

LEARNING TO HANDLE STRESS

Connecting and Bonding Seminar on 9/04/2010 by **Mary Southerland**: Author of the book, *Escaping the Stress Trap, Harvest House, 2006*

C&B Recap on 9/12/2010 by

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This past weekend I was at the conference for Pastor's wives, the Connecting and Bonding Labor Day event. It was stressful. These conferences are like physical exercise, it is stressful while you are doing it but it adds more life and vigor to a person's life. That's what all of these conferences do; they add life and vigor, even though they are stressful. I always come home from a conference feeling wiped out, because...

Breakfast (6 am)

Meetings/including friendship teams

Late nights/plumbing challenges – glug glug sound in the pipes.

One of the guest speakers, Mary Southerland, spoke about stress. She gave me one of her books, "Escaping the Stress Trap." She gave me this book because among the women at the conference I was the mother of more children than any of the other women who were there. She even brought the book to me from the podium because, as she said, with 5 children I had to know what stress was.

When I looked at the title of this book, I thought, "Another book about stress." Over the years Tom and I have purchased many books about stress. Books written specifically for Pastors and the stress they experience in their profession and in their families. Books on how stress affects our emotions, our body, our spiritual life, our family, our marriage, and every

other relationship we have. Stress can be devastating; learning to handle stress is much needed, especially in today's world.

Just because my first reaction to this book was "Another book about stress," I don't want you to think that I don't appreciate this book or all the many other books on stress; I appreciate these books very much. I did begin to read it and I will read it all. But with the stress of the week-end I had a few days of minimal activity for recovery time. I have not read the whole book. But just going through the book a little bit to pick up on her focus of "**9 practical strategies to overcome overload,**" (which is the outline of her book) I knew the basic principles she would encourage her readers to do. In fact, the few days of minimal activity for recovery time that I took this week is one of the strategies to handle a period of stress.

What are the basic principles that all the books on stress have in common? I'm sure you can guess, they are; prayer, bible study, solitude (meaning time alone with God) and meditation. A few books will add fasting.

The question is, do these principles help us "overcome overload, "... overcome stress... handle stress? The answer, of course, is yes. But how do we come to that Yes! In our lives. How does this Yes! Become so much a part of our lives that we come to the place of peace and trust in God our Father in spite of our troubles which are stressful?

I found it very interesting that when I asked Mary Southerland to sign her book she signed it and added **Psalm 23** below her signature. In her presentations she commented on how she had gone into a time of deep depression and one of the books in the Bible that helped her come out of it was **Psalm 23**. Her depression lasted for two years. Her depression was so severe that she said if she got out of bed at 2 p.m. just before her kids would get home from school that was a good day.

Do you think we could learn from Mary's example? Can we take some time this next week to read, review and study this very short book, the **23rd Psalm** to find Mary's "**9 practical strategies to overcome overload,**" (which is the outline of her book). You may find more than 9 or less than 9

strategies — *the important thing is that we begin to participate in the process of embracing the strategies.* Let's read this Psalm and see what strategies you catch as we read it together:

Psalm 23

A psalm of David

- ¹ The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not be in want.
- ² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
He leads me beside quiet waters,- ³ he restores my soul.
He guides me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake.
- ⁴ Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
Your rod and your staff,
They comfort me.
- ⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
- ⁶ Surely goodness and love will follow me
All the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
Forever.

The **23 Psalm** always reminds me of the first major period of stress in my life after coming into the church. I was going through a horrible divorce and someone recommended the book ***A Shepherd Looks at the 23rd Psalm*** by Keller. I had been in a prayerful and trusting relationship with God for several years by that time, but this book so deeply anchored my heart and soul, and my mind and spirit in the reality of Jesus as my Good Shepherd that I have never forgotten the many lessons I learned about God's personal care and love for me, verse by verse in the Psalm and chapter by chapter in the book. I felt that I had met the real Jesus, the real

living dynamic Jesus and I was right. Suddenly Jesus was a living person in my life. God in the flesh had come to live with me, not only in me but with me in my every day life. He was concerned about every minute detail of my life. Jesus became altogether the Shepherd of my soul, my spirit, my mind, my body.

One of the great blessings from God in reading this book based on Psalm 23 was that God's care for me included my children. Only God knows what a great weight of worry and anxiety was lifted off my shoulders by this realization. It was not difficult to place the care and future of my children in the loving, caring hands of Jesus, my Good Shepherd. God blessed me to realize from the depths of my soul that His Shepherding was not only for me but for my children also. That's a reality for everyone, whether your married, widowed, or divorced, the care of our children belongs to the Good Shepherd.

As I looked more closely at Mary Southerland's book I was pleasantly surprised to realize that her "**9 practical strategies to overcome overload**" is based on **Psalm 23**. Each strategy is based on 9 divisions of Psalm 23, and each division is subtitled with one of the names of God. Such as strategy 3 – "Know when to Rest" based on **Psalm 23:2-3** with the name of God **Jehovah-Rapha** the Lord Who Heals as a subtitle. I am looking forward to reading and studying this entire book

I want to bring across a contrast here... The first book I read 35 years ago, ***A Shepherd Looks at the 23rd Psalm*** relieved me of a great stressful burden. But today, I can see that the stress level in the world has grown exponentially in the last 35 years. Stresses that I could not imagine 35 years ago have now come upon our civilization, our societies, our homes, our nations, and the whole world. There are so many things that accost our sensibilities in the world today that there is a great need to be able to handle stress.

To quote from her book: "Stress is powerless in the life that continually seeks God and chooses to surrender to His love and care the way the sheep surrender to the love and care of their shepherd. **Psalm 23** describes the intimate, personal, and trusting relationship between sheep and shepherd,

between child and father, and it is not only a beautiful portrait of God's complete and faithful provision, but also an arsenal of stress-busting truths and principles..."

As I said earlier all of these books on handling stress have the same basic principles, prayer, bible study, solitude (getting alone with God) and meditation, and it can include fasting. But none of these stress-busting truths and principles will work if we don't do them. Everyday Tom and I have our prayer and devotional study together, and I do treasure these times together, and although they are a nice study, prayer and fellowship time, both Tom and I need our own time with God alone. I need my own private prayer and fellowship with God in a more deeply personal, spiritual and intimate way and so does Tom. Another quote from Mary Southerland's book that I agree with is, "We come to Jesus alone. There are no group rates when it comes to knowing God. It's always one-on-one and personal. What you believe about God in the silence and stillness of your own heart is what makes the difference for you in your life journey. The heart is where all spiritual transactions are made and the transformation process begins (there). "He calls his own sheep by name" (**John 10:3**)."

Remember the book of John that we went through this past year. Some of the greatest stress-busting truths are in the book of John. When the original 23rd Psalm was written Jesus had not as yet walked this earth as a human being and Israel desperately needed to know God as their Good Shepherd. But now we have the whole Bible and the portrayal of Jesus in the book of John shows a very human man who was not only acquainted with sorrow and grief, he also knew how to handle stress. And he left us the way to handle stress and overcome stress. We need to remember Jesus' own words about himself. He says that he is The Truth, The Way, The Life, doesn't that make Jesus the greatest stress buster in our life. He says he is The Truth, **that** is a stress busting reality when we are "in him." He says he is The Way, **that** is a stress busting reality when we are "in him." He says he is the Life, **that** is a stress busting reality when we are "in him. Who you gonna call? Stress buster! In John we read:

John 16:33 I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But, take heart, I have overcome the world.

This verse has four parts to it. First part: I have told you these things: in other words, listen to what Jesus has to say. What are all the things that he told the disciples? If we know what he said to them then we can enjoy the next part of what he said here.

Next part: So that in me you may have peace. Once we know what he told the Apostles then we may have peace. But the most important part of this phrase is “that **IN ME** you may have peace.” Apart from Jesus we have no peace, he makes that very clear here, only **IN HIM** we may have peace. When we are in peace **in him** there’s not much space for stress.

Next part: In this world you will have trouble. There is no escaping the truth of this, there is trouble and stress in the world, and even though we are *not of* the world, we are still in the world and that is why we experience trouble and stress.

Next part: But, take heart, I have overcome the world. Can we believe that? Can we go to God in our time alone with him and thank him that no matter the trouble, problem or stress, Jesus knows all about it and every detail that surrounds it (which most of the time, we don’t know) and he has overcome it. We just need to leave it with him and trust that he will take care of the situation. He knows how to handle our troubles and our stress better than we do.

In closing I want to say, the best stress busting principle to live by in reality is not a principle but a person. ***To live IN Jesus Christ is the way to overcome stress.*** Listen to Jesus’ own words about himself, “I have overcome the world.” We cannot even begin to imagine how much stress there is in the world, Jesus has overcome it all. Don’t his own words about himself verify that he is the greatest stress buster in our lives personally? We can rely on the faith that Jesus has in himself and in his own words, because he cannot lie. “I have overcome the world,” he says

and in Christ Jesus we can step into the reality of those words in our own circumstances.

Jesus will always be and will always take on the role of savior in every area of our lives. We can rely on him and trust him to take on the stresses in our lives personally and the greatest stress buster who is for us.

Let's grow in prayer and bible study to **Know God** as the Shepherd of our souls and to live in his life of overcoming the world. To **Know Jesus** and trust Jesus as our living Lord.