



Understanding and Managing Stress: A Biblical Perspective

***Meditative Response*
Abatement Response
Emancipatory Response**

**Jerome Taylor
2008**

Understanding and Managing Stress: A Biblical Perspective

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Module 1: Meditative Response to Stress—Take *PAUSE!*

Unit 1: Primer on Stress

- Nature of Stress (feeling overwhelmed, under-resourced, and dysphoric—Handout H1.1)
- Effects of Chronic Stress (personal, familial, and communal costs—H1.2, H1.3, H1.4)

Unit 2: Types of Stress

- Empathic (Job 1:13-15)
- Depletion (Job 1:14-15)
- Dismemberment (Job 1:19)
- Demoralization (Job 1:20)
- Illness (Job 2:7-10)
- Accretion (Deut 8:1-17)

Unit 3: Causes of Stress

- Being in Harm's Way (Luke 13:1-5)
- Sin (Disobedience—Genesis 3:14-19)
- Righteousness (Obedience—I Kings 17: 1-7)
- Discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11)
- Refinement (Job 42:7-17)

Unit 4: Godly Course of Stress (7 Phases H1.5: Job)

Unit 5: Meditative Response to Stress—PAUSE

- P:*** *Pray* for God's protection from the personal, familial, and communal ravages of elevated and chronic stress, its hurt, harm, and danger—see H1.2, H1.3, and H1.4.
- A:*** *Access* available hymns, biblical texts, taped sermons, or liturgical dance videotapes that provide assurance of God's availability, assurance, and ability to keep you during stressful seasons of your life—*e.g.*, hymns and scriptures (H1.6) and sermons (Reverend Eugene Downing's *In the Zone* (11/11/07) and *Breaking the Blues* (11/25/07).
- U:*** *Understand* and meditate on nature of stress, types of stress, causes of stress, and the course of stress which will not remove the stress but equip you to see it through—see materials and handouts introduced during Units 1, 2, 3, and 4.
- S:*** *Seek* God's face in understanding the cause of stress in your life and in revealing the way forward to greater post-stress spiritual maturity—see H1.5 distributed during Unit 4.
- E:*** *Engage* God's revelations by making wise and sometimes uncomfortable or painful decisions that will bring you to a level of spiritual maturity higher than you experienced before entering your latest season of distress—see H1.5 corresponding to Unit 4.

Monitor Meditative Response to Stress—PAUSE (H1.7)

Assess Changes in Perceived Stress and Dysphoric Symptoms (H1.8)

Understanding and Managing Stress: A Biblical Perspective

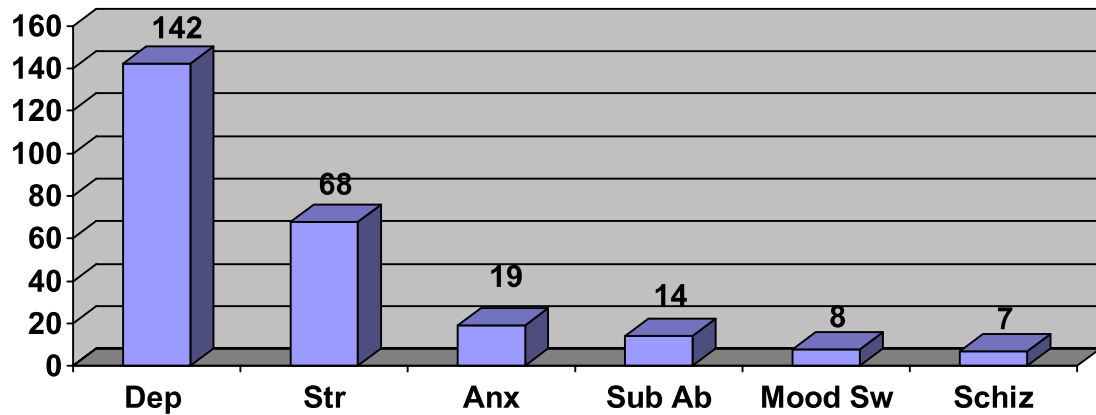
Handouts for Module 1: Meditative Response

Jerome Taylor

Behavioral Health Initiative in the Hill:
An Empowerment Model for Closing Gaps in Consumer Utilization and Service Quality

Figure 1. Behavioral Symptom Clusters Identified by Hill District Ministers³

Paula Davis, PhD, Charlotte Brown, PhD, Patricia Piercy, PhD, Lenall Thomas, PhD, Roland Slade, BA, & Jerome Taylor, PhD⁴



■ Raw Frequency of Symptoms Reported by 23 Ministers (91% Were Pastors)

- Dep** *Depressive Symptoms:* Feelings of despair, sadness, loneliness, and hopelessness; tearfulness, loss of motivation and interest
- Str** *Stress Symptoms:* Feeling overstretched, overwrought, overwhelmed; unable to function, tasks uncompleted, cascading troubles
- Anx** *Anxiety Symptoms:* Feeling uptight, tense, apprehensive, fearful, pressurized, burdened, frustrated
- Sub Ab** *Substance Abuse-Related Issues:* Aggravated family relationships and worsening personal adjustment of addicts
- Mood Sw** *Mood Swing Symptoms:* Unpredictable highs and lows, fussy, irritable
- Schiz** *Schizophrenic Symptoms:* Irrational behavior (e.g., urinating in a corner of the church)
- Common to All:** Diminished church attendance, unresponsiveness to phone calls, abrupt changes in appearance or behavior

Conduct disorders and school problems were reported for children, dementia symptoms for older adults. Elevated levels of Dep, Str, and Anx were also reported for both subgroups.

The following biblical application is directed toward understanding and managing depressive, stress, and anxiety symptoms identified as problematic by ministers of the Hill District. Stewards will be identified, trained, and certified prior to use of this applications in their host churches. Seperate applications will be developed for the remaining behavioral health challenges identified by ministers.

³ Presented November 17, 2005 at the conference *Church's Response to Mental Health Needs of its Members*, Bethel A.M.E. Church, Pittsburgh, PA. We are thankful for partial funding of this conference by UPMC's Department of Mood Disorders: Treatment and Research Program. Judith Callan and staff of this department, regular attendees of our Cultural policy Council, were key actors in arranging for UPMC's partial funding of this conference.

⁴ We express our appreciation to all ministers who agreed to be interviewed and to Ministers Roland Slade and Prudence Harris who conducted the interviews. Without the leadership provided by Reverend Doctor McLemore, Chair of the Cultural Policy Council, and David Richardson of the Center for Family Excellence and the Male Coalition which he coordinates, this study would not have been possible. Thanks also to Dasha Condon who created the database, entered the data, and generated this and other reports shared at the November 17, 2005 conference.

Handout H1.2

Personal Costs Associated with Stress

I. Behavior Health Challenges

Elevated and chronic levels of stress increase risks of...

1. Becoming overwhelmed with feelings of pessimism and fatalism that trigger increases in:
 - Depressive symptoms;
 - Anxiety symptoms;
 - Angry outburst, chronic irritability, or both.
2. Seeking momentary relief or escape through:
 - Alcohol and drug experimentation or addiction;
 - Smoking behavior;
 - Risky sexual behaviors;
 - Overeating and mis-eating.
3. Creating and reinforcing a sense of pessimism, fatalism, and alienation among children and youth that may underlie or exacerbate:
 - Conduct problems at home and in school;
 - Tardiness and absenteeism at school;
 - Poor school grades and test scores;
 - School drop out;
 - Delinquency behaviors.
4. Damaging that portion of the brain responsible for memory (CA3 area of hippocampus)

II. Physical Health Challenges

Elevated and chronic levels of stress increase risks of...

1. Cardiovascular disease by releasing chemicals that:
 - Increase the potential for blood clots which can lead to strokes;
 - Increase the stiffening of blood vessels which is associated with hypertension;
 - Decreasing the stability of plaques that build up in the lining of blood vessels which can lead to plaque breakages that can lead to heart attack;
 - Increasing the plaque build-up in the lining of blood vessels that can lead to atherosclerotic disease with the resulting loss of stamina and energy which triggers the progressive loss of physical capacity.
2. Type 2 diabetes by altering body metabolism in ways that:
 - Increase the level of blood sugars—higher triglyceride levels, for example;
 - Decrease the capacity to metabolize blood sugars—heightened insulin resistance;

- Reduce the functionality of major organ systems—kidney and retina, for example.
- 3. Arthritic conditions by increasing inflammatory processes in the joints.
- 4. Viral and bacterial infections by weakening the body's immune system.
- 5. Shortened life span by changing the tip of chromosomes structures (telomeres) that influence longevity.
- 6. Epigenetic changes that modify gene behaviors in ways that can be passed on to our children. Might such epigenetic changes affirm biblical wisdom that decisions of our fathers (mothers) can be passed along to future generations of our sons (daughters)?



Handout H1.3

Familial Costs Associated with Stress

Persistently high and chronic levels of stress associated with depression, anxiety, and anger tend to increase risks of...

1. Child maltreatment—abuse and neglect;
2. Conflicts and dissatisfaction between intimates;
3. Domestic violence;
4. Multiple intimate partners;
5. Isolation from social resources that can make a constructive difference in one's life;
6. Impaired capacity to cope constructively with stress;
7. Impaired capacity to help others deal with problems—including one's children;
8. Impaired capacity to learn;
9. Being unemployed;
10. Being fired.



Handout H1.4

Communal Costs Associated with Stress

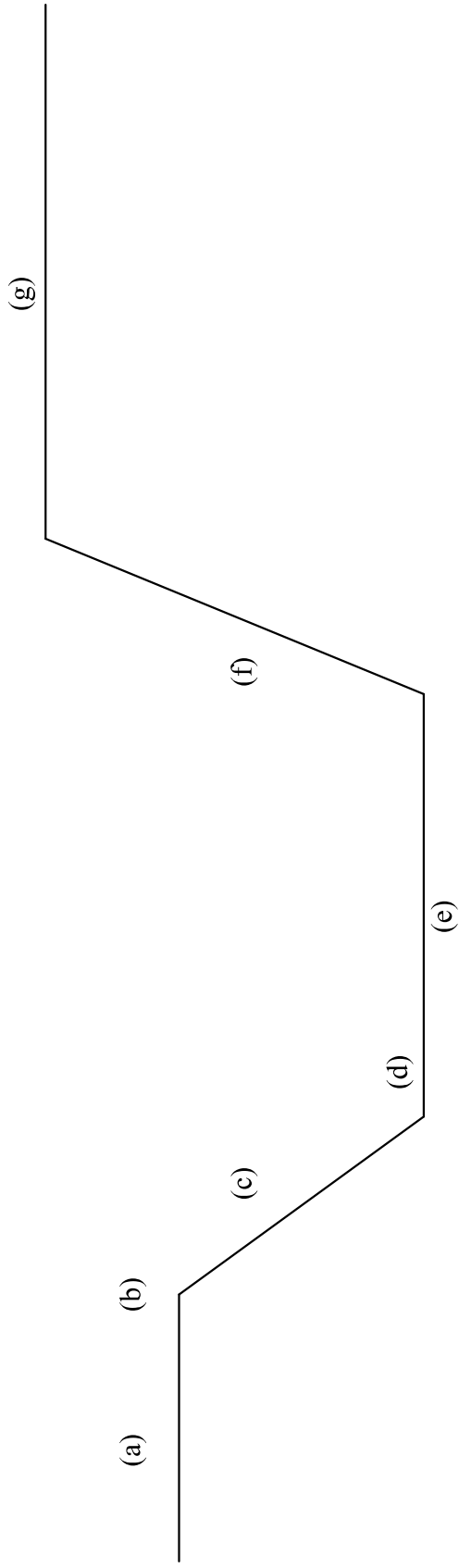
Persistently high and chronic levels of stress associated with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and anger may well lower prospects of...

1. Home Ownership by such persons who are preoccupied more with making it from day to day than dedicated saving for tomorrow;
2. Entrepreneurial Development involving such persons who are more preoccupied with challenges of the moment than in building for the future;
3. Full Employment because such persons bring personal characteristics often associated with unemployment or elevated risks of being fired;
4. Educational Development by children and youth who are pessimistic and fatalistic about their future;
5. Political Enfranchisement involving such persons who are unlikely to see that their individual vote or community participation can make a difference;
6. Healthy Families since such persons are likely to experience ongoing challenges in bonding adaptively with children and intimates;
7. Healthy Communities since children and youth who carry these symptoms are at risk of alienation from their communities and affiliation with peer elements that perpetrate crimes against property and persons in their neighborhoods.

We conclude this analysis by indicating that items 1 through 7 do not represent the usual 'blaming the victim'. In Module 3 we will be examining how 'the system' contributes to these patterns which undermine quality of communal life. Our challenge, then, is helping those bringing these symptoms to the table *and* fortifying them against systemic processes that create these symptom patterns to begin with.



H1.5
Godly Course of Stress (Job)



Exercise: Honestly thinking about myself the last time God brought me through:

- (a) Pre-stress Level _____
- (b) Angle of Descent _____
- (c) Depth of Descent _____
- (d) Breadth of Descent _____
- (e) Point of Recovery _____
- (f) Angle of Recovery _____
- (g) Post-stress Level _____

H1.6 During Times of Trouble: Sample of Hymns Celebrating God's Availability, Assurance, and Ability

The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow (Thomas A. Dorsey)

A hymn on God's availability, assurance, and ability (study in connection with Isaiah 43:16, for example)

Like a ship that's tossed and driven, battered by an angry sea.
When the storms of life are raging, and their fury falls on me.
I wonder what I have done, to make this race so hard to run.
(Then I say to my soul, soul take courage)
The Lord will make a way somehow.
The Lord will make a way somehow.

Repeat Verse (twice)

This tedious journey may not be easy, you did not say that it would be.
Sometimes I get so lonely and disheartened, and I just don't want to be bothered.
Then I began to think Lord what I have done, to make this race so hard for me to run.
Then I say to my soul, soul take courage
The Lord will make a way somehow
The Lord will make a way somehow

Precious Lord, Take My Hand (Thomas A. Dorsey)

A hymn on God's availability, assurance, and ability (written shortly after his wife Nettie died while giving birth to a child who also died shortly thereafter): Study in conjunction with Isaiah 41:13)

Precious Lord, take my hand,
Lead me on, let me stand,
I am tired, I am weak, I am worn;
Through the storm, through the night,
Lead me on to the light:

Refrain

Take my hand, precious Lord,
Lead me home.
When my way grows drear,
Precious Lord, linger near,
When my life is almost gone,
Hear my cry, hear my call,
Hold my hand lest I fall:

Refrain

When the darkness appears
And the night draws near,
And the day is past and gone,

What a Friend We Have in Jesus (Joseph M. Scriven, 1855)

A hymn on God's availability, assurance, and ability. Study in conjunction with Matthew 6:25-34 or Luke 12:24-27 (parables on birds of the air and lilies of the field).

1. What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

2. Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

3. Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He'll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

4. Blessed Savior, Thou hast promised
Thou wilt all our burdens bear;
May we ever, Lord, be bringing
All to Thee in earnest prayer.
Soon in glory bright, unclouded,
There will be no need for prayer—
Rapture, praise, and endless worship
Will be our sweet portion there.



Handout H1.7

Monitor for Meditative Response *PAUSE*

FIRST, draw a circle around the Type of Stress you are presently experiencing. If you are presently experiencing more than one Type of Stress, draw a circle around each type that fits your situation. **Second**, check off (X) components of *PAUSE* you have implemented in relation to the type or types of stress you presently are experiencing (see note below table for descriptions of each component of *PAUSE*). **Third**, tell your own story in the last table of what you did in relation to each component of *PAUSE*.

Type of Stress

Type of Stress	Description	P	A	U	S	E
1. Empathic	Shootings, muggings, break-ins or other crimes in your neighborhood or community; misfortune or crisis of a friend, relative, neighbor, or stranger					
2. Depletion	Financial crisis; ran out of money to cover your bills or obligations; bill collectors call; wages garnished, bankruptcy threatened or required					
3. Dismemberment	Loss of a loved one, serial loss of loved ones, loss of one's spiritual bearing and confidence					
4. Illness	Temporary or permanent loss of functionality due to illnesses physical or mental					
5. Demoralization	Dejection, discouragement, or miseries caused by unexpected obstacles, disappointments, or frustrations on your job, with family members, in your friendships, in your church fellowship, or in other relationships important to you					
6. Accretion	Life turns sour when material blessings provided by God are unacknowledged or when we come to believe they have been produced by our own hand					
7. Other	Please Describe:					

Components of *PAUSE*

- P:** *Pray* for God's protection from the personal, familial, and communal ravages of elevated and chronic stress, its hurt, harm, and danger—see H1.2, H1.3, and H1.4.

- A:** Access available hymns, biblical texts, taped sermons, or liturgical dance videotapes that provide assurance of God’s availability, assurance, and ability to keep you during stressful seasons of your life—e.g., hymns and scriptures (H1.6) and sermons (Reverend Eugene Downing’s *In the Zone* (11/11/07) and *Breaking the Blues* (11/25/07).
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My Story on PAUSE

Component	What did you do?	What happened? Describe how your thoughts, feelings, or behaviors got better, worse, or stayed the same.
P		
A		
U		
S		
E		



Handout H1.8

Measuring Changes in Perceived Stress and Dysphoric Symptoms

THESE MEASURES can be completed immediately before *and* immediately after *each* module or before *and* after the completion of all modules. The matter of interest here is whether participants exposed to one or more of these modules also experience reductions in levels of perceived stress (overstretched, overwrought, under-resourced) typically associated with dysphoric symptoms (depression, anxiety, anger).

Of course there are many ways of measuring changes in perceived stress and dysphoric symptoms. We include the following possibilities for your consideration.

Perceived Stress

PSS

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, please indicate with a check how often you felt or thought a certain way.

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

0=never 1=almost never 2=sometimes 3=fairly often 4=very often

2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

0=never 1=almost never 2=sometimes 3=fairly often 4=very often

3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?

0=never 1=almost never 2=sometimes 3=fairly often 4=very often

4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

0=never 1=almost never 2=sometimes 3=fairly often 4=very often

Depressive Symptoms

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INSTRUCTIONS: Carefully read each statement below. To indicate the extent to which each statement is true, use the following scale which is marked from 0 to 10. The more you think the statement is true, the higher the number you would assign. Place the number best representing your judgment in the blank space just preceding each statement.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I
Not True	Not Much		Somewhat		Very Much		Entirely			
At All	True		True		True		True			

- _____ 1. I feel happy inside.
- _____ 2. I have little get up and go.
- _____ 3. I tend to stay by myself.
- _____ 4. I cry over the slightest thing.
- _____ 5. I find myself bumping into things or otherwise having little accidents.
- _____ 6. I have few outside activities.
- _____ 7. My mood often changes from day to day.
- _____ 8. I am actively involved with my family.
- _____ 9. Getting chores done around the house is no problem for me.
- _____ 10. My eating habits have changed: I eat more *or* less than usual.
- _____ 11. I am usually well organized.
- _____ 12. I have difficulty getting things done.
- _____ 13. I am an outgoing person.
- _____ 14. I have lots of activities outside the home.

A (1,8,9,11,13,14) _____ B (2,3,4,5,6,7,10,12) _____ T=B+(60-A) _____

Taylor, J. & Tomasic, J. (1996). Taylor's measures of dysphoria, anxiety, and self-esteem. In R.L. Jones (Ed.), *Handbook of Tests and Measurements for Black Populations, Volume 2*, 295-305. Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry.

Anxiety Symptoms

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INSTRUCTIONS: Carefully read each statement below. To indicate the extent to which each statement is true, use the following scale which is marked from 0 to 10. **The more you think the statement is true, the higher the number you would assign. Place the number best representing your judgment in the blank space just preceding each statement.**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I———	I———	I———	I———	I———	I———	I———	I———	I———	I———	I———
Not True	Not Much		Somewhat		Very Much		Entirely			
At All	True		True		True		True			

-
- _____ 1. Sometimes my thoughts are a bit rambling.
_____ 2. I have trouble concentrating.
_____ 3. Friends compliment me on how clearly I speak.
_____ 4. I sometimes get things mixed up.
_____ 5. I always listen well.
_____ 6. I am a calm person.
_____ 7. My memory is sharp.
_____ 8. I am often in inner turmoil.
_____ 9. Friends come to me for help.
_____ 10. I forget things readily.
_____ 11. I get edgy.
_____ 12. I am always a clear headed thinker.
_____ 13. I manage things pretty evenhandedly.
_____ 14. I often feel uneasy inside.

A (1,2,4,8,10,11,14)_____ B(3,5,6,7,9,12,13)_____ T=A+(70-B)_____

Taylor, J. & Tomasic, J. (1996). Taylor's measures of dysphoria, anxiety, and self-esteem. In R.L. Jones (Ed.), *Handbook of Tests and Measurements for Black Populations, Volume 2*, 295-305. Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry.

Angry Symptoms

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INSTRUCTIONS: Carefully read each statement below. To indicate the extent to which each statement is true, use the following scale which is marked from 0 to 10. **The more you think the statement is true, the higher the number you would assign. Place the number best representing your judgment in the blank space just preceding each statement.**

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I	I———I
Not True	Not Much		Somewhat		Very Much		Entirely			
At All	True		True		True		True			

- _____ 1. I am even tempered.
_____ 2. I enjoy gossip.
_____ 3. I express my anger anytime and anywhere.
_____ 4. I anger quickly.
_____ 5. I am a patient person.
_____ 6. My anger is sometimes unpredictable.
_____ 7. It takes some doing to get me angry.
_____ 8. I think I am skillful in handling difficult situations.
_____ 9. I often use profanity.
_____ 10. I am a pretty cool head.
_____ 11. I sometimes get more angry than I should.
_____ 12. People say I have a hot temper.
_____ 13. I think I am mild mannered.
_____ 14. Nobody can get me to snap out.
_____ 15. I sometimes flare up over little or nothing.

A (2,3,4,6,9,11,12,15)_____ B(1,5,7,8,10,13,14)_____ T=A+(70-B)_____

Taylor, J. & Tomasic, J. (1996). Taylor's measures of dysphoria, anxiety, and self-esteem. In R.L. Jones (Ed.), *Handbook of Tests and Measurements for Black Populations, Volume 2*, 295-305. Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry.