

**Articles and Sermons :: Finding solitude with God by Charles Stanley**

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As summer draws to a close and vacations are behind us, thoughts of returning to everyday life may seem overwhelming. Or perhaps you never even got a break from your normal routine. But whether you had the chance to get away or not, the reality is that we can never fully escape stress; it's an unavoidable consequence of living in a fallen, sinful world. Since we'll undoubtedly encounter difficult situations at various points in our lives, we must learn how to deal with stress when it comes. Thankfully, the Lord understands our struggles and wants to help us.

At one point in my ministry, I was hospitalized three times in one year, and each time the doctors could find nothing wrong with me. I later realized that my body was simply responding to the pressure I'd placed upon it by doing more than God intended. My mistake was in thinking I should be involved in every ministry opportunity that came my way. I became so exhausted that I eventually had to take a three-month hiatus from preaching. During that time of recovery, my son and I spent some time together at the beach, and I had the opportunity to take a few hours each day to walk along the shore—just the Lord and me. In those precious times alone with God, He taught me how to trust Him in trying times.

First of all, He showed me that the solution for stress is solitude with Him. Communing with the Lord releases the grip of anxiety and tension (Ps. 16:8). The purpose of these times with God is not to study the Scriptures or to bring Him our prayer requests, but simply to be with Him. We must make a choice to voluntarily separate ourselves from others in order to connect with God. This doesn't mean we'll never struggle with stress again, but time alone with God teaches us to view our problems from His perspective and find joy in His presence (Ps. 16:11).

The practice of solitude is seen throughout the Bible. In both the Old and New Testaments, men and women who walked with God made time to be with Him. For example, after a busy day of teaching, healing, and feeding a multitude of 5,000, Jesus dismissed the crowd, sent His disciples away in a boat, and went up on a mountain by Himself to pray (Matt. 14:22-23). Seeking time alone with His Father wasn't a sporadic event in His life but a customary practice, especially after encountering high-pressure situations. We also see this same example in the apostle Paul's life. After his dramatic conversion, he headed to Arabia to spend time alone with His newly found Savior (Gal. 1:17).

The second lesson God taught me was that we must make a deliberate effort to find a place free of interruptions and diversions where we can hear the Lord's voice (Mark 6:32). What distractions keep you from focusing on the Lord? Where can you go to spend time with Him uninterrupted?

When I was young, I found a dark, quiet room in the basement of my church, which was an ideal location for me to meet with the Lord. However, I realize that finding an isolated place can be a challenge for some people. Susanna Wesley, who was the mother of 19 children—including John and Charles Wesley—didn't have the luxury of a quiet room in her home. When she wanted to be alone with God, she simply put her apron over her head. Her children soon learned that she was not available at those times. Wherever the location, the goal is to be still and quiet in order to give the Lord our undivided attention.

Third, we must realize that God longs to spend time alone with us. He created us in His image, and He wants to have a relationship with us for all eternity (Gen. 1:26). No other creature on earth has been given this privilege. Time alone with Him is the only way intimacy with our Creator will become a reality. It's in those quiet moments alone with the God of peace that all our worries, fears, and stress drain away (Rom. 15:33). If we allot unhurried time for the Lord in our busy schedules and clear our minds of all our preoccupations, we'll enjoy sweet fellowship with Him and receive His peace in our hearts.

Fourth, solitude with the Lord also prepares us for the day ahead. That's why time alone with Him should be a priority every morning (Ps. 90:14). To do this, we must first spend a short period of time reading His Word so our thoughts will be God-oriented and our hearts sensitive to His presence. If we begin each day this way, setting our minds and hearts on Him and listening for His voice, He'll guide us throughout the day and make whatever we do an opportunity for worship. This is also the time when He equips us to face our trials, heartaches, or burdens with calm confidence, instead of frantic anxiety.

Is stress pressing in on you today? If so, God wants to release you from that burden. If you come to Him, He promises

ses to provide rest for your soul (Matt. 11:28-30). As you get to know Him in those quiet times, your trust in Him will grow , and your worries will diminish. Then youâ€™™ll be able to rest in the knowledge that your heavenly Father will take care of you.

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