain; the trivial and the superficial merely amuse.

Avocation: those things that beautify the world: making music, building, restoring, repairing, creating – hobbies, interests, crafts that shape and order the world.

Service of others: using our free time to bless and encourage others.