

# Stress<sup>1</sup>



## SABBATH—JANUARY 8

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** 1 Kings 17:2–4, 15, 16; 1 Kings 19:1, 2; Mark 6:31–34; Galatians 6:2; John 15:13.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘Come to me, all you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest’ ” (Matthew 11:28, NlrV).

**STRESS TOUCHES EVERYONE.** Work, family crises (difficult situations), guilt, doubts about the future, unhappiness about the past—these are all hard enough. But all of this combined with general events of life can put enormous pressure on people. The pressure may be enough to cause problems with our physical and mental health. Researchers Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe developed a scale for measuring how stressful certain life events are. The test lists these life events with stress values for each: the death of a spouse—100 points; personal injury or illness—53 points; moving from one place to another—20 points; and so on. A person who gets 200 or more points at any given time has a 50 percent chance of becoming sick. Someone who gets 300 or more will reach a point of crisis. Reasonable amounts of stress are necessary to help us do our work better. But, at a certain point, stress becomes a danger to good health.

Jesus shows by words and example that seeking God at a quiet time and place is the best medicine for life's stresses (Mark 6:31). If we let Him, the Lord will help us deal with the pressures that are a normal part of life.

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1. stress—a state of mental tension and worry caused by problems in your life, work, and so on.

**SUNDAY—JANUARY 9****EXCITING LIFE EVENTS  
(1 Kings 17:2–6, 15, 16)**

**How did God protect Elijah during the long drought (dry spell) in Israel? Read 1 Kings 17:2–6, 15, 16.**

In the midst of a long famine (shortage of food), Elijah must have felt very close to the Lord. The Lord took very good care of him. First, Elijah saw ravens, normally unpleasant birds, come twice a day to feed him. Talk about a miracle! Then Elijah saw limitless amounts of bread coming from a little oil and flour—enough food to feed three people for two years. How much more proof of God’s care would anyone need?



**Ravens came to feed Elijah twice a day.**

Ellen G. White used the lessons of

this story to describe what God would do for His faithful people in the last days: “I saw that our bread and water will be sure at that time. I also saw that we shall not lack or suffer hunger. This is because God is able to spread a table for us in the wilderness. If necessary He would send ravens to feed us, as He did to feed Elijah.”—Adapted from *Early Writings*, page 56.

**What were some of the other things that happened to Elijah? What lessons can we learn from them for ourselves? Read 1 Kings 17:17–22; 1 Kings 18:23–39, 45.**

God used Elijah to bring the widow’s son back to life. What a test of faith! And what proof of God’s power over life and death! God further displayed His power to Elijah with the test at Mount Carmel. Finally, God gave another sign of involving Himself in human lives by sending heavy rain to end a three-year drought. Elijah’s life was so full of examples of how God helped him that it is hard to believe how he could not fully trust in the Lord. But, not long after all that, Elijah was overcome with stress and discouragement (see tomorrow’s study).

So, there is an important lesson here. We may have experienced miracles in our lives, but we always will face problems. No one, not even a prophet<sup>2</sup> like Elijah, is protected from the troubles that life brings.

<sup>2</sup>. prophet—a man or woman who is a spokesperson for God.



In the last days, if necessary God will spread a table for His people in the wilderness.

**Is success bringing you stress? A long series of exciting events (even positive ones) may add a lot of weight to your load. Why must we be careful not to be too self-satisfied during good times?**

## MONDAY—JANUARY 10

### BITTER LIFE EVENTS (1 Kings 19:1, 2)

Read 1 Kings 18:40. We do not know whether Elijah took part himself in the killing of hundreds of people. But he was clearly in charge of the operation. That in itself must have been a very stressful experience. This act was permitted by God as the only way to remove idol worship, which included the sacrifice (killing) of children (Jeremiah 19:5). Anyway, it surely must have been hard on the prophet emotionally.<sup>3</sup>

**On top of the stress of that expe-**

**rience, what else did Elijah face? Read 1 Kings 19:1, 2.**

From the beginning of Ahab's reign (rule), Queen Jezebel tried very hard to get her husband to "serve Baal and worship him" (1 Kings 16:31, NIV). As a result, all of Israel fell into idol worship. Jezebel played a large part in reestablishing in Israel the worship of Ashtoreth,<sup>4</sup> one of the most evil kinds of Canaanite idol worship. Now, with the death of all the priests, Jezebel felt angry enough to kill.

**How did Elijah feel after receiving the message from Jezebel? Read 1 Kings 19:3, 4.**

How could this man of God (Elijah), after having seen a series of wonderful miracles, feel so hopeless? How did Elijah reach the point of asking God to take his life? After all, look at all the miracles Elijah had seen, and even done!

"Satan has taken advantage of our weaknesses. And Satan will still work in the same way. Whenever a person is surrounded by clouds or puzzled by life's events, Satan works hard to tempt and bother. He attacks our weak points of character.<sup>5</sup> He tries to shake our faith in God, who suffers when these things happen."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 120.

**How often have you done the**

3. emotionally—having to do with a strong feeling (such as love, anger, joy, hate, or fear).

4. Ashtoreth—the Phoenician (Canaanite) goddess of fertility (the ability to produce children) and sexual love.

5. character—the way someone thinks, feels, and behaves; someone's personality.

**same thing: forgetting the wonderful way the Lord has worked for you in the past? When you feel stressed out or hopeless, why is it important for you to hold on to the memories of how God worked in your life in the past? Why do we forget what the Lord has done for us so easily? How can praise and worship help you through difficult times?**

## **TUESDAY—JANUARY 11**

### **GOD'S THERAPY (1 Kings 19:5–9)**

**Read 1 Kings 19:5–9. What simple treatments were given to Elijah during this stressful time in his life?**

**What can we learn from this? How do our physical actions influence<sup>6</sup> the way we think and feel?**

Sleep. Eat. Sleep again. Eat again. And then exercise hard—40 days and 40 nights, from Mount Carmel to Mount Horeb. How interesting that proper sleep, exercise, and a healthy diet are recommended for getting over psychological<sup>7</sup> stress.

A common treatment for mood disorders is called activity scheduling. It involves making a strict timetable of pleasant and purposeful activities. This will force a depressed person to organize, expect, and carry out events. Such a busy schedule helps the person fill time positively

and avoid self-pity. Physical exercise often is included in the activities because it helps produce endorphins. Endorphins are natural chemicals that make people feel happier and less depressed.

With God's help, Elijah was led into the steps that would restore his normal mental health. Like Elijah, we need to be open to God's leading. As soon as Elijah sat down under the broom tree, he prayed. Yes, it was the wrong kind of prayer (asking God to take his life). But at least it was a prayer that showed a desire for God to take charge.



**Elijah sat down under a broom tree and asked God to take his life.**

Over time, Elijah overcame his terrible discouragement. And God still was able to use him (read 1 Kings 19:15, 16; 2 Kings 2:7–11). Before Elijah was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind, he was given the great honor of anointing<sup>8</sup> his successor, Elisha. Elijah had watched the waters of the Jordan River separate, allowing

6. influence—the power to change or affect someone or something; the power to cause changes without directly forcing them to happen.

7. psychological—of or relating to the mind.

8. anointing—officially choosing someone to do or be something.

him and Elisha to cross the river on dry ground.

Finally, Elijah was taken to heaven, without ever having to die himself. What an unexpected “end” for a man who asked God to take his life!

**What are we missing out on if we pray only in times of discouragement and despair? What are the differences between a life of continual prayer and a life where we pray only in emergencies? How can you learn to live a more balanced life by praying continually?**



Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire, without ever having to die.

### WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 12

#### JESUS' METHOD (PLAN) TO MANAGE STRESS (Mark 6:31)

The use of cell phones was growing fast in the mid-1990s. But a veteran Adventist preacher said, “I will never have one! As I visit churches and listen to people’s problems I get

tired and discouraged. But when I return to my car, I find peace. If I had a cell phone, I wouldn’t [would not] find rest even in my car.” Every follower of Christ needs a quiet place to find peace, to pray, and to listen to God through His Written Word (the Bible).

**Read Mark 6:31. What lesson can we learn for ourselves from this verse? How often do you do this for yourself? Or do you always have an excuse?**

Ellen G. White wrote, “Jesus’ hours of happiness were found when alone with nature and with God. When He could, Jesus left His place of work to go into the fields, to meditate [think] in the green valleys, to talk to God through prayer on the mountainside or amid the trees of the forest. The early morning often found Jesus in some quiet place, studying the Bible, or in prayer. From these quiet hours, Jesus would return to His home to take up His duties again, and to give an example of patient work.”—Adapted from *The Desire of Ages*, page 90.

**What other sanctuary (quiet place) did Jesus have? Read Matthew 21:17; Mark 11:11.**

People may be the cause of discouragement or peace in the lives of others. Jesus found peace with friends who brought comfort and companionship to His life. He found this comfort at the house of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. “His heart was

connected by a strong bond of love for the family at Bethany. . . . Often, when Jesus was tired and was thirsty for human fellowship, He was glad to escape to this peaceful household. . . . Our Savior enjoyed a quiet home and interested listeners. He longed for [craved] human gentleness, kindness, and love.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 524.

**How can you use Jesus’ methods of stress management in your own life? What advice would you give to a person who lives in the city and needs to travel for hours to find nature? Or to someone who lives with a large number of people under the same roof? Whom would you go to among your family or friends if you felt discouraged and needed emotional support?**

### **THURSDAY—JANUARY 13**

#### **BRINGING PEACE TO OTHERS (Acts 10:38)**

**What specific parts of Jesus’ character did Peter use to describe his Master in Acts 10:38?**

Jesus’ style was selfless. He made use of all His energy to serve others. He brought peace to people through His kind words and healing power. Jesus never once used His power as God to help Himself. This must have made a very powerful impression on Peter. He described Jesus as

Someone who “ ‘went around doing good. He healed all who were under the devil’s power’ ” (verse 38, NIRV).

Paying attention to the needs of others (rather than to ourselves) is a good way to remove personal stress or pressure. People who are involved in volunteer work or community projects report greater feelings of well-being and satisfaction than people who are not.

**Read Galatians 6:2; Philippians 2:4; and John 15:13. What message is in there for us?**

John D. Rockefeller (1839–1937) gave an example of how to survive stress by moving the focus from oneself to others. By 1879, his company, Standard Oil, handled about 90 percent of the refining<sup>9</sup> in the United States. By the age of 50, he was the richest man alive. But in 1891, he had a nervous breakdown and was near death. Then, in just a few months, he recovered from his illness.

How?

Rockefeller decided to eat a simple diet, rest, and exercise every day. He also decided to give away his riches and spent the remaining 40 years of his life as a philanthropist.<sup>10</sup> Early in the 1900s, his fortune reached nearly \$900 million. At the time of Rockefeller’s death, he had given away all but \$26 million. His donations did a lot of good in the world. And as for himself, he lengthened his life by nearly another 50

9. refining—a process of making oil more pure.

10. philanthropist—a wealthy person who gives money and time to help make life better for other people.



years, living in peace and happiness until the age of 97.

**What has your own experience been with the blessings that come from serving others? Why not make a serious and prayerful effort to do more?**

### FRIDAY—JANUARY 14

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “Elijah was very tired. He sat down to rest under a juniper tree [broom tree]. And sitting there, Elijah prayed that he might die. . . . He was running for his life, far from the cities of men. His spirits were crushed by bitter disappointment. He never again wanted to look upon the face of man. . . . Into the experience of all there come times of great disappointment and discouragement. There are days when sorrow controls life, and it is hard to believe that God is still the kind Provider of His earth-born children. There are days when troubles bother the soul until people prefer to die than to continue living. It is then that many lose their hold on God and are brought into the slavery of doubt and unbelief. If we only could understand in those times the meaning of God’s leading! Then we would see angels trying to save us from ourselves, angels who are working hard to put our feet upon a foundation more firm than the everlasting hills. Then new faith, new life, would come forth anew.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, page 162.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Do you ever have times when you clearly see the hand of God working in your life? It is easy in such times to have strong faith. But soon after, your faith suddenly sinks, and you find yourself filled with doubts about God and His leading in your life. How often have you experienced this? What have you learned from that kind of experience that could help others who might be facing the same thing?
- ② What is it about helping others that makes us feel better? Why is that? At the same time, why is it so hard to give ourselves unselfishly to others? How can we be more willing to die to self in order to better serve the needs of those around us?
- ③ Take a good look at your own health habits. What are you eating and drinking? What kind of exercise program are you on? How much free time do you have? What changes can you make that could help you feel better emotionally and physically? In some cases, people are suffering from very serious problems and need the help of a good psychologist or counselor. Many times a change in lifestyle and habits can make a big difference in how we feel.
- ④ How much free time do you have? What do you do with that time? How could you make better use of that time to improve your relationship with God?