

# *The Safety Net*

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*“Resolution Reduces Stress”*

Dear ones,

Do you make New Year’s resolutions?

I want to suggest that you make at least one.

RESOLVED: I will deal with stress better in 2008!

Some of you won’t need to make that resolution. You’re already living in Hawaii, golfing daily, spending hours doing crosswords, or puttering in your greenhouse.

But others of you LIVE in stress. Your world is like a pressure-cooker, and you are the one getting cooked. Quickly.

Stress is a major component of our society. I don’t have to tell you that. Several years ago there was a stress test being passed around that had you list changes you were facing. Everything from losing a spouse, getting fired from your job, or getting a new dog. Some of the things were good, some bad. But they all involved some degree of CHANGE and the idea was that CHANGES BRING STRESS. Virtually everyone that took the test found himself or herself in a stress-endangered area. I’m not sure whether the test had any value or not.

But I am sure about the fact that stress can have a negative impact.

On a short-term, limited basis, stress can be a wonderful thing. It helps you jump out of the way of an on-coming car, burn the midnight oil to get some project done, or jump-start you out of lethargy.

But the value of stress is when it is temporary, and motivates us to some productive accomplishment.

Stress as an on-going, long-term routine can truly be deadly.

Perhaps you’ve heard the story of a lecturer who raised a glass of water before his audience and asked, “How heavy is this glass of water?” Answers came from listeners that ranged from 8 oz. to 20 oz. The lecturer then replied, “The actual weight does not matter. What matters is how long you try to hold it. If you hold it for a minute, that’s not problem. But if you hold it for an hour, it gets to be a problem. Your arm will begin to hurt. And if you hold it for a day, you may have to call an ambulance!”

In each case, it’s the same weight. The problem is, that the longer you hold it, the heavier it becomes.

The professor then went on to say, “That’s the way it is with stress. It needs to be managed. If you carry your

burdens all the time, sooner or later you won't be able to carry on. As with the glass of water, you have to put it down for a while and rest before you hold it again. When you're refreshed, you have no difficulty picking it up again."

One of the difficulties of church leadership is that you often go through weeks, or even months at a time without getting refreshed. In most occupations, when you "take your work home with you," you end up getting overwhelmed by the burden. I wrote recently about the study that says people in Great Britain live longer than people in the United States because they relax more.

So how about a resolution in 2008 that makes you a better stress manager?

K. J. Morgan, an upper-level manager for TDI-Brooks in College Station, Texas, recently gave a list of suggestions to his employees to help them manage stress. With some humor, but all seriousness, he suggested the following ways of dealing with the burdens of life:

1. Accept that some days you're the pigeon, and some days you're the statue.
2. Always keep your words soft and sweet, just in case you have to eat them.
3. Always read stuff that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it.
4. Drive carefully. It's not only cars that can be recalled by their Maker.
5. If you can't be kind, at least have the decency to be vague.
6. If you lend someone \$20 and never see that person again, it was probably worth it.
7. It may be that your sole purpose in life is simply to serve as a warning to others.
8. Never buy a car you can't push.
9. Never put both feet in your mouth at the same time, because you won't have a leg left to stand on.
10. Nobody cares if you can't dance well. Just get up and dance.
11. Since it's the early worm that gets eaten by the bird, sleep late.
12. The second mouse gets the cheese.
13. When everything's coming your way, you're in the wrong lane.
14. Birthdays are good for you. The more you have, the longer you live.
15. You may be only one person in the world, but you may also be the world to one person.
16. Some mistakes are too much fun to only make once.
17. We could learn a lot from crayons. Some are sharp, some are pretty, and some are dull. Some have weird names, and all are different colors. But they all have to live in the same box.
18. A truly happy person is one who can enjoy the scenery on a detour.

Here at Higher Ground, most people do a better job of dealing with stress while they are here. They sleep better, they eat better, they pray more, and they take long walks. The problems haven't disappeared, but people

leave with more strength and faith in order to face them. They've learned how to pace themselves. And they've learned how to accept help.

At least an hour of daily prayer is a wonderful stress-reliever. Especially when the prayer is multi-faceted, filled with praise, thanksgiving, intercession, supplication, as well as petition. When Paul and Silas were singing at midnight in prison, I think they were singing, "Our God, He is Alive," not "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen."

Exercise is a great stress reliever also. Here, we not only take walks through the orchard, but do a series of exercises that involve yoga, deep breathing, and stretching.

We also stress meditation. Not the mystical type of sitting quietly and saying "Ohm," but the biblical kind of saying, "And in Thy word I meditate all day long." We teach centering prayer, turning loose, and chewing the cud. All biblical stuff.

We also bear one another's burdens. And thus we "fulfill the law of Christ." It's not a lying contest, where everyone has to tell a bigger one than the person before. No one is put under any pressure to "fess up." None of that here. But simply the freedom and assurance that comes by realizing that others care, others sympathize, and others have been there.

And even the "table fellowship" is special. We really do eat well. Food is home-cooked, tasteful, and enjoyed leisurely. No fast food here. You don't really know a person until you sit down and have a good meal with them.

There are other things that we do to relieve stress. Sometimes we even have a harpist play. Don't worry, it's not me. But it certainly does show you why it relieved King Saul's tensions.

Maybe what I'm saying is "Why not make a New Year's resolution to come to Higher Ground" during 2008? The door is open, and the light is on.

Love in Christ,  
Silas