

## Revitalize: Your Idea about Stress

Christmas time is here and like having a favorite carol, we often have a 'favorite' stress. My biggest holiday stress is decorating. Some people stress out over cooking or baking or shopping or attending parties, schedules and finances and weather...pick your own! There's something for everyone to stress over at this time of year. It's enough to send you to the loony bin or at least to the doctor with the colds and flu that goes around. Stress contributes to the poor function of our immune system and other health problems.

My college daughter told me about a TED Talk she watched in her psychology class entitled, "How to Make Stress Your Friend". The speaker was Dr. Kelly McGonigal, a health psychologist. In her fifteen minute talk she shared that after ten years of trying to help people deal with stress because she believed it was detrimental, she had to change her thinking on how she viewed stress. She shared that there are some studies of people that have a lot of stress, but because they don't view the stress as harmful they exhibited less negative effects than other people, including some of the un-stressed individuals in the study. Basically, after looking at some more studies she believes that changing your belief about stress can change your body's response. If you view the physical signs of stress; increased heart rate and respiration as your body preparing you for action, increasing blood flow and oxygen to your brain and body, then your blood vessels don't constrict, they remain open. This reaction looks like the way our body acts in the states of joy or courage.

At that point of the video my Holy Spirit light bulb went off and I thought, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance." James 1:2-3. Wow! She was speaking a TRUTH with science.

Then Dr. McGonigle went on to talk about a hormonal response to stress. Not adrenalin, but oxytocin, a neuro-hormone that the pituitary gland puts out. But oxytocin has an interesting function, it incites you to seek the support of other people. It's a social hormone! Not only does it make you seek that support, but when you hug someone your pituitary gland releases oxytocin! It's a biological urge to seek and encourage fellowship!

Again, I had a Holy Spirit light bulb go off. "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25. Oh and then there's the whole book of First John, telling us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. And I also thought of Ecclesiastes 4:12, "Though one may be overpowered two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." My Holy Spirit light bulbs were starting to look like a string of Christmas lights.

The more social you are, the lecture said, the more oxytocin is released, not just in you, but in those around you. She says it's a mechanism for stress resilience! I say it's a God thing!

It was a great lecture, encouraging and thought-changing. If you make up your mind at the first sign of stress that you are going to think of that fast heart beat as pumping blood to get you ready to handle the job ahead and the fast breathing as sending oxygen to your brain so that you can think clearly and problem solve, then you have become courageous! You have counted that stress as joy! Then reach out, share that stress with someone else, get the blessing of fellowship and oxytocin. Have coffee, chat, and hug, pray together...keep that good hormone working and share it around. (Maybe that's why we love our coffee & donut time and our welcome times, we're sharing the oxytocin with each hug and interaction!

Follow God's prescription, and turn stress from negative to positive! (I highly recommend this TED talk! See if you get any Holy Spirit light bulbs when you watch it!)

Nancy