

## Chapter 4

### Stress

Ah, stress; what exactly is stress? And why do we have so much of it in our lives today? Simply put, stress is generated by negative thoughts that create pressure and anxiety in our minds. Over time this pressure can lead to a mental or physical breakdown. We are a stressed-out people because we live in a state of worry, fear, depression, low self-esteem, anger, and unforgiveness, just to name a few. We can learn to reduce the amount of stress that we carry by reducing the toxic emotions that I just listed.

The key to living a more peaceful life is to get to the roots behind our negative thinking and then change how we think. This is what the following chapters are going to expose, areas in our lives that have roots that keep us stuck in the same pattern of toxic thinking. We want to expose the roots or the “whys” behind the way we think. Many times exposing the root, facing it, and grieving over it will bring healing and in turn reduce the amount of stress in our lives.

#### Three Stages of Stress

Dr. Hans Selye (1907–1982) was a pioneering Austrian-Canadian endocrinologist known as the father of stress research. He conducted important scientific research on the study of stress and how it affects our mental and physical health. In his research he names three stages of stress. He calls these stages of stress the General Adaptation Syndrome. In this syndrome Dr. Selye describes how our bodies handle small levels of stress and how our bodies handle greater levels of stress. He describes how we adapt to stress and how it affects our physical and mental health.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Selye also taught that stress is not always bad for us.<sup>2</sup> There can be stress that comes from the excitement and exhilaration that we experience in life. What one person views as negative stress another may view as positive stress. For example, if two people are preparing to take a plane ride for a vacation, one person may have major anxiety about the plane ride while the other person is excited about the plane ride. The person with the anxiety may lose sleep, lose their appetite, and dread the day of the flight. This is negative stress in their life. The other person who sees the airplane ride as exciting is bubbling over with joy because it's the beginning of their vacation. This is positive stress. When each of these two

people sits in that airplane to leave for their vacation, one is excited (good stress) and one is anxious (bad stress). The negative or positive stress that we experience begins in our thoughts. That's why it's important to heal our thought life so that we can experience less of the harmful negative stress.

Dr. Selye did not regard stress as a purely negative phenomenon; in fact, he frequently pointed out that stress is not only an inevitable part of life but results from intense joy or pleasure as well as fear or anxiety. “Stress is not even necessarily bad for you; it is also the spice of life, for any emotion, any activity, causes stress.” Some later researchers have coined the term “eustress” or pleasant stress, to reflect the fact that such positive experiences as a job promotion, completing a degree or training program, marriage, travel, and many others are also stressful. Selye also pointed out that human perception of and response to stress is highly individualized; a job or sport that one person finds anxiety-provoking or exhausting might be quite appealing and enjoyable to someone else. Looking at one's responses to specific stressors can contribute to better understanding of one's particular physical,

emotional, and mental resources and limits.<sup>3</sup>

This is information we can learn from. How we interpret an experience will determine if it has a negative impact on our health or a positive impact.

Below I will describe the phases Dr. Selye observed concerning the physical responses the body goes through when we're confronted with an excessive amount of negative stress: first is the *alarm stage*; second, the *resistance stage*, and third, the *exhaustion stage*.<sup>4</sup>

When I first researched this material, I quickly realized I had lived in each of these stages of stress for most of my life. I have also experienced the negative impact that stress can have on our physical body. Over the last twenty years, I have learned how to reduce the amount of stress that I allow into my life. To think we will rid ourselves completely of all negative stress would be a fallacy, but learning to stop stress from impacting our physical and mental health is possible. There is knowledge to be gained from learning about the three levels of stress; and while Dr. Selye does a marvelous job in describing the problem of stress, it is the Holy Spirit who gives us the *wisdom* to *not allow* stress to ruin our lives. We will begin with the first stage; the alarm stage.

### **The alarm stage**

This is the fight-or-flight response that the mind and body go into when confronted with a dangerous situation. The flight or fight response is characterized by biological changes that prepare the body to either fight off the stressor or flee from the stressor.<sup>5</sup>

An example of this would be if someone were to break into your home.

Immediately your mind would start sending your body signals to either fight the attacker or run from the attacker. During the alarm stage (the body's fight or flight response) hormones such as cortisol, adrenaline, and noradrenalin are released to provide instant energy.<sup>6</sup>

These hormones send signals to your brain that you're going to need more strength, energy, and attentiveness to either fight or flee the situation. Your heart begins to pump more blood to your muscles to provide you with quick movement. Your breathing is increased to get your body ready to fight or flee. The body begins to move food through the digestive track more quickly to rid the body of waste. The stomach moves food along because a full stomach slows the body's fight or flight response down. This is why when we have fearful thoughts or situations we have digestive problems such as irritable bowel syndrome. The digestion process can be affected by stress. These are some of the bodily functions that occur when the body goes into fight or flight response.<sup>7</sup>

During the alarm stage your body (and mind) goes into red alert mode and prepares to protect itself. God put this first stage in place for our survival. If we are confronted with danger, there is a physical response system ready to help save and protect our lives. The problem arises when we go into the alarm stage when there is no physical threat present. Problems arise when our body goes into the flight or fight response because of our past memories or abuses. Going into the alarm stage is also problematic because our bodies were not designed to live in a constant state of threat. The alarm stage was designed to be an acute physical response to help us survive.

My experience has been that there are "triggers" that put the body into an alarmed state. A physical event such as a car accident, or fight with a family member, or you hear bad news, can kick off the fight or flight response. Everyone's triggers are different. Physical triggers are tangible real threats that threaten your safety. There are also psychological triggers that can set the mind and body into a fight or flight response. This could be your thoughts or your memories that

trigger the alarm stage. Just remembering a traumatic event can cause the mind and body to go into fight or flight. This is the case in post-traumatic stress disorders. The definition of post-traumatic stress is a type of anxiety disorder that can occur after you have gone through an extreme emotional trauma that involved the threat of injury or death. Post-traumatic stress disorders deals with the memory of the event that takes you right back to the event as though you were reliving it.

The body and mind will go into the fight or flight response simply by the memory of the event. I will discuss post-traumatic stress more in the chapter on fear.<sup>8</sup> In my experience and the experience of others, there are triggers that can begin the alarm stage. For example, meeting new people, giving a speech, having a job interview, or perhaps going to the dentist can trigger the fight or flight response, especially if you had a bad experience once before in that same situation. Our mind will try and protect us from having another bad experience by sending the body messages to not repeat the same activity or revisit the same place. Our brain remembers the negative experience we had before and sends messages throughout the body that this is not a safe environment and you need to flee the situation. A friend of mine lost her husband to a heart attack while he was in the hospital. This was an extremely difficult time for her. She developed a fear of going to doctors. Each time she would go to the doctor, her body would go into a flight or fight response and she would have a panic attack. This was her brain's way of keeping her safe. Her understanding was that doctors weren't safe and needed to be avoided. This of course is a lie; but to her this fear was very valid due to her traumatic experience of losing her husband while he was in the care of doctors. Her mind had subconsciously believed that doctors were in some way going to harm her and she needed to stay away from them to protect herself. Though it is understandable why she would go into a panic while at the doctors, she needed to deal with the root cause of this fear, which was losing her husband and overcoming the lie that doctors were going to hurt her. Whether the perceived threat is physical or psychological, the body's response is the same. The alarm stage is the body's "call to arms."

### **The resistance stage**

This is where the body goes into survival mode *while* the stressor continues. I once heard this stage described as when your foot is on the accelerator pedal of the car and the car doesn't know how to slow down or stop. To be healthy our "car" has to slow down, stop, and rest. Our mind and body need rest. Jesus understood this and told His disciples to come aside and rest awhile.

And He [Jesus] said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.' For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

—Mark 6:31

Many times we are so busy doing and giving we don't take proper care of ourselves. When I first read this scripture I was relieved that Jesus instructed His disciples to rest and eat. We should learn from Jesus' admonishment. In this stage the

36 Soul Mend

body attempts to adjust to the stressor as best it can. During the resistance stage, the body attempts to return to a normal biological state by restoring the energy that was used from the stress. The body is also trying to repair any damages due to the excess stress.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the stress level remains high, although not as high as during the alarm stage. The mind still recognizes the stressor and sees the stressor as a threat.<sup>10</sup> This stage occurs because we cannot resolve or make peace with the problem we are facing. We keep turning the problem over and over again in our

minds, and the mind and body get little relief.

The prolonged release of stress hormones may be accompanied by such emotional responses as anger, fatigue, and irritability. If a stressful condition persists or negative thought patterns persists, your body adapts by continually trying to resist the surge of negative stress hormones.<sup>11</sup> We are in a continual battle when the negative circumstance or thoughts do not subside.

In the resistance stage your body *does not fully recover* and allow itself to get back to homeostasis. Homeostasis is when the body is in balance and rest.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, many people live their life in this stage. The intense fight or flight response has calmed down, but there is an underlying stressor or problem that is constantly present to eat away at us. This constant stressor can affect the person right down to the cellular level.<sup>13</sup> Some physical symptoms may start to surface such as; trouble sleeping, muscle tension, digestion problems such as stomach aches, constipation, headaches/migraines, irritability, and a general sense of feeling down.<sup>14</sup> These symptoms may manifest as the body is trying to deal with the stressor.

### **The exhaustion stage**

The third stage is the exhaustion stage. If the stressor persists, the body may enter in the exhaustion stage. Now, you may be thinking the exhaustion stage is where you're tired all the time or dragging through your day; but the exhaustion stage can be far worse than feeling tired. This is where you are so drained and depleted that you are now open to major illnesses. The immune system is greatly impaired at this stage due to the ongoing release of stress hormones.<sup>15</sup> The body's ability to resist disease at this stage is lost because its adaptation energy supply is gone,<sup>16</sup> meaning the body has been so busy fighting stress that it has not been able to use its energy to fight off infection and disease.

It's at this stage of burnout that we see people who are continually getting colds or infections. Their body is spending all its energy on the stressor with little left to fight off viruses, infections, and the like. Heart rate and respiration are now decreased to conserve bodily resources. With continued exposure to stress, the body's resources may become seriously depleted.<sup>17</sup> At this stage the body is functioning on low, performing only necessary functions. Stress-related disorders such as kidney disease, heart disease, allergic conditions, digestive disorders, and depression, chronic fatigue may occur.<sup>18</sup> The list could go on and on.

As I have already discussed, I have been at this stage twice in my life. There was a time when I was in the exhaustion stage that I was housebound for almost a year. I remember I hardly had enough energy to yawn. Friends or family had to come in and cook meals, clean the house, and do the laundry. As one who enjoyed providing nice meals and a clean home for my family, this was extremely difficult. I have learned some hard lessons from living through the stages of stress, and it is my desire to write this book so that others may learn how to avoid or how to recover from these types of adversities.

### **Three Spiritual Stages of Stress**

There is a spiritual war that wages against us to keep us in a state of continual stress. The enemy has been around humanity for a very long time and knows how to bring stress on us from a spiritual perspective. As I was contemplating the three stages of stress, I began to compare the physical stages of stress to the spiritual stages of stress in our life. Below is a description of the spiritual stages of stress and how they can impact our mind and body.

#### **The alarm stage from a spiritual perspective**

The first stage, the alarm stage, can be likened to the bully (the devil) coming to threaten us with thoughts of fear, sadness, anger, unforgiveness, and the like.

When the enemy roars and whirls his lies in our mind, then the body responds by going into the stress response of fight or flight. The spiritual dynamic of the enemy's lies can trigger the physical stress response in our physical body. I have described above the stress hormones that are released and all the physical changes that can occur in the body when presented with a threat. The enemy knows this and triggers the threat. He does this by getting us to believe his lies. He understands that our physical body and our mind will be negatively affected.

I speak from experience when I tell you that there were many times the enemy would whisper fearful thoughts in my mind; and as a result my heart would race, my blood pressure would rise, cortisol and adrenal would be released, and my stomach would be in knots *all because* I was fighting a spiritual battle.

### **The resistance stage from a spiritual perspective**

The second stage, known as the resistance stage, can be likened to the bully (the devil) coming to live in your house, meaning the devil has presented you with a constant threat or problem. This problem seems impossible, like it will never go away. This can go on for days, weeks, months, or even years. We try and find a way to cohabit with the problem, but the problem begins to wear us out. Our mind and body attempt to find a level of peace, but the enemy is still around in the form of the "problem" or affliction. During the resistance stage, our spirit, soul, and body are trying to recover but the problem is still present. We are living with the enemy.

### **The exhaustion stage from a spiritual perspective**

The third stage, known as the exhaustion stage, can be likened to the person becoming completely depleted and hopeless. At this stage we are ready to give up, and some even consider suicide. It's at this point that the enemy looks bigger than God. There seem to be no solutions to our problems and life looks bleak. At the exhaustion stage there is little energy left to fight the enemy, and any spiritual vigor that we once had is now gone. At this stage we are in desperate need of an intervention by the Holy Spirit.

It's at this phase that the person, Christian or not, says to God, "If You're real, I need You to intervene; because if You don't, I will die here." We feel like we are drowning in an ocean of affliction. The good news is that when we choose to turn to God through prayer, reading the Bible, and by surrounding ourselves with godly people, we find strength.

This is the truth! I know because I have lived this. This is where we find Jesus reaching out His hand to pull us out of deep waters. God's rescuing love and restoring power will begin to change us from the inside out. I have been at this stage, and I have seen miracles—the miracle of God either rescuing me out of the affliction or little by little walking me through the affliction.

When you are in the midst of the trial and don't know what to do, begin to put one foot in front of the other and keep walking, or crawling if necessary, until you begin to see freedom. God will walk you right out of the problem and right into a better quality of life.

I have presented the problem of stress to you, and you may have even seen yourself in the three stages of stress. But now I want to provide practical and further spiritual keys that will help you better deal with stress. I have over thirty years of experience in dealing with stress and all that comes along with stress. The difference for me now is that I no longer cohabit with stress. Stress still knocks on my door, but it no longer lives in my house. I don't take stress out to dinner with me, stress is not allowed to fall asleep with me or attach itself to me.

It is my prayer that you will benefit from the information below on how to reduce your stress levels.

## **Steps to Reduce Stress**

As we have learned, stress can send a cascade of stress hormones into the body and over time this can lead to illness. I am going to outline a few practical steps that can alleviate stress and spiritual steps to alleviate stress. As I said at the beginning of this book, always get the advice of your doctor to counsel you on your specific needs. I have been under the care of both regular medical doctors and also naturopathic physicians. Both were helpful; but in my journey back to health, I discovered a clash between medical doctors and the synthetic drugs they prescribe and naturopathic doctors and the vitamins and minerals they recommend. A naturopathic doctor once told me that if you give the body natural supplements the body knows what to do with those herbs, vitamins, and minerals; but if you give the body synthetic drugs, the body may reject the foreign chemical. I encourage you to do your own research to discover what's best for your body.

### **B Vitamins**

B vitamins can be lost during prolonged periods of stress. I speak personally only from the plethora of doctors who advised me to take vitamin B supplements. Years of stress on the body can take its toll on many internal systems of the body, particularly the nervous system. When I began to take the B vitamins, I noticed my alertness improved and my energy levels recovered. If you're someone that has a lot of stress in your life you may want to have your B levels checked. As a side note: when I had my B vitamins checked by my regular MD, he said my B levels were normal; but when my naturopathic doctor looked at those same B levels, he said my B vitamins were on the "low end" of normal and should be much higher for optimum health. The naturopathic doctor was correct; because once I started taking the vitamin B supplements, I saw a positive change.

### **Hormones**

Stress can take its toll on our hormones. I would encourage anyone who battles stress to see your doctor and get your hormones tested. In my experience, stress is especially hard on the adrenal glands and the thyroid. There are supplements that can help rebuild both. The adrenal glands are a particular focus because during stress the adrenals work over time and when the adrenals are not functioning properly there are adverse effects in the body.<sup>19</sup> I took supplements for both the adrenal glands and the thyroid, and the supplements improved the functions of both.

### **Balanced diet and reduced sugar intake**

Eating a balanced diet is necessary to maintain good health. Good food provides health to the mind and body. There is no way around this truth. When choosing what to eat, look for foods that are closer to nature, uncooked fruits and vegetables are the best. Frozen vegetables and fruits are a good second choice to fresh fruits and vegetables.

One of the worst types of foods we can eat is processed foods. Processed foods

40 Soul Mend

may contain harmful chemicals that the body is unfamiliar with, and these chemicals can do damage to the body. Chemicals that we consume through processed foods can be destructive to us over a long period of time resulting in illness and disease. Someone once told me that *live food equals a live body*, as opposed to overcooked, processed foods.

Science teaches us that excess sugar can do damage to our bodies. We know that large quantities of sugar can suppress our immune system.<sup>20</sup> Having said that, I believe it is fine for most people who are eating a healthy, well-balanced diet to splurge with dessert on occasion; but always follow the advice of your doctor.

### **Something to look forward to**

Another way to combat stress is to have something to look forward to. Life

gets busy and we are confronted with issues and situations that require us to problem solve, so it's good to give your mind and body a break! Your body chemistry changes when your brain is focused on something positive.<sup>21</sup> That's why it's a benefit to have an activity that you are looking forward to. It could be a vacation you are planning, going out with friends, taking a hike, going shopping, playing a sport, getting a manicure—whatever it is that brings you joy (within reason, of course), allow yourself some fun and R & R.

### **Exercise**

Yes, this is also something we have heard for years; and it's true, exercise contributes to a healthy mind and body. I have heard it said that if exercise could be bottled into a pill, it would be the most widely prescribed pill. The key is to find an activity that you enjoy. The exercise that you choose doesn't have to be excessive to the point where you can't talk through the activity but some type of activity that gets the body moving. Get creative with your activities; chase your kids around the house, go to a park, play Frisbee, do garden work, walk your dog—you get the idea.

There is also the option of joining a gym for exercise. Before you say you would never join a gym, you might want to give it a try. I was in my forties when my daughters finally talked me into joining a gym. I remember the day we pulled into the gym parking lot. I wanted to run the other way. All I could imagine is very fit, toned young people; and here I was a middle-aged woman. It took a few visits for me to be convinced, but now I'm hooked. Much to my surprise the gym was filled with all ages, shapes and sizes. I absolutely love how I feel after the workout. Before I exercise I feel like a rubber band that is being stretched to its maximum capacity, but after exercise I feel like the tension from that stretched rubber band is gone. The point is to get some type of physical exercise because exercising releases endorphins and reduces the stress hormones.<sup>22</sup>

### **Stretching**

This is one of my favorite things that *quickly* releases tension and stress in my body. Stretch your muscles and hold the stretch for about 10 seconds. If you will take a few minutes to stretch the major muscles groups in your body you will notice you feel relaxed afterward. Your body will feel more at ease and stress free.

### **Proper breathing**

This is also an important step that I find can immediately stop the stress response in the body. Breathe in for two long seconds and then breathe out for four long seconds. Put your hand right above your naval and you should feel your stomach move up and down as you breathe.

It is not good if you breathe out of your neck and upper chest area. Breathing rapidly out of your upper chest and neck area is what causes people to hyperventilate. When I feel myself get nervous, I automatically start this type of deep breathing. Counting is also helpful. As you *take in a breath*, count *one* one thousand, *two* one thousand. Then as you breathe out, count *one* one thousand, *two* one thousand, *three* one thousand, *four* one thousand. This sends a message to your brain to immediately calm down. This really works!

### **Nature**

If you're in a stressful mind-set and you need to find some peace, observe nature. I've noticed that all seasons—winter, spring, summer, and fall—have beauty in them. When you look for the beauty in nature, you will find it.

I like to look at a sunset or sunrise, squirrels in the fall, or birds in the spring. I like to watch the sun beaming through the trees or the beauty of the clouds in the summer sky. God designed the world beautifully. Not long ago I was helping my husband shovel snow. The sun was setting and the sky was filled with blues, pinks, and purples; the winter sky was breathtaking. I felt so blessed to be outside at that moment.

When you observe the beauty in nature it brings tremendous peace to the mind.

### **Talk or write**

When you've had a lot of stressors, talking to a good friend or counselor can be extremely beneficial. We find answers to our problems when we begin to talk about what is bothering us. I have noticed that when I open up and begin to talk about a situation, harmful emotions surface and are brought out. This is healthy for us, even if tears are a result of us talking. This is healing.

Another helpful tip for getting stress out of your life is to write your concerns and feelings out on paper. A counselor once told me to write about a troublesome situation—*and then throw the paper away*. This is the same principal as talking it out; because when we get those feelings out and bring them into the light, stress levels decrease and hurts are exposed so they can be healed. This process is freeing to the mind.

### **Five-minute break**

Remove yourself from the stressful situation if possible. This will help you process information and not react illogically. If you're at work and you feel stressed, take five minutes out. Take a bathroom break, drink some cold water, sit down, and do the above breathing exercises I mentioned. Be kind to yourself and give yourself a few minutes to regroup and refresh your mind.

### **Spiritual Steps to Reduce Stress**

The above are practical steps that are helpful to reduce stress, but it's equally important to seek out spiritual steps to reduce stress. This next section deals with spiritual keys to close the door on harmful stress.

### **Pray**

That's obvious, right? Pray! If you find yourself in a battle of stress and you feel your body responding to the stress, stop what you're doing, stop what you are thinking, and ask the Holy Spirit for help. There have been countless times I have had an "emergency" come up; and instead of going into the fight or flight response, and instead of allowing my mind to race to all the worst case scenarios, I will begin to call on the Holy Spirit for help. The Holy Spirit is faithful to either calm us down or bring an answer that will settle the situation.

In the corporate world, where my husband worked for many years, he would have seasons of high stress on his job. We would pray together. Our prayer was that God would either change my husband's perspective on a stressful situation or change the negative people who were creating the stress. Yes, there were times when God would change my husband's perspective about a situation; but I saw countless times when God would *remove* the negative people who were creating the stress. Prayer does work, and God hears us when we call on Him.

If you feel you are in stress, you can cry out to God and ask Him to open your eyes to see the root of the problem. You can ask the Holy Spirit to give you insights on how to walk through your problems, You can ask Him to surround you with godly people and godly teaching that will give you fresh hope and expectation of His deliverance in your life.

When you pray you are admitting that you don't have the answer and you need God to intervene. In Philippians 4:6-7 Paul tells us:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

What I love about this scripture is that it admonishes us not to worry about anything, not to stress about anything, but instead to pray. Not only are we instructed to pray, but we are instructed to pray with thanksgiving. The next part encourages us that the peace of God will guard our hearts and minds through

Christ Jesus. What a tremendous promise from God! When you're stressed out and don't know where to turn, pray. God has the answer.

### **Read your Bible**

Daily reading the Word will also reduce stress because scripture is God's love letter to us. If you don't know where to begin, start with the Gospels or the psalms.

### **Attend a Bible believing church.**

Scripture specifically teaches that we should not forsake the assembling together. Being in a community with others can bring a sense of wellbeing into our lives.

### **Have Faith in God**

God is true to His Word. He promises to help us when we turn to Him. We can confidently lean on Him, and because of this confidence and faith in Him, our stress is greatly reduced.

## Other Access Points

### **Old wounds**

Our experiences will shape how we view our world and how we think. If we have had negative experiences (particularly as a child), then we will tend to view life through broken, toxic emotions. When we view life through toxic emotions, we will have more stress in our lives. The next six chapters deal with toxic emotions and their roots. Roots that I will be identifying are such emotions as a broken heart, self-rejection, guilt, anger, bitterness, fear, depression, and unforgiveness. If you have any one of these toxic emotions, then chances are your life is stressful. When the enemy knows you're broken in one of these areas, he will come to whisper thoughts in your mind that will create stress in an area in which you're broken. You are more susceptible to stressful thinking if you still have open wounds. For example, if you have an issue with guilt, the enemy will tell you all the things that you're not doing and how you should feel guilty. He will tell you that you are not measuring up and you're a failure. This train of thought can lead to stress. I address specifics on how to deal with the root of guilt in the corresponding chapter on guilt. Each chapter is designed to help you break free from wounded emotions.

But for our purposes, the best way to get started in closing the door of stress in your thinking is to practice the stop sign method that I mentioned in the introduction. In the stop sign method, when you get a negative stress thought and you feel your mind *and body* begin to spiral down, *hold up a stop sign in your mind*. There have been countless times where a negative stressful thought will enter my mind and I will envision a stop sign and say no to that thought. I will not roll that thought over and over in my mind. This in turn reduces the amount of stress in my mind and body. Just recently I was walking to my car and I got the thought that I was all alone and what if? I held up that red stop sign in my mind and I said, "Not today, devil! I am not going to fall for that lie and get myself into fear. Not today am I going to allow that thought to kick off the fight or flight stress response and send a surge of stress hormones in my body."

Do you see how that stop sign works? As you get healing in a particular area of negative thinking, holding up that stop sign will get easier and easier. That is why prayerfully reading the chapter that pertains to your area of brokenness is so important. The Holy Spirit wants to help you in your area of weakness, and He wants to bring new levels of freedom to your life.

### **The occult**

The enemy can have a legal right into our lives if we have dabbled in the occult. Participating in the occult can include going to palm readers or fortune tellers, practicing witchcraft, playing the Ouija board, watching movies that were

inspired by the demonic, and the like. The source of these practices and where they get their information from is of the devil. It is a bit of a double standard to go to the devil for guidance (as in the case of fortune tellers) and then ask God to help us in our afflictions. We need to choose one side or the other. Either we are going to get into agreement with God (His Word, the Bible) or we are going to get into agreement with the devil.

If you have participated in any form of the occult, repent to God and ask Him to forgive you and cleanse you from your involvement with the occult. Ask the Holy Spirit to shut any door that you may have opened to the devil.

Make a commitment to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit to serve Him and not the enemy. Make a decision to live for God and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into peace and out of stress thoughts.

### In Conclusion

It takes time to change the habit of stress. As you go through the remainder of this book, you will uncover the cycles of negativity in your life and ways to break free from these patterns. The list below shows the progression of negative roots in your life.

- Negative roots (from hurts in our past or current crises) produce
- Negative thinking, which produce
- Toxic emotions, which produce
- Negative behaviors, which produce
- A poor quality of life.

Once the source of the negative roots is exposed and dealt with, you will be less susceptible to stress. Below are questions to consider and a prayer to ask God for wisdom to deal with the stress in your life.

### Questions to consider

1. What are the three stages of stress?
2. Have you ever found yourself in the alarm stage of stress, where the body goes into the fight or flight response? What were the circumstances surrounding that event?
3. In the second stage of stress, the resistance stage, we learned that at times, we have to survive while the stressor continues. Have you had to cope through a difficult season of life? Describe this time period of your life?
4. Have you ever been in the 3rd stage of stress, the exhaustion stage? Did you find yourself sick physically or emotionally? What were the circumstances around this time of your life?
5. During your times of stress, if you turned to God, how did He carry you through your difficulties?
6. When you read the scriptures below what message is God communicating to us?

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Isaiah 43:2

Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. I Peter 5:7

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11”28

7. List some practical and spiritual steps you can take to prevent or recover from stress that the author outlined.

*Heavenly Father, I ask You to help me get to the source of my stress. As I begin this journey of healing from negative thinking, show me the stumbling blocks that have kept me bound. Give me the strength to go from the surface issue to the root of the issue. Grant me the wisdom to know which remedy I need to overcome a stressful situation. God, I also seek Your grace to heal my mind, body, and spirit. I look to You, Holy Spirit, for Your counsel as I begin this process of restoration. Thank You in advance for the good things that You have in my future. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*