

POWER TO COPE

Chapter 1

An Attitude of Gratitude

The medical profession has been referring to our reactions to pressure as *stress* for only the past three or four decades. However since the beginning of time, people have had to find ways to cope with stressful events, in order to survive.

Psychiatrists and psychologists, as well as other health professionals, friends and humorists have all come up with techniques for managing stress.* No one, however, wants to eliminate stress entirely, since some stressors are what makes life exciting and challenging!

An Attitude of Gratitude

A source of special interest to researchers is the difference in the way one person copes compared with how another person does. It has been found that one

characteristic frequently noted in those who handle stress well is gratefulness. Conversely, this *attitude of gratitude* is usually missing in those who buckle under pressures.

But that is not a new discovery. In the Sacred Scriptures, one of the oldest commonly accessible literary manuscripts, we read David's words. You may want to look them up yourself.

What time I am afraid I will trust in thee. In God I will praise His word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me.

Psalms 56:3, 4 (KJV*)

*Scriptures identified "KJV" are from the King James Version. All others are from the New International Version.

The New International Version says:

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not

be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?

In the verse quoted above, praise means gratitude and confidence in God. Evidently, in a frightening, stressful time when David was running for his life, he still chose to express gratitude and trust in God—in a power outside himself. When David expressed confidence in God, his reaction of fear came under control, so that he was able to deal with the situation confidently. He was not excessively anxious, nor did he pretend his problem did not exist. But he knew he had access to power above and beyond himself. He trusted God. You might say he knew God was his Powerful Friend.

Read the entire poem David was inspired to write in Psalms 56. You'll hear him voicing joyful gratitude to God again in verse 10, and verbalizing his freedom from fear, on that basis, in verse 11.

Tips for Handling Stress

1. Regulate your life as much as possible.
2. Take some creative control of your activities.
3. Exercise adequately. **Walk** outside, if possible.
4. Bathe regularly and drink plenty of water.
5. Take a long **walk**.
6. Eat nourishing food with a good supply of the B vitamins.
7. Breathe deeply—as you're **walking**.
8. Get out in the sunlight when you **walk**.
9. Don't take yourself too seriously.
10. Take time for rest and relaxation.
11. Reach out and help someone.
12. Keep life—present and future—in proper perspective.

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In the Scriptures, those who trusted God often faced stress with praise and joy.

...neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength.
Neh. 8:10 (KJV)

At other times, God told those who faced stress that His strength was available to them as their confidence was expressed quietly.

For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength...
Isa. 30:15 KJV

The New International Version reads: "...in quietness and trust is your strength."

Supernatural Power During Stress

Now, if it is true that strength from a Super-natural Power was available to human beings at the time the Scriptures were written, we wonder: Is that power available to us now, and, if so, how can we get it?

First, we need to decide whether we will believe that what is written in the Bible is inspired by God or not. It says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that all Scripture is inspired. This study guide accepts that premise.

If we accept the Scriptures as our point of reference, we then need to know if the God whom

David and other Biblical figures trusted is still alive. The apostle Paul was inspired to talk of the God who created at the beginning of time as being the Lord for whom we should be searching:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. "For in him we live and move and have our being." As some of your own poets have said, "We are his offspring."

Acts 17:24-28 N.I.V.

The God whom David and other Biblical figures trusted is still alive.

If we accept the Scriptures as truly God's word, then this Scripture quotation says that the very fact we are alive means that God Himself is alive, since our

continued life is from Him. He, our Creator, sustains us.

This God, whom we are describing, said in Malachi 3:6 that He does not change. In 2 Chronicles 19:7, we're told He is fair and doesn't treat one person differently from another. Finally, He inspired the following assurance:

The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him: He also will hear their cry and will save them.

Ps. 145:18,19 KJV

That is a loving promise of nearby help from God, available to anyone who asks or calls for it. Verse 4 of Psalm 145 talks of expressing gratitude to this God from one generation to another, which brings it down to us in the present time. Generations ago God gave promises of help in times of stress to people who asked. Evidently, since He is changeless, the principles behind those promises still apply when we ask now.

How Can I Get This Help?

But how does a person come to the point of trust and praise toward God? How can you trust someone you do not know?

As a start, you can choose to believe because He said so. In time, as you study His word and

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claim His promises for yourself, you will come to see that He is your own trustworthy God—a powerful Friend!

Then, you can admit you have a need for help above and beyond yourself. Next, ask God to help you. No memorized prayer is needed; put it in your own words, just as you would speak into a telephone to someone without seeing him. Then "listen" to Him by reading His promises from Scripture. Finally, thank Him for whatever special promise you are claiming at the moment. Thank Him that it is true, and tell Him that you accept it for yourself. Have an attitude of gratitude toward Him.

As you accept your own human limitations and admit your need for strength beyond yourself, you'll find that perhaps your greatest help in times of stress comes in knowing there is a God who loves you. You will realize that you are not alone—that His strength will see you through.

You have in your hands now a secret which has baffled many people for centuries. You have access to a power above and beyond yourself. God is speaking to you now through His promises. You will never be the same again, because you have power to cope—in a framework of praise. All you need to do is ask.

Powerful Promises from God for Times of Stress

Here are more promises from God that you can read and re-read as you get acquainted with your Powerful Friend. Read them aloud to yourself in the morning and evening.

When you are alone and fearful:

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Isaiah 41:10 (KJV)

When you are indecisive:

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.

Psalms 32:8 (KJV)

When you want a sound mind without fear:

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

II Timothy 1:7 (KJV)

When you need wisdom:

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...and it shall be given him.

James 1:5 (KJV)

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Chapter 2

Release

What about those people who cannot forgive themselves for past actions or failings? What about those who know they have brought many problems on themselves by their selfishness, thoughtlessness, explosive temper or uncontrolled words? Is there power, or are there promises from God for someone who blames himself for abandonment, rejection, or failure—at work, at school, with friends, or with children?

It really doesn't matter how much other people tell you everything is OK, does it? You're the one who has to live with yourself. You're the one who has to deal with your inner self in those quiet moments. And you need peace of mind!

What Really Matters

So what does matter? Not what another human thinks, but what God thinks and how He sees you. Because, according to Scripture, He's the One who gives you peace of mind!

Let's read about this from Scripture:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

John 14:27

The world often gives "peace" by saying something doesn't matter, or by rehashing it over

and over, or by pretending a problem doesn't exist. This is not God's way. He meets a situation head on and judges fairly, because He created everything.

This is what the Lord says, he who made the earth, the Lord who formed it and established it—the Lord is his name: "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. ... I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. ... I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins."

Jeremiah 33:2,3,6,8

God doesn't ignore the problems that destroy our peace.

So the God who created at the beginning (who does not change) says He gives peace and will cleanse anything bad from our lives. Evidently, everything of which we are guilty is actually done against the God who created us, since we belong to Him.

God did not plan to ignore our "badness", our sins, our guilt. He did not just pretend it didn't exist. Instead, He planned to remove it from us to Himself. Here's part of a prophecy of the

Messiah God spoke of through Isaiah:

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:4-6

His Punishment for Our Peace

So that is what God did with everything bad about us—every wrong thought or action. God the Father placed on His Son, Messiah the Prince, the punishment that we deserve so we could have peace and again be in touch with Him for life and strength.

Read about it again in Colossians 1:19, 20:

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

God didn't ignore the problems that destroy our peace. He took the guilt and shame upon Himself when He came to live on this earth in a human body (He-

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brews 2:14), so He could take our punishment, condemnation, separation and, finally, death.

So why do we still have terrible feelings and inner pressures? Why do we behave like we do? We can't pretend we are innocent. Yet the God the Scriptures talk about died in our place nearly 2000 years ago! Where is that peace?

Where Is It?

Is the God who died to give us peace alive now and ready to release it to us? Back to the Scriptures for the answer:

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus...equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 13:20, 21

How Do We Get It?

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the

whole world.

I John 1:9, 10; 2:1-2

Easy for Us, Not for Him

He has provided for our needs. Our response is to choose to accept. When we admit we have sin and guilt problems, when we confess our sinfulness in general and whatever specifically we are aware is wrong, we receive God's forgiveness—it's been there waiting for us all along. He clears our records. That's why He died on the cross—so He could take the guilt from us. We human beings cannot cope with it ourselves. It is like poison to every part of us.

Our Creator did this because He loved us and knew we were doomed without His help.

**God doesn't force
His help on us.
He treats us
intelligently.**

Our Choice: To Accept or Not

But God doesn't force His help on us. He treats us intelligently—and gives us freedom of choice. Either we can face life now and the judgement later—all by ourselves, or we can accept His power to cope and His covering of love. To have the record of our messed up lives covered

by the record of His perfect life seems too good to be true. But that is what God is like.

Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.

You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

Micah 7:18, 19

So, if right now you bow to God and confess your sins (whatever they are) to Him, you can thank Him that, because of Jesus, they are forgiven.

You can thank Him that Jesus took your punishment and guilt. You can thank Him that the sins have been tossed as far away as the ocean bottom—because He said so, not because you feel anything. You can thank Him for peace because that gift is yours now.

No more do you have to go over the sins and failures of your past. They are covered now because of Christ. When thoughts of them come into your mind, just thank God they are forgiven and that He remembers them no more—so you don't have to, either. You are no longer guilty. In fact, God sees you as an extremely valuable person. Your freedom from guilt was purchased by the blood of the Prince of the universe!

Your name is written in His book of life, as of the moment

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you accepted Christ's covering over you. You have become a part of His family and He is giving you peace. He said so.

It is by expressing thanks to God that we allow His gift of peace to possess us. As you read Colossians 3:15-17, note the first word "Let"—it is one of choice. God continues to give us power of choice:

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing...with gratitude in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Choose every day to accept His peace, His solution for freedom from sin and guilt. And express gratitude. His promise can be believed, no matter how you feel, because God said so. You have power to cope!

Powerful Promises of Peace from God

The Lord give strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace.

Psalm 29:11

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Isaiah 26:3

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

John 14:27

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.

John 16:33

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:7

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Chapter 3

On the Winning Side

The battle continues, doesn't it? You know you don't have to worry about the past anymore—your guilt has been taken care of by Christ. You accepted peace of mind about it, and you are practicing the habit of praise to God. There are so many things you're remembering to be thankful for, including the gift of life itself. But there are lots of aggravations. Has anything changed just because you are accepting God's promises?

Not if the Bible is just another book. But if it is God's Word to you (and you are choosing to believe this as you study and pray), then there is a power coming into your life that you've never had before, because God promises it.

Participation in the Divine Nature

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

II Peter 1:3, 4

This passage says that God is enough, that He has given us eve-

rything we need. It also promises that we will escape the corruption of the world. So why is life such a battle, filled with temptations that cause us so much stress? How does God help us?

How Does God Help Us?

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

I Corinthians 10:13

**God is enough.
He has given us
everything we
need.**

Stress-causing temptations sometimes can be translated "provings" "trials" or "tests". These are situations that confront a person as tests of character, and are used by God to strengthen us.

There are other times, however, when stress-causing temptations come to us as "enticements". Frequently in the New Testament, that meaning is used to describe any experience that comes to us to try to weaken our hold on God. But with God's power to cope available to us, these, too, can work

out for our good:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8: 28

Who or what works to try to weaken our hold on God, to entice us? In the Scriptures we find three main avenues of these types of stress-causing temptations:

One Source

The first comes from within ourselves:

...each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

James 1:14

Our old inner urges drag us into the patterns and lifestyles we thought we had left when we turned to the Bible promises and accepted Christ's death for us. Then that divine nature that God planted within, that we can "participate in", tugs at us to draw us back to God and to place our power of choice—our will—under God's direction again for peace of mind:

It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

Phillipians 2:13

So then, just when it seems we'll never escape the old ways, God's love draws us back to a

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path of strength and power.

Now, that's a struggle! That's stress! Will we ever have the strength to resist those old urges? Yes! As we choose to take time to ask for God's control and keep our eyes on Christ, we'll find this powerful promise true:

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

II Corinthians 12:8

Our Solution

How do you keep from giving in? Just like you do anything else in this stressful battle—you ask for help, because Jesus says:

Apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

A Second Source

Another source of our stress-causing enticements is right from *the world around us*.

As Solomon warns:

My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.

Proverbs 1:10

If you choose God's control, listen to His promises, and accept participation in the divine nature, then you'll find His help always the strongest force:

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

John 15:7

Your situation, no matter how difficult, is not too complicated for our God.

Our Solution

What is impossible with men is possible with God.

Luke 18:27

With God working in and through us, we'll find that, more and more, we aren't giving in to the pressures put on us by those around us. The battle is heavy, but the strength we receive from God will clearly amaze us more and more each day.

**Your situation,
no matter how
difficult, is not
too complicated
for our God.**

A Third Source

There is one other basic source of all our stress-causing enticements: it's a person. That's right. The same supernatural being who hated and tempted Christ attacks us. Mark 1:13 recounts a time when Jesus was in a desert area, and for nearly six weeks he was "being tempted by Satan."

Another time we are warned:

Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.

Revelation 12:12

For this third source of enticement, too, we go to God for help. He is our defense against an enemy battling for the control of our minds and bodies. We can trust God!

Our Solution

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

I Peter 5:7, 8

Christ's enemy is our enemy, and the only way to be truly self-controlled is to ask God for freedom from the enemy's power. Christ calls Himself the "way and the truth and the life." (John 14:6) He also said:

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

John 8:31, 32

The Real Battle

It is obvious that we need to be alert. But the real struggle is between two supernatural forces: God's government (His authority to rule as Creator of the universe), and a being who had been

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a leader among the angels. This being, Lucifer (later called Satan), rebelled because he could not be equal with God. Let's read a few passages about him:

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!

For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God ... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.

Isaiah 14:12-14 (KJV)

Notice how his thoughts were all on himself ("I...I...I..."). Here is another account:

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he [Satan] was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

Revelation 12:7-11 lies." John 8:44

And "the Lamb" is what John called Jesus. Christ's death on the cross condemned Satan and showed the universe that if Satan were to rule, it would be a reign of cruelty and death. God in Christ showed that while His government and His law demanded obedience, His love was in both. He knows what is best, and He loves people so much that He gave us a law of love, then died in our behalf when we chose to disobey.

**We have power
over every
temptation,
enticement and
aggravation.**

On earth, mankind had joined the devil in his rebellion against their Creator. Satan, in so many words, had told Eve that God's word could not be trusted:

"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'? ... You will not surely die ... For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God ..."

Genesis 3:1-4

But Satan himself, according to Jesus, is "a liar and the father of

He attacks God's commands, His authority as Creator, His government of fairness. And Satan lies to us. He either tells us we are in a hopeless condition, or that it doesn't matter. He tells us we don't really want to follow God anyway. He tells us that God can be depended on only to a point, and that we really have to do things on our own. He wants us to be separated from Christ, because he knows that only then are we defeated. Sometimes he attempts to allure us through pleasurable sensations, through those dearest to us, through all types of pressure-filled experiences, to destroy our confidence in God.

We Have Power Over Satan

Why does Satan attack us? Because we have chosen to accept God's rule, His promises, the life that Christ offers in place of eternal death. He knows we have power over him—over every temptation, enticement and aggravation, as we walk close to Christ. He knows God has given us power to cope with supernatural forces through the blood of Jesus. Christ's death spelled Satan's defeat and our victory.

It is only in the mighty power and promises of Christ that we are free, because Christ is truth!

Jesus answered, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

John 14:6

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The truth will set you free.

John 8:32

If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed.

John 8:36

So, we do have power to cope, because in Christ we are freed from every controlling problem and every battle that would overwhelm us.

With Christ

We have power to cope with the battle going on all around us, in difficult situations such as these:

- the loss of someone we love
- the consuming power of drugs, alcohol, or any other destructive habit
- the discouragement in sickness and pain
- the loss of a job
- the stress of any unexpected occurrence.

First to last, Christ invites us:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

The choice is ours: To be freed through the love of Christ by choosing to come under God's authority—or to be in rebellion against the Creator, and go to the side of His enemy, who himself is already defeated. Satan delights in defeating us, because in this way he hurts Christ who

loves us. It is a daily battle. The question is "How do I choose?"

Powerful Promises for Our Defense

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

I Peter 5:7

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

I Corinthians 10:13

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

Revelation 12:11

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

Psalms 34:7

He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation.

Psalms 91:15,16

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

Ephesians 6:10,11

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Chapter 4 **Making It Through**

We're still living in a world of stress. Let us hope that we're able to take long walks each day while deliberately concentrating on thoughts of thankfulness. As we do this, we sense a power beyond ourselves strengthening us.

We know there is a supernatural battle going on for the control of our minds, but again we are deliberately choosing to let our God, who released us from the guilt of the past, drive back the satanic forces.

But, knowing all this for ourselves, how do we relate to the injustices going on around us? The stress comes pretty close when people at home, at work, or at school seem oblivious to our needs; when they seem to be unaware that their lives are causing nearly unbearable pressure on us. They may even be deliberately causing our stress!

Can God give us enough power through His promises to help us deal with situations that seem so unfair, that stir up all sorts of feelings of resentment and retaliation? Shouldn't there be some way to "get even"? And while we dwell on these thoughts, there goes our peace of mind! How do we get it back again?

We Need Love

First, it is perfectly natural to want appreciation and love. God placed that need within us. He,

as the highest authority in the universe, looks at us right now and sees that need. He sees us as individuals—extremely valuable, lovable, and with tremendous potential for good. He Himself is prepared to fill that need with His love, and there is nothing that can separate us from this.

**God will not allow
evil and injustice
to continue
forever.**

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:35, 37-39

Second, God is in charge of the universe. Nothing happens of which He is unaware. So come these questions: If He is so powerful, why does He allow injustice to go on? Where is fairness? When will people get what they really deserve? It's stressful just thinking about it. Here is His

answer:

No Need to Fret

Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away....Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret—it leads only to evil....But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace....But all sinners will be destroyed....The salvation of the righteous comes from the Lord; he is their stronghold in time of trouble.

Psalm 37:1, 2, 7, 8, 11, 38, 39

Third, God will not allow evil and injustice to continue forever. God is sovereign. People will bring punishment upon themselves in God's own timetable. He would prefer that everyone accept His mercy, but He will not force that choice.

We see evidence that His justice is blended with love and mercy: Look at the way He forgave you! Remember when you bowed before Him and let Him cover the record of your own "badness"—your guilt—with the covering of Christ's life and death on the cross? In comparison to His death, how relatively easy it was for you to confess the sins and mistakes of your past and thank Him for freedom from that guilt. His justice de-

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manded the death penalty because you had broken His law of life. But in His mercy, He took the punishment in your place. When you realized this and accepted it, His forgiveness flowed over you, and you received His peace.

But other people are continually causing problems that affect you or those you love. You're not finding the capacity to forgive them or to deal with it, so peace of mind always seems elusive.

You Can Return

God has power for you to cope with your reactions to those around you. He knows you don't want those resentful feelings; they poison the spirit of thankfulness. So He invites you to do just what you did with your other problems: Come to Him as often as you need to for release, asking Him to give you forgiveness, strength and a right spirit.

David expressed his need this way:

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Psalm 51:10-12

God answered his prayer, as He will answer ours—as often as we return to Him. (See 1 John 1:8, 9.) Daily, maybe hourly,

invite God's Spirit to possess your mind, to give you Christ's forgiveness toward other people who are causing you stress. Only His Spirit in you can keep you from fretting over the injustices of others. His Spirit will give you *power to forgive those who don't ask or deserve your forgiveness*, because that is how God has loved and forgiven you.

**God has power
for you to cope
with your
reactions to those
around you.**

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:6-8

Free to Forgive

God loves and forgives us even when we don't love Him, and His Spirit in us frees us to give that same love and forgiveness to the mean and the unlovable around us. Only God can give the capacity to respond this way in a deeply stressful situation, even

the one you may be in right now. God is in charge of the universe. The execution of justice is in His hands. He knows the peace we will find when we realize that it is not up to us to "get even" or administer punishment. He knows the joy to be found in appreciating the good qualities even in those who may at times be cruel. He not only loved and died for us, but He sent us His Holy Spirit so we could know this and cope with the world we live in now. Otherwise, the situation would be impossible and hopeless.

Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Romans 5:3-5

The Key

Here is the key: The power of the Holy Spirit causes us to love others as God has loved us; to suffer, knowing that good will come from it in some way, because God is in control. The Holy Spirit draws our minds to think of Jesus and His tremendous love for us; then we are able to trust Him:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him....

Romans 8:28

Only those who have accepted

POWER TO COPE

forgiveness themselves are truly able to see that they are free by God's Spirit to forgive others. By the transforming power of God's Spirit a person is free to respect and appreciate the good in those who are causing stress while not in any way condoning the "bad" they do.

At the same time, the Bible tells us that people who resist God's love are cutting themselves off from life and bringing on their own eventual punishment. Rather than wanting to hurry up their punishment, we will feel sorry for their spiritual blindness because of God's power working in us. God will use us to help them be drawn to Him. Can you imagine that happening? God can. He sees in us great potential as instruments of blessing to other people.

Power to Change

God's power to cope can actually change our very nature:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him....He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.

2 Peter 1:3, 4

As we unite with God and see His love meeting our own needs, we will be more aware of the needs of others.

Instead of being under the stress of trying to punish others, which is not our job, we are free

to share God's power which relieves that stress. We can share the assurance that God is in control, and that no matter what the circumstance is, He can bring good from it when we allow His Spirit to rule our lives. As we do this, we will find that our own capacity to cope increases.

The Apostle Paul had a very stressful battle with a physical problem and shared these thoughts, which God gave him:

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:8-10

**God's power
to cope can
actually change
our very nature.**

When Strength Is Released

When we realize that we ourselves have no power to cope, we are much more inclined to ask

for help, and it is then that God is able to release His help to us. Our acknowledgement that we are weak is an opening for God to give us His strength.

Paul chose God's strength, and we too have a choice to make. We can try to handle life's problems by ourselves, or we can accept the authority of a sovereign God who wants us to call Him Father, who wants to give us the gift of power to cope via His Holy Spirit. Our choice is to ask for it and thank Him for it:

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

Luke 11:13

No Disgrace to Ask

Those who would cope are in continual need of a power outside of, and beyond themselves. That's us. When we choose to yield to the complete control of the Holy Spirit, we will give our best affections to God and will be rewarded with more than enough enlightenment, strength and power.

Enough to cope.

Enough to share.

The choice is ours to make.

How do you choose?

Powerful Promises for a Free Spirit

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him.

Romans 8:28

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22, 23

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

2 Corinthians 12:9

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you.

Deuteronomy 33:27

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

Psalms 51:12, 13 (KJV)

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

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