



Overcoming STRESS Begins with Surrender to God

by Dr. Arlene Kaiser

“I want to quit teaching!” Marci said. “I’ve made a mistake, a terrible mistake. I can’t do this. I am just not teacher material.” I quietly listened as Marci poured out her heart filled with frustration, tension and strain.

To further distort her perception of teaching, she had a raging cold and parent conferences were scheduled for the following week. *Such a gifted teacher*, I thought. *What a loss to the teaching profession it would be if Marci follows through and resigns.* She looked at me while wadding up a bunch of tissue paper to dab at her wet cheeks. “What am I going to do?” she whimpered.

Up to this point I had listened intently. I reflected on my twenty-five years of service in public education. I quickly said a prayer, “Lord give me the words to share with this hurting soul.”

“Marci”, I said, “I know how you feel. As a teacher and administrator I seriously considered leaving public education. The first time was the beginning of my career and ten years later when I was overwhelmed with a family crisis. You are not alone in your struggle.”

Perhaps you are in a struggle just like Marci. Your reasons may be: a difficult class, a school that wasn’t your first choice, the overload of work or the long hours needed to just to keep one step ahead of your class. I have found that the reasons are not important. However, the response to stress is the key. By implementing the following tips, your perception can change into positive action.

S Surrender your circumstances to God.

Early in my career, I was assigned the worst sixth grade class in the district. Every morning I dreaded going to school. Each day I was the last one to leave the school. I graded papers far into the night. There was no joy, no connection with the students or staff. I wanted to quit; however, there were promises of great opportunities in the future if I proved myself to be a competent teacher. I felt trapped. I was jealous of the veteran teachers who seemed to coast through each day. At lunch, their laughter carried through the dark hallway while I sat at my desk alone and discouraged. I held a grudge against God.

One night my perspective radically changed. I slammed the front door to my apartment, sick at heart because of another miserable day. I slumped to the floor and began to sob. In spite of my rage, frustration, and stress, a verse came to my mind. I Thessalonians 5:16-16, “Always be joyful. Keep on praying. No matter what happens, always be thankful, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (NLT)

I looked at the stairs leading up to the second level. As an exercise of obedience I took a deep breath and stepped onto the first of 14 steps. I said aloud with gritted teeth. "Lord God, thank you for this teaching assignment and I will stay until June if you want me to." As I went up to the next step I repeated the phrase. Of course, I didn't mean the words but I was being obedient. I kept going up and down the stairs saying the phrase. Finally exhausted, my will was shattered like a plate glass window. I said the phrase and I meant it. My words and feelings were congruent. When I surrendered to God, the stress had been lifted. I completed the five-month assignment. During the rest of my career I never repeated such a stressful teaching experience.

T Trust: Trust your heavenly Father in your circumstances. If you are a child of God through your commitment to Jesus Christ nothing happens to you without His permission. Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose." (KJV) The Lord promises to walk with you each day and guide you in every area of your life. Keep your connection alive with God through prayer, meditation and Bible study. Claim those verses when the going gets tough.

R Rest: How can you give your best to your students if you are not getting enough rest? It is so easy to push yourself beyond your limits, resulting in havoc on your body and mind. Matthew 11:28 reminds us, "Then Jesus said, 'Come to me, all who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.' " (NLT) When I didn't get enough rest my students would tell me I was crabby. They were right! My efficiency in teaching was diminished. Be kind to yourself and get enough rest.

E Exercise & Eat healthy. How is your diet? Stressed teachers often live on fast food. Medical research constantly reminds us of the importance of healthy eating and the value of exercise. Exercise even wards off depression. My doctor once stated that sugar and white flour are breeding grounds for bacteria. My own observation showed that ten days after the students participated in Halloween the absenteeism due to illness increased. Could there be a connection?

S Speak with someone who encourages you. It still surprises me that when I share my burdens through talking with a trusted person, I feel the load lightened. Galatians 6:2, "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ." (NAS) If you are willing, God will guide you to someone who will listen and needs your ear, as well. One of my friends often says, "Call me. You don't have to hurt alone."

S Spend some time in play. Do you remember playing as a child? Remember getting together with your friends and planning something fun? As a movie buff I began "The Movie Club" at my school. Many of my colleagues enjoyed movies but rarely took time to see the latest releases. Twice a month, on Wednesdays, a group of us left school at the end of the day and saw a movie. Sometimes we shared a light meal afterwards. We were always energized from that experience. The Movie Club was just the start of sharing many activities: picnics at the park, a Christmas concert, horseback riding on the beach, dinner at an elegant restaurant and even a weekend in the mountains. It only took one person to get the activities started. You might be just the person. Start small in your plans to play.

S.T.R.E.S.S. is all about perception. God will relieve the tension and anxiety if you will turn over the reins of your life to Him and thank Him in everything. And what happened to Marci? She just completed her fourth year of teaching. She's a natural!

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