

From Stressed to Blessed

50 Days of Transformation, Part 2, 10/22

Welcome to Part 3 of our 50 Days of Transformation Series! Before we get into the message this morning, let me start with a question:

- How many of you here have felt a bit stressed out at any point this week?
- Now, if you haven't, that's great! Maybe you woke up this morning **completely rested and refreshed...**
- You got yourself energetically out of bed... and **when you stood in front of your bathroom mirror**, all you could think was, *"Wow, do I feel good! In fact, I really look good!"*

Maybe those were a few of your first thoughts this morning. But if they weren't, then know that you're not alone.

- In fact, more and more people today are living their lives feeling **far more overwhelmed & exhausted** than rested & invigorated.
- As a society, we've found ourselves **chronically tired...** STRESSED from what seems like an **infinite barrage of challenges & complications & ever-increasing responsibilities.**

And the sad reality is that the presence of stress in our lives is increasing year after year.

- In fact, **31% of men and 37% of women surveyed claimed to have experienced significant stress last year.**
- That's up several percentage points for women from the year before and a full 5% more for men.
- And **what are we stressed about?** Let me ask you. What do you think came up as the #1 stressor for men & women?
- Well... **67% said money. 65% said work-related stress; 54% family-related stress; 51% said health;** and so on.

Of course, not all stress is bad. Feeling a bit stressed from time to time is a natural part of life that actually come with a few benefits.

- In **smaller doses**, it can help you meet your deadlines a little more efficiently... It can event help you focus and can help boost memory.

- It's also a God-given mechanism that stirs the fight-or-flight response that can help us in emergencies...
- flooding our bodies with chemicals like adrenaline & cortisol, stimulating laser-like reflexes, for example, so you can jump out of the way of a truck about to hit you.

But, as we all know, too much stress can wreak havoc on our physical health; From weight gain to fatigue to hair loss to muscle pain.

- And when that stress is chronic, it can weaken the immune system, cause high blood pressure, depression, and even heart disease...
- And, it can also cause inflammation which can lead any one of a number of auto-immune diseases.

And yet, because of how “normal” stress has become, we're less & less aware of its presence in our lives.

- But **even when we are**, we're **only vaguely aware** of the physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual price we're paying for it.
- At the very least, you find that you're **not becoming the kind of person** that you long to become...
- you're not enjoying **life** and **relationships** and **ministry** the way you know you could.

When we live in a state of **ongoing tiredness & stress**, we **struggle to live out our values and beliefs**...

- it's **no longer fun** being about what God has called us to be and do...
- **Not because we're out to defy God**, but because we just feel too scattered and fatigued to follow him...
- Too overwhelmed and under rested to be the kind of **parents** we want to be... the kind of **friend** or **spouse** or **student** or **Christ-follower** that we really want to be.

And yet, as I said, this stress and weariness of soul that comes with it, has become so normal in our **complex & fast-paced** lives,

- that we don't even know that we're experiencing it till we're in

- so deep we're no longer sure how we can get out.
- But understand... that living with chronic tiredness and stress is not God's heart for our lives.

In fact, one day Jesus looked at a group of people and said, "*Come to me all you who are weary and heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.*"

- He said, "*Take my yoke on you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest for your souls.*"
- In **Psalm 23**, David said, "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters... He restores my soul.*"

You see, even in spite of the many challenges life throws in our paths,

- the Father's heart is that we be restored and and more at rest in His presence.

- And so, what I'd like to do this morning is to **first identify some of the causes and signs of a stressed-out life...**
- and then talk about a pathway laid out for us by King David in Psalm 23 **that really can lead us from "stressed to blessed."**

So... what are some of symptoms of **living that stress out, weariness-of-soul life?** Well, let me walk you through just five of them.

- Now, **if you're too tired and stressed out to track with me,** I'll understand... but try and stay with me!

Signs and Causes of a Stressed Out Life...

1. A frequent or constant sense of feeling rushed (*an ongoing sense that there are just not enough hours in the day*)

There are too many **things** I have to do, too many **responsibilities** to be met, too many **obligations** to be carried out...

- too many things I want to do, and there just isn't enough time.
- And so, **rather than find creative ways to slow down** a bit,
- we spend all our extra time figuring out how we can go faster and do more in the limited time we have.

And yet, we're still **tortured by the sense that important things are going undone...**

- And **by the sense** that there's just **no margin of error** in our lives...
- Where, **if one thing goes wrong...** one interruption, one delay... we just can't catch up.
- There's just this **constant sense of feeling rushed or fatigued.**
- I'd say more about it, but **we don't have time** so I want to go on to the next one.

2. A second sign of a stress-filled life is difficulty making decisions.

We're so obsessed with wanting lots of alternatives that we live in what experts call "**choice overload.**"

- You look at the choice factor of our lives today compared to the lives of people a hundred years ago, and it's unbelievable.
- Just take one very simple activity: A hundred years ago **if people wanted to wash their hair**, they used lye soap.

Today, there are over **1,640 kinds of shampoos**: a shampoo for **dry** hair, **itchy** hair, for **oily** hair, for **limp** hair, for **colored** hair, for **damaged** hair.

- There's **organic** shampoo, **dry** shampoo... There's shampoo with an **egg** in it: shampoo with **beer** in it; and shampoo with **tar** in it!
- There's shampoo to make your hair smell like a coconut... or any kind of **flower**, any kind of **fruit** and **several kinds of vegetables.**

In every way today, from choosing a cup of coffee to choosing a restaurant to how you'll communicate with a friend,

- Your mind is flooded by a never-ending barrage of information that **needs to be processed & discerned...**
- hundreds of decisions a day that would never have even been considered.
- So, let me ask you... **how many of you ever wrestle with**

indecision? Anybody here?

- How many of you aren't sure? You need a little more time?

3. Surplus of information, but a deficit of wisdom.

Now, I don't know about you, but I get stressed at times because I feel like there is so much information that I should be reading & understanding...

- too many **books & blogs** ready to be read; too many **podcasts & sermons** by wonderful teachers ready to be listened to.
- There are newspapers, network/cable news, etc. etc. Bottom-line... we have an **information overload!**

There's just so much information out there that, without even knowing it, we can easily buckle under the weight of information overload.

- When I was a kid, I remember **complaining about the instructions** that came with a new watch I had gotten...
- You know, that 2-inch by 17-foot wad of paper that took five minutes just to unfold! What was there to explain?

But now, no bigger than the watches of 40 years ago, **we now have watches** that do everything from **track your heart beat...**

- to **providing you with GPS services** so you don't get lost when you're running!
- My sister was having her kitchen remodeled recently... and they put in the cabinets wrong and she was getting stressed out.
- Well, her watch told her to sit down and take deep breaths!

For most of our history as a human race, if people wanted to know what time it was, they looked at a **sundial**.

- Sundials didn't come with 29 pages of instructions.
- Just look at where the shadow is! If there was a shadow, you knew about what time it was.
- If it was a cloudy or rainy day, then **they'd just assume it was nighttime and went back to bed!**

You see, guys... We are the most informed people who have ever lived.

And yet, let me ask you a question: **Are we the wisest?**

- We will go down as the most informed generation to this point in human history.
- But will people look back on this era and say, "*Now, there was a group of men and women who had real wisdom for living*"?
- In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon put it like this: "*For wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.*"

It is very interesting to me that Solomon **doesn't say that information** is more precious than rubies.

- Wisdom is about knowing how to live... the way God created us to live.
- And yet, **wisdom does not come to a mind that is rushed and fatigued.**
- Are you living with an increasing sense of wisdom these days, or are you on information overload?

4. Sense of superficiality in my relationship with God.

Let me ask you, do you have a sense that things are stagnant in your spiritual life?

- Are your prayers hurried?
- Are you hurrying through your devotional times?
- In your spiritual life, is Jesus **your steering wheel** who guides your life?
- **Or, is He your spare tire** that you turn to only when you get a flat?
- Do you find that **your mind is being deeply formed & shaped** as you immerse yourself in Scripture?

Why is it that I can speak to a 60-year-old man about the things he is struggling with... and it will often be the same things he was struggling with when he was 25?

- It's because chronic stress has **kept him from living the kind of life that would empower freedom** over those things.
- The truth is, that for so many people, **because things are going**

so fast and because we get so fatigued, our character is not really developing.

- And without any change, **we need to face the prospect of reaching the end of our lives** with a character in **no better shape** than it is right now.

5. A final sign of a stress-out life is a decreased ability to love & care.

I would guess that each one of us here would like to be a more loving person. And yet stress & weariness of soul is perhaps the **greatest barrier to love...**

- because when your own well is dry, there's just **not a whole left to give** to anyone.
- Parents understand the kind of energy that it takes to parent well and how often we realize that *right now*,
- my child needs **attention** and needs **conversation**, needs my **presence**,
- But I'm not able to give it. I don't have it to give.

Again... it's not b/c you don't want to give... you do... but b/c of a tired, weary soul, you lack the **energy, power, and strength** just to love... let alone give.

- You see, stress is deadly serious. It creates people who are **constantly rushed, always behind, indecisive, superficial, disconnected with God** and **too fatigued to love**.
- And b/c we feel stuck living a lifestyle so different than we want to be living, we take on **frustration, guilt, shame, and anger** on top of all those other things...
- Till it feels at times as though your **heart is growing smaller**, and your **spirit is withering**, and your **sense of joy is evaporating...**
- And your **ability to appreciate and experience awe & wonder** has all but disappeared.

Well... there's another way to do life. And that's why, in Psalm 23, King David, who lived with a few pressures of his own...

- wrote about the kind of life we were meant to have.... **the kind**

that gives way to the Abundant Life Jesus spoke about in John 10.

- In **verse 1 of Psalm 23**, David says, "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters*"
- And then this remarkable statement -- "**he restores my soul.**"

So, in the time remaining, I want to look at the different parts of this short passage which really can lead us along the path from stressed to blessed.

A. First of all, David says, "The Lord is my shepherd."

There's a real basic decision involved here. Have I put my life in God's hands?

Ask any sheep and they'll tell you that **life without a shepherd** is a life of worry-- worry about the **future**, about your **children**, about your **job**,

- about your **health**, about **whatever crisis you're in**, about whether or not you'll experience what your heart's crying out for.
- Let me ask you... how many of you ever worry?

How many of you have **discovered that worry & anxiety is a constructive,**

- life-giving way to deal with your present circumstances or the future?
- You see, there's another way to do life, and that is to **live in the constant care of the Good Shepherd.**

Now if you know anything about sheep, these critters do not just take care of themselves.

- Sheep require more **attention** and **meticulous care** than just about any other kind of livestock.
- They *need* a shepherd... a *good shepherd* who is always **thinking** about them, **guiding** them, **caring** for them, **watching** out for them, who's **looking out** for their needs.

Well God wants to remind you that He's your faithful Father...

- that there is never a moment in any given day that He's not loving you...
- where He's not present in your life as your Good Shepherd.

Maybe you need to **cry out for a fresh revelation of His love** in your life.

- Listen guys, **you are not who YOU think you are**. You are who the Good Shepherd thinks you are! And who is that?
- Well, you may not feel like it, but **you're a new creation**, you're **His treasured possession**, His precious son & daughter.

Maybe you believe He's present, **but b/c of stress** you've started to wonder if He cares what's going on in your life.

- But that's just the stress talking.
- The Good Shepherd's love & care for you has no limits.

He's always thinking about his sheep. He's always **guiding** them,

- **protecting** them, **watching** out for them, he's always **looking** out for their needs.
- God will do that for you. His heart is to shepherd you.
- He will help you as you face not only your every-day struggles but even those much bigger storms that might intrude into your life.

B. David says, "The Lord is my shepherd." Then he goes on to make this amazing statement. He says, "I shall not want."

You see, what David's saying here is that because He's come to embrace and trust the Lord as a good shepherd **who cares and provides for him**...

- he can go through life as a joyful, grateful, contented person.
- Of course, in his life, David also experienced the **alternative to that...** which was **chronic discontent**, **insatiable desire**, and the never-ending, **unfulfilled quest for satisfaction**.

In many respects, we live in an economy and a society today that is **built on the production of insatiable desire.**

- Some of the **smartest people** in our world devote most of their working hours thinking of ways to convince you of two things:
- **First...** that **you are or should be discontent**, and; **Second**, that **contentment is just one purchase away.**
- If you turn on the television or look at billboards by the side of the road, a thousand products cry out,
- *"Use me! Buy me! Eat me! Wear me! Try me! Drive me! Put me in your hair!"*

They say to us, "You will be happy if you have a **bigger house, newer car, higher income, better clothes, whiter teeth, fresher breath or a sleeker body.**"

- You're told you need **abs of iron, buns of steel, a flatter stomach, and sleeker thighs...**
- That you can only be happy if you were **larger in the northern hemisphere and smaller around the equator.**
- How do we break free from all of this? **What is the antidote for "not wanting"?**

How can we live with greater contentment in our lives? I just want to focus in on one word... **"simplify."**

- Anybody here (you don't have to raise your hands on this one) find that **your life gets cluttered with stuff, activity, junk?**
- Well, **researchers have shown** (and our experience has proven) that the presence of all this clutter... creates stress in our lives.

What would your life look like if instead of this endless chase for "what do I need to **buy**, what do I need to **acquire**...

- how do I need to **change**, what will **bring me satisfaction**... you **just simplified** and said, *"God, I'm just a sheep. You're my shepherd. I shall not want.*
- *"I'm not going through life in an endless frenzy of activity to try to get some **external thing** or achieve some kind of external **circumstance** in the hopes that it will satisfy the ache in my soul."*

Just let this settle in your heart and mind... that you should never rest your security or peace in anything that can be taken away from you.

- You can lose all your stuff; you can lose your job, you can lose your health, you can lose a relationship, you can lose your money, you can lose your mind!
- **But, you can't lose your relationship with Jesus.**
- You see, more than all their benefits, all this stuff **ends up doing more to distract us away from our relationship with Him** than anything else.

So, what if you decided to live more simply? Maybe when you go back home you need to go through your house...

- your closets, drawers, garage... searching for clutter you can get rid of.
- Maybe some of you need to **go through your calendar and find clutter and get rid of it.**

Maybe you need to turn off the pings on your phone or your computer so you're not overrun with **twitter, text, or FB messages** all through the day.

- Because, let me tell you, those same researchers are talking more and more about the impact of digital clutter,
- Which keeps us from being fully present with those whom we're actually "doing life" with.

Some of you are **cluttered with financial commitments** that are choking you.

- You're making payments **you can't afford** for things **you don't need.**
- Just ask yourself the question... what do I need to do to simplify things in my life?

David says, "*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*" Another way of saying that is, "***The Lord is my shepherd, so I have all that I need.***"

- I'm telling you, in a world of **chronic discontent**... to go through life with stress under control... in contentment, not

- wanting... it would be an **oasis of sanity**.
- But it's going to take a different way of life.

C. David goes on to say about the Good Shepherd, "He makes me lie down in green pastures."

Now, the alternative to lying down... to rest... is **frantic activity**, **constant busyness**, **overcommitted lifestyle** and, of course, **stress!**

- Remember, sheep are real timid creatures...
- and, in the presence of stress or fear, they will never rest.
- The problem is that if you're a sheep, **when it comes to predators and finding enough food**, for example, there's a lot to fear out there!

But, what gives the sheep **assurance to rest is the presence of the shepherd.**

- When there's a Good Shepherd, **the sheep know there's someone protecting them...**
- that there's a **someone more powerful than their adversaries** who is looking after them.

You see, When I come to the Good Shepherd and I say, "*God, I'm empty. I'm feeling lonely. I'm feeling hurt. I'm feeling unloved,*"

- He says, "*You just remain with me for a while, and I will fill your heart... I'll care for you!*"
- What if, during these 50 Days of Transformation, you planned a weekly "date night with God;"

Sometime in the Shepherd's presence where you can share your heart and,

- more importantly, let Him share His heart with you.
- If time is an issue, then **let me suggest that you schedule two or three appointments** with non-existent people this week.
- And **since they probably won't show up**, you'll discover a block of time to be the Good Shepherd.

And if we don't? Well, there's a little clue David lets us in on if we don't voluntarily slow down.

- He writes, “***He makes me lie down in green pastures!***” Has God ever "made you" lie down in green pastures?
- I know there's been a few times in my life where, **after NOT choosing to hit the breaks in my life**, God stepped in and hit them for me.

Guys, **if you made the decision** that there just wasn't time to be in a Life Group;

- If you've made the decision that there just isn't time to read & interact with His Word...
- If you made the decision that you're too busy to sleep 6-7 hours a night...
- If you've **come to the decision** that spending meaningful time with meaningful people who want, spiritually, what you want,
- Then **you might find the Good Shepherd making you** to lie down in greener pastures.

And why? Not because He's angry and out to punish you...

- But because **He hears the groans of your soul crying out** for deeper, more meaningful connection with Him.
- But even more than that, **He longs for deeper connection with you**... the **kind of connection** that can only be fostered in the stillness of His presence.

D. David goes on to remind us that we can trust God even in the dark valleys.

In verse 4, David says, “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; Your rod and your staff comfort me.*”

- I suppose one of the hard realities of life is that we're all going to walk through some pretty dark valleys.
- You know that one of the most **common sources of stress is loss**... losing your job, your income, your health, a loved one.

And when we face those losses, there are **two common reactions**. One is **fear** and the other is **grief**. Grief is good, fear is bad.

- As heavy a grief can be, it's a **God-given bridge to healing**. In fact, if you don't grieve, you'll just get stuck.
- Maybe you feel that you're a bit stuck in your life right now.
- Perhaps you need to reflect on whether you allowed yourself to grieve or whether fear caused you to stuff all that emotion deep inside.

Not once in the Bible does it say, grieve not or sorrow not or weep not or cry not.

- What it does say is fear not... and, it says it 365 times in Scripture... once for every day of the year!
- And why is this repeats so often in Scripture? Because, while grief can open doors to healing, **fear will almost always paralyze**.

Because your Good Shepherd is with you, you *may* fear, but you *don't have* to fear.

- You don't have to fear opening the door to that grief...
- You don't have to fear the challenges & obstacles in front of you...
- you don't have to fear the future or the losses.
- Why? Because your Shepherd is with you, carrying a **staff to guide you** and a **rod to protect you**.

You see, you may be going through the valley of the shadow of debt... the valley of the shadow of loss... the valley of the shadow of depression.

- And, those times can be scary... **because shadows can be scary**.
- I mean, when we were kids lying in bed, we were afraid of shadows.
- But eventually we learned that **shadows can't hurt you**... that the shadow always appear bigger than its source.

The reality is, **you can't have a shadow without a light...** and so, if King David were here,

- I think he's remind us fix our eyes not on the shadows but on the light;
- On the Good Shepherd, the Light of the World, who always guides & protects.

E. Then David says that the Good Shepherd "leads me beside still waters."

Another interesting thing about sheep is that they get pretty nervous when in the presence of noisy, fast running water...

- because **if they fall in**, their wool gets so saturated and heavy that they will almost always drown.
- And yet, **we don't live in a still, quiet world**, do we?
- I mean, think of it... where do you go to get away from noise?
- The **doctor's office, supermarket, elevators?** Wherever we go, **we're surrounded by noise.**

But here's the thing: We're the noisiest culture in the history of the world, but **even when we have the chance to escape it**, we don't.

- And, we don't, because **we don't just endure noise, we're addicted to it.**
- And that's why, when people arrive home, one of the first things they do is turn on the TV...
- And the number one reason they do that is... **Noise!**

Now you think about that. Like we don't get enough of it in the rest of our lives **so we have to go home and turn it on** to get more.

- You see, the real problem with television isn't about *what happens* on the screen, but what **doesn't happen** because we're plopped won in front of it.
- It's the time **not spent in meaningful, life-giving relationship.**
- It's the time **not listening... not paying attention... not connecting... not serving... not loving... not engaging.**

The irony is we watch TV because we're tired, and we just kind of want

to collapse for a while. **But does it restore you?**

- When was the last time that you woke up in the morning saying, *"Last night I sat in front of the TV from the time I got home until I went to sleep. And today I feel so rejuvenated and energized."* It doesn't happen.

So, here's the challenge: **Learn to appreciate quiet again...** Learn to feel comfortable in the quiet presence and love and protection of the Good Shepherd.

- It might be a little uncomfortable at first, but **turning down the volume of life...**
- and **slowing down enough to be still** in the Father's presence...
- are two **vital first steps** toward living the kind of abundant life Jesus invited us to.

F. Then, finally... David ends this passage saying "He restores my soul."

You see, I think what David is saying here is that as we embrace the Good Shepherd and recognize His nearness in our lives...

- As we **simplify** rather than continue in chronic discontent
- As we **make time for rest** instead of always running in frantic activity;
- That as we **turn off the noise** and learn to be more still...

Then we'll find ourselves in that place where stress can begin to be relieved...

- and God really can begin to restore our very weary souls.
- You see... it's God who restores our souls.
- Our responsibility, then is to **put ourselves in the context** where He can do that.

In Ephesians 1:4, Paul writes that *"Long before He laid down the earth's foundations He had us in mind."*

- Before God thought of the universe, **the Good Shepherd thought of you by name...** and loved you.

- And, because of His abiding love & presence in our lives, we can know that **David's words in Psalm 23:6** will always hold true:
- That ***"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."***

Perhaps you're beginning to see **how much the stresses of the moment** or the **anticipated stresses of the future** has you weighed down.

- What if I lose my job? What if I don't have enough money? What if somebody walks out on me? What if I'm alone?
- You can **anchor yourself to those thoughts** that do nothing but perpetuate chronic stress.

OR, you can see things from heaven's viewpoint, that, in spite of the dark shadows, ***"Surely goodness and love will follow you all the days of your life."***

- Knowing that the **Good Shepherd** wants to restore your soul!
- Knowing that your **Heavenly Father** wants to restore intimacy back into your relationship with Him...
- Knowing that He wants to bring **calm to your life, renew your spirit, refresh your passions, revive your hope,**
- and **stir your heart** for the rich, intimate, meaningful life we've been called to in Christ.