

# TRANSFORMED



## PHYSICAL HEALTH

### “From Stressed to Blessed ”

Psalm 23

September 14, 2014

*“Peace of mind makes the body healthy.”*

Proverbs 14:30 (TEV)

*“A relaxed attitude lengthens a man’s life.”*

Proverbs 14:30 (NLT)

## 7 SPIRITUAL HABITS THAT REDUCE STRESS

1. \_\_\_\_\_

*“The Lord is my shepherd, so I have all I need.”*

Psalm 23:1

*“Since God did not spare even his own Son for us but gave him up for us, won’t he also surely give us everything else we need?” Romans 8:32 (LB)*

2. \_\_\_\_\_

*“He makes me lie down. . .” Psalm 23:2a*

*“Six days are set aside for work, but every seventh day you must rest completely, even during your seasons of plowing and harvest, you must observe a Sabbath day of rest.” Exodus 34:21*

3. \_\_\_\_\_

*“He makes me lie down in lush green meadows and leads me beside calm, quiet waters. He restores my soul.” Psalm 23:2-3a*

*“You’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious—the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly.” Philippians 4:8 (The Message)*

4. \_\_\_\_\_

*“He guides me in the right paths for his name’s sake.”*

Psalm 23:3

5. \_\_\_\_\_

*“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.” Psalm 23:4*

*“When I am ready to give up, he knows what I should do.” Psalm 142:3 (TEV)*

6. \_\_\_\_\_

*“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, and you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” Psalm 23:5*

*“How I love you, Lord! You are my defender, my protector, and my strong fortress. In you I am safe. You protect me like a shield.” Psalm 18:1-2*

7. \_\_\_\_\_

*“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Psalm 23:6*

Jesus: *“COME to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. TAKE my yoke upon you, and LEARN from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” Matthew 11:28-30 (RSV)*

**When I’m “yoked” with Christ, we move together in the same \_\_\_\_\_ and the same \_\_\_\_\_.**

**TRANSFORMED**  
**Physical Health**  
**“From Stressed to Blessed”**

*Psalm 23*

September 14, 2014 AM Worship

**The Bulk of this Message is from Rick Warren however I edited and added other elements and my own personal illustrations as well as other extras.**

During these seven weeks we're looking at some of the most famous classic texts in the Bible. Last week we started with the most famous story or parable ever told by Jesus called the parable of The Prodigal Son.

This week we're going to look at the most famous Psalm in the Bible, [Psalm 23](#).

It's true we spend an awful lot of money on relieving stress in our lives. Stress at its core is simply a threat – real or perceived. Whenever your body feels threatened by something emotional, physical, spiritual, mental threat stress responses take place in your body. Your blood pressure goes up, your pulse quickens, adrenalin shoots into your body and all kinds of other physiological effects.

There's nothing wrong with that. In fact that's pretty good. If you're standing in the road and a truck comes after you and your stress response says, Get out of the road. You get that extra burst of energy. That's a good thing.

The problem is in chronic stress your body never shuts down. Many, if not most of you, are living under chronic stress. We're going to deal with that today. Because hundreds and hundreds of scientific and medical studies have shown that chronic stress in your life is dangerous and devastating to your physical health. It's damaging to your brain to always be in chronic stress. And it's deadly to your body. Stress, chronic stress, can kill you.

Last week as we started the 50 Days of Transformation we looked at transforming your spiritual health and we looked at the habits for spiritual health.

This week I want us to turn the dial a little bit. We're going to look at the habits for physical health. The right kind of food, the right kind of fitness, the right kind of friends, faith and focus.

What I want us to do today is specifically look at the effect of stress on your body and what the Bible says is the antidote to the most common stresses in your life.

So if you're a little tired, a little worn down, a little stressed out, you picked a good week to come to church. Because we're going to help you out as we look at the most famous Psalm in the Bible – Psalm 23.

Before we look at the text let me just identify the seven most common sources of stress in modern life. These are the seven things that cause stress most often in today's lifestyle.

### **1. Worry.**

The reason why worry is number one is because there's a lot more things to worry about than there used to be. Nobody worried about identity theft twenty years ago. Nobody worried about losing their cell phone twenty years ago. There's a lot of things we worry about today that your parents didn't have to worry about because they are new worries in an increasingly complex world. – ISIS – Terrorism just this week

### **2. Hurry.**

Hurry comes from the increasing pace in our life. Would you agree that it seems like the world is going faster and faster? We live in a microwave nanosecond world where everybody wants it now and they want it yesterday and they want it immediately. And everything is going faster and faster. That creates stress. Speed creates stress.

Obviously when you're running through a town it's a lot more stressful than simply walking slowly through the town.

### **3. Crowds.**

Crowds. As the world gets more crowded people are getting more stressed out. The reason why is we have a thing called urbanization. That is people are moving to the cities. They are moving to the cities. Life used

to be rural but now it is definitely urban. Eighty three percent of America lives in a large city. Eighty three percent.

In 1800 there was only one city in the world that had one million people in it. It was the city of London. That was the only city on the planet that had a million people in it. Today there are over five hundred cities in the world that have over a million. And thousands and thousands that have a half a million. There are even now what we call mega cities like Mumbai, India which has thirty two million and Tokyo which has thirty six million and Mexico City, thirty five million. These are enormous cities. You can go block after block after block without ever seeing any dirt. It's all been paved. This crowding and this urban-ness creates additional stress in our lives.

It causes traffic stress. I read one study that said in the seventy five largest cities in America that last year, Americans wasted over four billion hours waiting in traffic jams. Just imagine the amount of productivity lost in that. That wasted over six billion gallons of gasoline – while you're stuck in traffic. That's a stress.

#### **4. The fourth modern stress is multiple choice.**

Or more choices than ever before. Actually the more choices you have in life, you think that's more freeing, more liberating. But actually it's more paralyzing because it creates indecision.

You used to walk into a grocery store and there would be a couple kinds of toothpaste. There's now sixty kinds of toothpaste out there. Do I really have to choose? There's minty fresh and non minty fresh. But now they've got fourteen different ingredients. How do I know? The more choices you have....

It used to be like there's cough syrup. Now there's fifty kinds of cough syrup. How do I know which one is the right one? The more choices you have can be paralyzing.

When you think of all the different ways you can get your coffee at Starbucks... That can be a little overwhelming. I just need a cup of coffee!

#### **5. Loss of privacy.**

The loss of privacy. Actually any loss is stressful but in the modern world the loss of privacy there are not just the government but all kinds of corporations keeping their number on you. They want to know where you are and who you are and what you said and what you bought. Every time you buy something now somebody rings it up and they're keeping a record of how many Pampers you bought and when you need to move to Depends. You move from hot wheels to wheel chair.

The more choices there are and the loss of privacy that causes stress.

## **6. The word I put down is Pluralism.**

What is pluralism? We now live in a world where the people around you often have very different beliefs, convictions, lifestyles, cultures and things like that.

A hundred years ago America was pretty much a homogenous place. There were commonly held values people shared in common. But that's just not true anymore.

Technology has shrunk the globe and we are now a melting pot but we're really more like a stew. People who live all around you and work all around you often have very different beliefs than you, often have very different cultural values and things like that.

What does that mean? It means there's going to be conflict. Conflict comes from this being around people of different...And of course the media feeds on conflict. And it's created this culture of incivility where people are just rude to each other.

## **7. The fear of the future.**

The *what ifs*. The fear of the future. – My health, finances, family, etc.

We're going to look at these things after a Psalm. I want to read you Psalm 23. Because all of the antidotes are in Psalm 23. It's just six verses long but we find the seven antidotes in these six verses.

That is the most beloved Psalm in the Bible. And it's not by accident because it's given comfort to people for thousands of years. But when you really dig into it though, when you understand each of these metaphors, it

is telling you how to lower your stress. It is a model of stress management.

How many of you would like to be healthier? [Proverbs 14:30](#) says *“Peace of mind makes the body healthy.”* It’s not always what you eat but what eats you that makes you unhealthy. So we’ve got to figure out how to lower the stress and raise the peace of mind.

How many of you would like to live longer? Can I see your hands? Look at the next verse. In the New Living Translation it says *“A relaxed attitude lengthens a man’s life.”* So it’s all about attitude.

### **7 SPIRITUAL HABITS THAT REDUCE STRESS**

I want us today, in Psalm 23, take this passage and tear it apart line by line. I want us to see that there are seven spiritual habits for reducing stress. They actually parallel the seven sources of stress that I just gave you in the modern world.

I said that the first cause of stress in your life is worry. You worry because you think will I have what I need when I need it. And anytime you expect other people to meet your needs instead of God you’re going to be frustrated, you’re going to be disappointed and they’re not going to be able to measure up. Because nobody can meet all your needs. No man, no woman. Only God can meet all your needs.

So the first antidote to stress, this is important. Write it down.

#### **1. LOOK TO GOD TO MEET ALL MY NEEDS**

That’s the first thing David says we need to do. I look to God to meet all my needs. And that calms me down. That way I’m not going to be disappointed. Because I’m going to trust in God.

This single change in your life – you **stop looking to other people** to meet your needs – if you’d stop looking to your husband, to your wife, to meet your needs, your stress would go down dramatically. Stop **putting your security in things that you can lose.**

Sometimes people put their security in their job and they lose their job they lose their peace of mind.

They put their security in their marriage. Then their spouse dies or they go through the tragedy of divorce. Then they go, Who am I? What is my identity?

Or you put your security in your money. There are a lot of ways to lose your money.

As your pastor and friend, I recommend to you that you **never put your security in anything that can be taken away from you.** I'll say it again: You should always put your security, find your security, in something that can never be taken from you. You can lose your job, you can lose your health, you can lose your reputation, you can lose your spouse, you can lose your mind. But you cannot lose your relationship to Christ.

So you put your security in that. You look to God to meet all your needs. *Psalm 23:1 "The Lord is my shepherd so I have all I need."* I shall not want. I have nothing that I don't need because he's going to be my shepherd. I stop expecting other people to meet the needs that only God can meet.

The Bible says this in *Romans 8 "Since God did not spare even his own Son for us but gave him up for us, won't he also surely give us everything else we need?"*

The logic there is obvious. If God loved you enough to send Jesus Christ to die on the cross don't you think he loves you enough to take care of every other need in your life? Yes. Of course he does.

**So stop looking to other people to meet your needs because they're going to let you down.** There's no one who could possibly meet all your emotional needs. There's no one who could possibly meet all your physical, mental, spiritual needs. So David says I'm not going to look to other people to meet all my needs. I'm going to look to God. *"The Lord is my shepherd so I have all that I need."*

What's he saying here? **That the first step to stress reduction is worship. I refocus on God.** I stop focusing on expecting other people to meet my needs. And I refocus on God. *Isaiah 30:15 says this, "The sovereign Lord says only in returning to me and waiting for me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength."*

Notice he doesn't say not in anxiety and fear, not in hard work and planning, not in self motivation and positive mental attitude. He says in quietness and confidence is your strength. The Lord is my shepherd.

In fact I want you to make this an affirmation in your life. Every time you start to get stressed out, you need to pause and say, **"The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need.**" The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need." When you start to get stressed out like I don't have what I need right now, the Lord is my shepherd. He's going to provide. He's going to take care of me. I'm going to look to God to meet all my needs.

Once you've laid that, that's the bedrock of stress management, then you go to a second step. Verse 2.

## **2. I NEED TO OBEY GOD'S INSTRUCTION ABOUT REST.**

I need to obey God's instructions about rest. So much of the stress in your life comes from always being in a hurry. Always working too much. Always feeling like you've got too much to do. That's why you overwork. You never can get caught up.

**How many of you feel like "I can never get caught up."** True confession. There's no way I'm ever going to get caught up.

So what do you do? You look to God to meet your needs and then you obey God's instruction about rest.

Think about this: If God had wanted to he could have created human beings without the need for sleep. **Why did he create you with the need for sleep? You will spend one third of your life asleep.** If God's only going to give you sixty, eighty, a hundred years here on earth why wouldn't he give to you one hundred percent of the time? Why would one third of that time be "wasted" in sleep?

**Because God wants you to learn the importance of rest. Rest is so important God rests.** God modeled it. When he created the whole universe the Bible says that after he finished all of creation it says *"On the seventh day God rested."* Why did God rest? He wasn't tired. God doesn't ever get tired. He was modeling the importance of rest to your



life. He says every seventh day you rest. That's what God did. He modeled it.

The Bible is filled with instructions about rest and recreation and relaxation. In fact it's so important God put it in the "big ten." **It's in the Ten Commandments.** Right up there with don't commit adultery, and don't murder, and don't lie. He says every seventh day you take a day off. Hello! That's how important a Sabbath is in your life.

Jesus later said *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."* In other words God said I created this idea of you to take a day off every seven days for rest, recreation, worship and restoration. That's my idea. It's for my own benefit. It's so you don't burn out.

Yet today in our modern society people aren't doing that. Even on their day off they're working. And a lot of people even if they go to a church service they go home and go right back to work, trying to get done all the stuff they didn't get done during their work week. That's not a Sabbath.

God says I want you to rest. Psalm 23:2 says this *"He makes me lie down."* Circle the phrase **"makes me"**. He says God makes me lie down. **Does God ever have to make you lay down?** Because you weren't smart enough to obey what he says about rest and take a day off every week.

**Sheep aren't smart enough to rest when they get tired so the shepherd has to make them lay down.** And if you're not smart enough to get the rest you need and take a day off every week for rest, your body will make sure you do it. God has wired your body in such a way if you don't *take* time off your body will *make* time off. Anybody want to give a testimony on that? You just keep working, working you're going to get sick because God wired you to obey his commandments.

**Getting enough sleep is essential to stress management.**

**Write this down: My best requires rest.** You're not wasting time when you're relaxing. You're not wasting time when you're resting. It is better to have loafed and lost than to have never loafed at all.

That's why God gave us a Sabbath. Here's the [Sabbath Exodus 34:21](#) *"Six days are set aside for work. But every seventh day you must rest completely.* [Circle the word **"completely."** You must rest completely.]

*Even during your seasons of plowing and harvest you must observe a Sabbath day of rest.”*

Even in your busiest season it's not an excuse. You may be a tax accountant and it's April, you still have to take a day off. You may be a retailer and it's Christmas season, you still have to take a day off. You may be a farmer and it may be harvest or planting season, you still have to take a day off.

**What am I supposed to do on my Sabbath? Three things.**

**1. Rest my body.** You need to rest your body. Physically rest. The Biblical basis for a good Sunday afternoon nap. Just not while I'm speaking.

**2. Refocus my spirit.** I rest my body on the Sabbath and I refocus my spirit. What is that? That's worship. It's what you're doing right now. You are refocusing your spirit right now by coming to worship. In corporate worship we recharge and refresh our spirit.

**3. Recharge my emotions.** Use the Sabbath to recharge your emotions. That's what recreation does. It recharges your emotions.

**Different things recharge different people.** We'll talk about that in just a minute. About how you need beauty in your life. You need to do something that restores you and reenergizes. It could be a hobby. It could be a sport. These are good things that God has given us as gifts in order to recharge your emotions.

It doesn't really matter which day is your Sabbath. The book of Colossians in the Bible says it doesn't matter which day you choose. You just need to choose a day.

**My Sabbath is not Sunday.** Sunday is a work day for me. My Sabbath is Friday. I rest and I refocus and I recharge. That's my Sabbath. And by the way, don't call it your day off. Because if it's your day off, you'll cheat on it. You see all these things you need to do; I'll do them. But if it's your Sabbath you use it for what God intended.

**You say, But I feel guilty when I relax. Jesus didn't.** When you study Jesus' ministry he often took time off to relax. He'd go out and do an entire period of intensive ministry then he'd say, Guys we need to come

apart for a while. We're going off to the mountains. We're going off to the desert. Come apart. I always say, if you don't come apart you're going to come apart. He'd say "Let's go off to the desert. Out there where there's these springs and those date palms, palms and springs – Palm Springs. A Biblical basis for going to Palm Springs right there! He says go off to the desert. We're going to go relax for a while. I'm sure he didn't have a Jacuzzi to sit in but it would have been nice.

But Jesus didn't feel guilty about it. Did you know that during the French Revolution the French government cancelled the Sabbath and said every day is going to be a work day? After a couple years they had to reinstate it because the health of the nation had crumbled. **You need this in your life. You need a Sabbath.**

I heard about a guy who said to his pastor, "Pastor I tried to get a hold of you all day on Monday." The pastor said, "I'm sorry. That's my day off." The man said, "The devil never takes a day off." And the pastor said, "Yeah and if I didn't I'd be just like the devil..."

Some of you that's why you're so mean. You're not getting enough sleep. You're not getting enough rest. You're a little devil because you're not taking a Sabbath and the devil is not your model.

I look to God to meet all my needs – "*The Lord is my shepherd.*" I obey God's instructions about rest – "*he makes me lie down.*"

### 3. RECHARGE MY SOUL WITH BEAUTY

That's the third thing we need to do: Recharge my soul with beauty. Beauty is an incredibly important thing in stress management. Ugliness stresses you out. Beauty inspires. Beauty encourages. Beauty motivates. Beauty stirs up positive emotions.

Have you ever thought about why God made the world so beautiful? You look at sunrises and sunsets, beautiful flowers that are never even seen. All of these sights around the world that human eyes will never see. But God created a world of beauty. He could have made earth just like the moon. Just a moon scape.

He could have made it just a desolate, dusty, gray planet. No. God created a planet with vibrant colors.

Have you ever heard anybody say... “I feel so close to God in nature.” Of course you do! He created it.

Man was made to live in a garden. Not in a skyscraper. When God created man he put him in the Garden of Eden. He didn't put him in a skyscraper. He wasn't made to live in everything concrete. God made us to live in a garden, in a beautiful place.

We've come a long way from the Garden of Eden on this planet. You feel close to God in nature? Of course you do. It's God's beauty and beauty inspires and beauty motivates.

Notice the next verse, [Psalm 23:2-3](#) “*He makes me lie down [Where does he make me lie down?] He makes me lie down in lush green meadows. [Golf course?] and leads me beside calm quiet waters. [By the sand trap] He restores my soul.*”

It's no wonder that Psalm 23 is the most beloved Psalm. Because we can all visualize this one. When I say, Think about lush green meadows and a calm quiet lake, you relax just thinking about it. If I say, Think about downtown LA you get stressed out. But if I say, Think about meadows and calm waters and babbling brooks. Nature refreshes because beauty inspires.

You need beautiful scenes. You need to see beautiful scenes and you need to hear beautiful sounds in order to keep stress down in your life. You need to add beauty into your life. Let me give you some suggestions:

**1. Get outside every day.** If you're not getting outside every day your stress level is going up. Even if it's just your back yard, even if it's just a walk around the block, even if it's just take your lunch outside, walk outside of the office and sit outside and look up at a tree while you eat your sandwich. You need to get in touch with God's creation. You need to surround yourself with beauty. Get outside.

**2. Start the day with God not the media.** Before you go read any text message, before you check your email, before you turn on the radio to some talk radio and people screaming at each other, before you turn on the television for some morning show, you need to get in touch with God first. The first seven minutes of your day set your mood every day. Do you want to start it with an alarm clock and then the worst news of the day

coming at you? No. You don't really need to know all the bad news first thing when you get up. You don't need to know that. You need to turn on some praise music, some worship music. You need to get in touch with God. You need to let the first five, ten minutes of your day be with the Lord. That will dramatically reduce your stress and improve your mood.

**3. Intentionally put beauty around you.** Pieces of art or music that inspires you. Or a craft. I used to collect seashells. I collected them from all over the world. I had my library filled with them because looking at those things inspired me. The intricacy of that nautilus, how God inspired that. Looking at beauty lowers your stress level. Listening to beauty lowers your stress level. So I highly recommend that you either take up an instrument or some kind of art or craft to create beauty. You are most like your Creator when you're being creative. You need art in your life. You need beauty.

**Did you know that more songs have been written about Jesus than any other subject in human history?** Did you know that **more books** have been written about Jesus than any other subject in human history? Did you know that more art has been created about the Bible and to honor and glorify God and Jesus than any other subject in history? Why?

God gave us music and God gave us art for one reason. **To express emotion.** That's the only purpose of it. You don't need it for physical survival but you do need it to really live. To be who God made you to be. So fill your life with art and fill your life with music.

**When I get stressed out I go home and I sit on the piano and play.**

Philippians 4:8 says this: *"You'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things that are true and noble, reputable and authentic and compelling and gracious [That sounds like television, doesn't it? No, it doesn't. That is not television.] — the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly."*

Because of sin there's a lot of ugliness in the world. There are a lot of unpleasant things in the world. Whatever you give your attention to is going to either raise or lower your stress.

Some of you during 50 Days of Transformation you need to do a fast on

the news. I hate to tell you this but you could miss the news for the next fifty days and it isn't going to make one difference in the world. If you read the newspaper one day later you'd realize how much news really isn't news. The media is tuned to make you think stuff is important that really isn't that important, has no bearing on your life. If you use all the time that you spend listening to news or watching news or reading news and instead spent that listening to God, reading his Word, listening to worship songs, your stress would be dramatically lower. It's your choice.

If you want to stay stressed out keep watching local news. Because if it bleeds it leads on the local news. In other words if there's a crime that happened anywhere within distance it's going to be reported on the news. Is that really what you want to hear? Is that what you need? Is that going to make you a better woman, a better man? No.

#### 4. GO TO GOD FOR GUIDANCE.

This is important because a **common source of stress in your life is indecision**. You can't make up your mind. Some of you right now are wavering. You're at a fork in the road or maybe you've got multiple options and you just can't decide and the stress is killing you. You can't decide whether to get in or get out or do neither. You've got too many choices.

I recommend that you make God the number one source for guidance. Not the opinions of your friends. Not some pundit on television. But you go to God for guidance. Because he always tells you the truth.

So what do I do? I say, God I need wisdom. [James 1 says this](#) "*If any man lacks wisdom let him ask of God who gives to all men liberally and doesn't condemn them or criticize them.*" He gives it generously and graciously. God is waiting to give you wisdom. You just have to ask.

So you say, God I need wisdom. **I pray and I ask. Then I read the Bible.** I read this book. Then I wait and I think and I be quiet and I listen and I sense. At the right time, maybe not immediately, but at the right time, God will put that idea in my mind. And you go, Wow! That's inspiration! That's what I need to do.

I want you to write this down. This is an affirmation: **God will guide me at the right time. Not in the wrong time. His timing is perfect. He's**

**never early. He's never late.** If you have to make a decision about next year, he's not going to give you the answer today because he wants you to trust him. The Bible says, there's enough trouble in each day. Take one day at a time. So God is going to give you the right decision and the right guidance if you'll trust him but he'll do it at the right time.

Psalm 23:3 says this *“He guides me in the right paths for his name's sake.”* That's an affirmation: God I believe you're going to guide me at the right time in the right way. I believe you're going to do that. If you have that belief he's going to do it.

## 5. TRUST GOD'S IN THE DARK VALLEYS

I trust God in the dark valleys. **We're all going to go through dark valleys in our lives.** You'll go through many of them in your lifetime. One of the common sources of stress is loss. You can lose your job and you can lose your income and you can lose your money. You can lose your health. You can lose your reputation. You can lose a loved one. We all go through many losses in life.

When you go through loss there are **always two common reactions. One is fear and the other is grief. Grief is good. Fear is bad.**

Grief is the way we get through the transitions of life. Grief is a good thing. The Bible says God grieves. It's a godly emotion. In fact if you don't grieve you get stuck. Some of you have had a major loss in your life in the past and you just shoved it down. You stuffed it instead of grieving. When you stuff it you get stuck at that stage emotionally. You've never gone any further because you didn't go through the grief. You got stuck. You maybe need to go back and grieve some things in your life you've never grieved over so you get unstuck because you got unstuffed.

Stop pushing the pain down. Just grieve it, let it out. It's not going to kill you. Grief will not kill you if you let it out. It's good for you. It's how you go through the transitions of life.

Then you get unstuck and you move on and you grow up emotionally. Grief is a good thing.

**On the other hand fear is a bad thing.** Not once in the Bible does it say, grieve not, sorrow not, weep not, cry not. What it does say is fear not.

And it says that 365 times. Which means there's one for every day of the year. Because grief doesn't paralyze; fear does. Fear does.

Psalm 23:4. Here's what David says, "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, [I don't fear anything. Why? ]for you are with me; Your rod and your staff comfort me.*"

Remember he's using the shepherd metaphor. Shepherd and sheep. Shepherds always carried a rod and a staff. These are the two tools that you'd use to protect the sheep. To ward off wolves and to protect the sheep. **He says I'm not going to stress out about this because God is my protector; God is helping me.** And I'm going to trust God in the dark valleys. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow.

**Some of you are going through the valley of the shadow right now.** Maybe the valley of the shadow of death. It may be the valley of the shadow of debt. It may be the valley of the shadow of conflict. It may be the valley of the shadow of depression. It may be the valley of the shadow of discouragement. But you're going through the valley of the shadow.

**Shadows are scary.** Remember you used to get afraid of shadows when you're laying in bed as a little kid. Some of the things that I've learned about shadows are this: Shadows can't hurt you. They can't hurt you. A truck can run over you but if a truck's shadow runs over you it doesn't hurt you. A shadow can't hurt you.

**Shadows are always bigger than the source.** Isn't that true? It's your fear of that greater than the actual event. Shadows are always bigger than the source and makes them look bigger than they really are.

**But here's the good news. Wherever there's a shadow there's a light.** You can't have a shadow without a light. So the key when you're going through the valley of the shadow to not be afraid is to turn your back on the shadow and look at the light. Because as long as I keep my eyes on the light the shadow can't scare me. And Jesus is the light of the world.

That's how you go through the valley of the shadow of death. That's how you lower the stress. I trust God in the dark valleys. Maybe you're going through that right now. You need to pray like David. **Psalm 142:3** "*When*



*I am ready to give up, he knows what I should do.”* When I’m ready to give up he knows what I should do!

I want you to write this down in your outline: **I don’t have to know the answers when I know God.** I don’t have to know all the answers about what I’m going through if I know God because he knows what I should do.

**And I’m going to turn my back on the shadow and I’m going to look at the light and I’m going to walk through the valley of the shadow.** I’m going to trust God in the dark valleys. That will reduce the stress of loss.

## **6. LET GOD BE MY DEFENDER**

Another common source of stress is **conflict**. Opposition. Criticism. Attacks. There are people in your life who simply don’t like you. They are people you work with. They criticize you maybe out of jealousy, maybe out of fear. Maybe they are people in your own family who will not let you enjoy anything. They’re always ragging on you. They’re always putting you down. They never have a positive word. If you have any success they poo-poo it. They down play it. They minimize it. You’ve had these people in your life and they’re always attacking you and they’re always putting you down and they’re always criticizing you.

**When that happens your natural response is attack back, criticize back, retaliate, get even.** But when you get even with somebody who’s criticizing you it **puts you on the same level**. If you forgive them it puts you above them. But if you get even you’re no better than they are.

**Because of the pluralisation in our society we have people around us all the time who totally disagree with us.** People who live with, around you and work around you. Who don’t agree with you and don’t like you. Maybe even don’t like Jesus. As a result they will criticize you and they will put you down. There are other reasons too, not just because of that.

**But in our society today our civilization is losing its civility.** The world is getting more rude. Would you agree with that? **One of the things that’s causing that is the internet.** Because the internet allows you to hide anonymously behind the screen and spout all kinds of vile things against other people. Things that people would never say to you face to face, they

wouldn't have the courage to say, they'll spout off and they will minimize you and they'll belittle you and they'll be rude to you and they'll criticize you. And they will attack you on the internet.

All they're doing is revealing the smallness of their heart. **Little people belittle people. Great people make people feel great.** So when somebody's always belittling other people they're just revealing the smallness of their heart. They have a little knot for a heart and they have to belittle others thinking that will make them feel better.

**How do you handle rude people? How do you handle mean people? You don't. You let God handle them. You let God be your defender.**

**David is a pro at this.** Because David knows what it means to be attacked not just emotionally or verbally but literally physically. In the story of King David, David as a young man was anointed by Samuel, God's prophet, to be the next king of Israel. But it was done in secret so nobody knew about it. David knew about it. His family knew about it. He knew he was the rightful king. Then for the next years, the better part of much of his life he spends it running from the first king who wants to kill him. He's hiding in caves and he's being maligned and he's being demeaned and he's being put down. And rumors are being told about him. He's being criticized constantly.

Yet he never would say a bad word against the king. He would never attack back. He would never retaliate. He only said good. God was preparing David to be the king after his own heart.

David says in [Psalm 23:5](#) *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, and you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."*

What's David talking about here? It's a metaphor. He's saying you know what? **God is so good to me. He says I'm going to give you, David, a banquet in front of your enemies.** And I'm going to anoint your head with oil which is saying to the world, This is my guy! Back off! This is the guy I've chosen. This is the guy who's going to be the next leader. He anoints my head with oil. My cup overflows. God, you're so good to me in spite of my attackers, in spite of my critics. You just keep blessing me and blessing me and blessing me. I'm just going to trust you and I'm going to let you be my defender.

Psalm 18:1-2 David says this *“How I love you, Lord! You are my defender [against criticism and everything else], my protector, and my strong fortress. In you I am safe. You protect me like a shield.”* Does David sound stressed out there? No. But he’s writing this in a cave. I’m not worried. God’s in control. God is my defender. I don’t have to defend myself. God will take care of me.

**It takes a lot of faith to rest when you’re under attack. It takes a lot of faith to trust God and just not defend yourself when you’re being maligned, you’re being misunderstood, you’re being misjudged in your office by other workers, rumors are spreading about you, people are saying things about you on line.** When that happens everything in you wants to rise up, I’ve got to do something about this. I’ve got to correct this. I’ve got to teach the truth. When you’re under attack it takes faith to trust God.

**It also takes humility.** It takes humility to not retaliate but to let God be your defender.

**You are most like Christ when you remain silent under attack. Jesus was constantly attacked.** And who is he attacked by? The religious people. The religious people did not like Jesus. Common, ordinary, everyday people – they loved Jesus. The prostitutes, the pimps, the tax collectors, the crooks, the thieves, the poor, all the outcast people. The lepers, they all loved Jesus. It was the religious people who could not stand Jesus. They called him a glutton, they called him a drunk, they called him a son of the devil, they called him the devil himself. They said he came from the devil. They said he was a false leader, a false prophet.

**Jesus never ever retaliated.** He never got them back. He never corrected them. He just remained silent. Even right before he goes to the cross the Sadducees and the Pharisees take Jesus into custody and make him a prisoner. They take him to the Roman governor Pilate and say to Pilate “This guy is trying to overthrow Rome.” They couldn’t even find any witnesses to corroborate this. It was a total bogus lie. It was an attack. This guy is trying to overthrow Rome. He wants your job. He’s trying to get rid of you.

Pilate looks at Jesus and goes, Is that true? Is what they’re saying right? And Jesus it says *“He spoke not a word unto him.”* He wouldn’t even

dignify the accusation with a response. He remained silent because he had entrusted himself into the care of the Father.

When you do this you end up gaining more power, more authority, more influence, more anointing. Your critics actually end up helping you. They think they're hurting you by criticizing you. But when you respond correctly it actually helps you. Because when people criticize you unjustly, falsely, and they say all kinds of mean things about you, Jesus said this *“Blessed are you when men shall revile you, persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad for great is your reward in heaven.”*

Not only are you going to be rewarded in heaven but God gives you, when you refuse to retaliate but you respond in love, you say nothing but good things about your critics. When you do that God gives you more power, gives you more influence, gives you more authority and gives you more anointing. Your critics actually end up actually helping you. Is that cool or what?

**So that's how you can thank God for your critics. Because this allows me to be more like Jesus which means I'm going to get more love, more power, more grace in my life.** More blessing. And they end up actually causing you to be more blessed than before.

Peter has a good way to say this. 1 Peter 4:19 *“So if you are suffering according to God's will, keep on doing what is right, [And by the way notice some suffering is God's will. Some people say suffering is never God's will. They just have never read the Bible because it says it right there, some suffering is God's will] and trust yourself to the God who made you, for he will never fail you.”*

## **7. EXPECT GOD TO FINISH WHAT HE STARTS IN ME**

I expect God to finish what he starts in me. Are you a person who is afraid of the future? **Are you a what if-er?** You're always *what if-ing*. What if this happens? What if this went wrong? What if that went bad? What if? What if? What if? If you're a what if-er it leads to enormous amount of stress in your life. Unnecessary stress. Because here's what David says, Psalm 23:6, *“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, [That's what I've got to look forward to – goodness and love will*

follow me all the days of my life.] *and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*” I’m going to heaven anyway.

When a shepherd has a flock of sheep he usually has a couple of sheep dogs. He’s leading from the front and the sheep dogs are at the back keeping everybody kind of in line. **These two sheep dogs mercy and love or goodness and love are like those sheep dogs in your life.** Following along through your life.

Is that what you expect? **You tend to look at your future one of two ways:** You can say “What if everything goes wrong? What if I don’t have enough money? What if I lose my job? What if somebody walks out on me? *What if? What if? What if?*”

**You can do that or you can look at the future and say** “*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. And I’ll dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*”

Those are your options. You can either see from God’s viewpoint or you can see it from your fearful anxiety.

**How do you lower the stress? You say I’m going to expect God to finish what he starts.** And even if everything went wrong in my life I’m still going to heaven. I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

What do you expect? There’s a word for that. **It’s called a goal.** That’s why, remember, I’m trying to get you each week to set one goal during 50 Days of Transformation. If you don’t set goals you’re not living by faith. Goals are statements of faith. **Set a goal for your physical health and your spiritual health.** Next week we’re going to look at emotional and mental and relational and all these other areas.

You say, I’m tired of the pace I’ve been living. I can’t maintain it. It’s not sustainable. It’s not satisfying. It’s not even any fun. We’ll deal with those in the weeks ahead.

**I don’t know what burden you’re carrying. I don’t know what’s weighing you down. But I do know the answer.** The last verse on your outline Jesus says this: Jesus: “*COME to me, [Come to me. Not come to church. Not come to class. Not come to clinic. Come to me, Jesus says...] all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you*

[more work to do. I think some people actually think that's what the verse says. Come to me if you're weary and carrying heavy burdens and Jesus says I will give you...] *rest.* [Circle that. Rest. Rest.] *TAKE my yoke upon you, and LEARN from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

For many years I never understood that verse. In the first place, as a kid I didn't know what a yoke was. I thought it was like part of an egg. In the middle of the egg. A yoke is a board that has two arches in it that you put over two cattle so the two cattle will pull a cart.

**The value of a yoke is that it halves the load.** Without a yoke you've got one cow that's got to pull that entire load by itself. But if you yoke up the cow with another cow then the two cows together pull the load together and the load is half as heavy. Does that make sense?

*So when Jesus says "Take my yoke upon you."* It sounded to me like is he going to give me something else I've got to deal with? Take my yoke. I've got a heavy enough burden myself, Lord. I don't need to take your problems on me.

That's not at all what he's saying. When he says take my yoke upon you he's not saying I'm going to give you my problems. Jesus doesn't have any problems. He's saying take my yoke upon you. **I'm going to share your problem. I'm going to share your load. I'm going to take your stress and I'm going to pull it with you.** Wow!

He says **three verbs** in this verse. He says "**come,**" he says "**learn.**" And "**take.**" Come to me. And then he says, take the yoke on you. Team up with me. Then, Learn how I do it. This is going to lighten your load. This is going to reduce your stress. This is going to make it easier for you to navigate.

Write this down: **When I'm yoked with Christ we move together because you're obviously yoked together. We move together in the same direction and at the same speed.** Those two are the problems that you have. You're going in the wrong direction and you're going at the wrong speed.

**But when you yoke up with Christ you will go in the right direction and you will go at the speed that you can handle.** When you're yoked to Christ you're not going to go off in a ditch because he's going to keep you on the right path. And when you're yoked to Christ you're not going to run too fast and burn yourself out. Because you're yoked to Christ. You need to come to him. *Now.*

Prayer:

Lord, I know there are many people who are tired and worn by the pace of modern living. And I know, Father, of these different stresses that we've looked at so many of them can be seen right here in our midst today. We know that many people are stressed out. Stressed out by worry, by fear, by conflict, by criticism. By indecision, by the rudeness of people around them, by a crowded schedule. By overwork. All of these different things. Lord, if we just do it your way, life would be so much easier. If we would practice the Ten Commandments, if we would keep the Sabbath to rest our bodies, refocus our spirit, recharge our emotions. If we would fill our souls with beauty not ugliness. If we would hear sounds of beauty and see scenes of beauty rather than filling our mind with so much negative news and so much negative talk shows and all of the conflict that is in the media today. Lord, I pray that each of these steps that David took that we would take today.

Now you pray. Say, dear God I want to look to you to meet all my needs. I know that there's no person that could possibly meet all my emotional, spiritual, mental, physical needs. The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. God, starting today I'm going to obey your instructions about rest. You make me lie down in green pastures. Help me to fill my soul and my surroundings with beauty, with art, with music that you have given for the expression of emotions. Thank you that you make me lie down in green meadows and beside calm, quiet waters. Father, those things that I don't know what to do and I'm confused and I lack wisdom, help me to go to you for guidance. Father, I need your wisdom in the days ahead. When I go through dark valleys help me not to be afraid of the shadow but to turn to the light and look into your eyes, Jesus. And when I'm ready to give up you know what I should do. Father, when I feel like

I'm under attack and when I feel like others are against me, would you be my defender? Help me to speak no words of unkindness but to return good for evil. To pray for those who persecute. To love those who hate. To do good to those who do evil. Would you be my defender, my protector, my fortress? Would you protect me like a shield? And let me trust you. And God, I'm going to expect you to finish what you start in me. Rather than what if-ing the future I'm going to say, Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Jesus, you said to come to you. So I come to you. I want to take your yoke on me. I want to team up with you. I want to learn of you. And I want to move forward in the direction and the pace that you choose. Slow me down Lord, that I may I see your plan for my life. Jesus Christ, I invite you to take over every area of my life and my mind. Replace my stress with your serenity. In your name I pray. Amen.