

How do you deal with stress?

I want you to watch this commercial and see how a couple of workers deal with stress.



AllOverIt\_1.wmv

Isn't that great? When they realized they were discovered, one got up and smashed the computer. That is one way to deal with stress. How do you deal with stress? Do you want to smash it? Do you want to get rid of it? Do you want to run away from it? How do you deal with stress?

Today we are beginning a new sermon series called *Stressed! Dealing with Life at the Boiling Point*. Over the next month we are going to deal with a wide variety of ways stress can get at us and eat at us. Today, we are talking about *Handling Stress when tough stuff happens*.

The backdrop for our scripture today is tough stuff. Israel has been carried off into exile. This means they were overrun by the Babylonians. Their land is gone. Their political structures are gone. Their religious structures are gone. The leaders have been killed or carried away. Everything that brought stability and structure to their society and belief system is gone.

Their world has turned upside down in the chaos of this tragedy. Stressful. Tough stuff. Much of the response of most of the people was to give up. How do you respond to stress? How do you respond to tough stuff?

A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up; she was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as one problem was solved, a new one arose.

Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to boil.

In the first she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil; without saying a word of what she was doing. She just listened to her daughter.

In about twenty minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Turning to her daughter, she asked, 'Tell me what you see.'

'Carrots, eggs, and coffee,' she replied.

Her mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. The mother then asked the daughter to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard boiled egg. Finally, the mother asked the daughter to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she tasted its rich aroma. The daughter then asked, '**What does it mean, mother?**'

Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity: boiling water. Each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened. The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water.

The mother then asked her daughter a question that I think is important for us to ask ourselves, 'Which are you? When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean?'

As you get ready to answer that question, as a person of faith, what role do you let God play in helping you through adversity? Do you get angry at God? Do you walk away from God? Do you turn

to God and ask for assistance, even when you don't fully understand what is happening?

In our scripture much of Israel had given up hope. Listen to this promise that comes to them and to us, when we get overwhelmed with tough stuff. *Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, 'We have become old, dry bones, all our hope is gone.' Now, give them this message 'Oh my people, I will open your graves of exile and cause you to rise again. Then I will bring you back into the land of Israel. When this happens you will know that I am the LORD. I will put my Spirit within you and you will live . . .'"*

This passage reminds us that when challenges come our way, when tough stuff happens, when tragedy strikes, we are not left alone. But God sees us. God cares about us. God wants to lift us up and bring us new life.

It doesn't mean we can't grieve for what we have lost. We can and we should. But it does mean that when tough stuff happens, God does not abandon us. God does not leave us. God chooses to stay with us and walk with us through whatever tragedy we may face.

That is the big lesson I have learned in the aftermath of the tragedy that has come upon our family with the death of my daughter, Whitney from last summer. When I heard of her death, it knocked the wind out of me.

In those moments of being overwhelmed and not knowing where to turn, I felt God turn to me to surround me with love. As members of this church, you surrounded us with love and grace through your prayers, your cards, your thoughts and your gifts; you became God's presence reminding us that we were not alone. Your love helped me, and our family, discover God's presence in a way that is helping us through this tragedy.

Once there was a six year old who was asking his mother all kinds of questions in a doctor's crowded waiting room. "Mommy, why

is the grass green and the sky blue? . . . Why do we have skin? . . . How do birds fly?" And to the amazement of all in the room, the mother patiently answered each question.

Then the little boy asked her all kinds of questions about God. Why this and why that and so on. Everyone in the room was getting tired and they were wondering when the mother was going to get tired of all the questions.

But when he asked this question and she answered it, the whole waiting room understood how she could do it. "Mommy, why doesn't God ever get tired and just stop?" She said, "It's because God is love and love never gets tired."

I love that. God is love and love never gets tired. I need to be reminded of that when tough stuff happens. Israel needed to be reminded of that too. And God came to remind them and to remind us that we are loved. We will not be abandoned.

When tough stuff happens, when the stress begins to build, my hope is that you will be able to turn to God and be reminded of how loved you are. Thanks be to God.

Amen