

## STRESSED OUT!

Since 1992 April has been Stress Awareness Month. Sponsored by the Health Resource Network, Stress Awareness Month is a nationwide effort to educate people about the dangers of stress along with effective coping techniques. Stress affects everyone from time to time. While not all stress is bad, long-term stress can hurt one's health. Over time constant strain on your body from chronic, routine stress can contribute to health problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and mental health conditions.

### Not All Fun and Games

Classic movies about teenagers like *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and *Grease* portray adolescent life as carefree and fun. However, young people today lead lives that are terribly demanding and stressful. Academic expectations are greater than ever, resulting in hours of homework and studying each night. Youth sports foster a competitive environment that results in multiple practices each week in an effort to win instead of simply having fun while playing a game. Daily schedules are packed full of activities and events, leaving teenagers feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. In a recent study conducted by the American Psychological Association, adolescents reported a higher stress level than adults during the school year. With unhealthy actions related to stress showing early in people's lives, there is significant concern for the livelihood of young people today (see [www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-children.aspx](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-children.aspx)).

### Journeying with Teens

As adults who serve and care about teenagers, it is our role to walk with them through this stressful journey called life. It is important for us to listen carefully to the conversations we have with adolescents, particularly for signs of overload. We can talk with both parents and their children about setting healthy limits so schedules do not become a burden. We also need to be aware of our personal schedules so that we model a balanced life for those we serve. In a culture that is so focused on "doing," our responsibility is to help teens focus on simply "being" who God has created them to be.



## TIP FOR THIS ISSUE

Traumatic stress can be brought about by a sudden negative change such as divorce, illness, or financial hardship within a family. While most teenagers find internal or external resources to cope, some adolescents do not know how to handle such stress, leading to depression and suicide attempts. Signs of teenage depression include being unmotivated, withdrawal from social settings, excessive sleep or fatigue, and complaints of pain (headaches, stomachaches, and so on). If a young person you serve shows any of these signs, talk with his or her parents or caregiver.

## HOW TO DE-STRESS WHEN YOU'RE IN DISTRESS

**Question of the Day:** What causes stress in your everyday life?

**Purpose:** To encourage teens to cast their cares on God.

**Cultural Connection:** Stress Awareness Month

**Topic:** Stress Management

### POWER CORRUPTS

**2 Chronicles 33:1-13**

*During his distress, Manasseh made peace with the LORD his God, truly submitting himself to the God of his ancestors.  
—2 Chronicles 33:12*

#### **Commentary:**

Manasseh became king at the age of twelve, a rather young age to be ruling the land of Judah. As many teenagers do, Manasseh turned away from the faith of his ancestors and engaged in corrupt practices. He defiled Solomon's temple with idols and worshiped pagan gods, even sacrificing his children to these gods. His actions caused God to become angry, punishing Manasseh and his people with conquest and exile by the Assyrians.

All this hardship eventually brought the king to his knees in prayer, asking God for forgiveness. Despite the horrible acts of his past, God forgave Manasseh and brought him back to Jerusalem to restore the temple. If God can forgive Manasseh, he can certainly forgive anyone. Take heart! No one is beyond the reach of God's forgiveness.

#### **Questions to think about:**

- ▶ When did God first become real in your life? In what tangible ways did your life change?
- ▶ Can you recall a time when you faced great trouble and called out to God? How did God come to your rescue?
- ▶ Thinking back on this past week, are there sins for which you need to ask forgiveness?

### LET GOD LIGHTEN YOUR LOAD

**Psalm 55**

*Cast your burden on the LORD—he will support you! God will never let the righteous be shaken! —Psalm 55:22*

#### **Commentary:**

The Book of Psalms showcases a variety of emotional responses to the events of everyday life. While many are full of praise and exaltation, there are also numerous psalms of lament, such as Psalm 55. This psalm is a prayer of deliverance from the assault of an adversary. The writer seems to be reacting to the distress that comes from experiencing betrayal by a close friend. While insults are expected from an enemy, the psalmist is confronted by a fellow Israelite considered to be a companion.

At the end of the psalm, the agony that has overwhelmed the writer is resolved into assured reliance on God. God wants us to cast our cares on God, but frequently we continue to bear them ourselves. Trust in God and allow God to sustain you through the joys and sorrows of this world.

#### **Questions to think about:**

- ▶ When faced with difficult circumstances, do you first turn to God or to someone/something else?
- ▶ If you had "wings like a dove" (verse 6), where would you fly away for rest?
- ▶ Who is someone you know who needs a reminder to cast his or her cares on God?

# TEACHER BIBLE PREP

## DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

### Philippians 4:4-9

*Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks. —Philippians 4:6*

#### Commentary:

Imagine never feeling “anxious about anything.” It seems almost impossible, doesn't it? There are so many areas of our lives that cause us to worry. We worry about family members and friends who are ill or who seem to be “going down the wrong path.” We agonize over stressors at work that affect our productivity and cause us to fear losing our jobs. We fret about the future because we are uncertain what the next day, month, and year has in store. Paul counsels us to turn our worries into prayers. If we want to worry less, we should pray more.

#### Questions to think about:

- ▶ What happened during the past week that gives you reason to rejoice and give thanks?
- ▶ How do your thoughts affect your feelings? How do your thoughts affect your relationship with God?
- ▶ What worry do you need to give over to the Lord once and for all? Who can join you in prayer to experience the peace of God guarding your heart and mind?



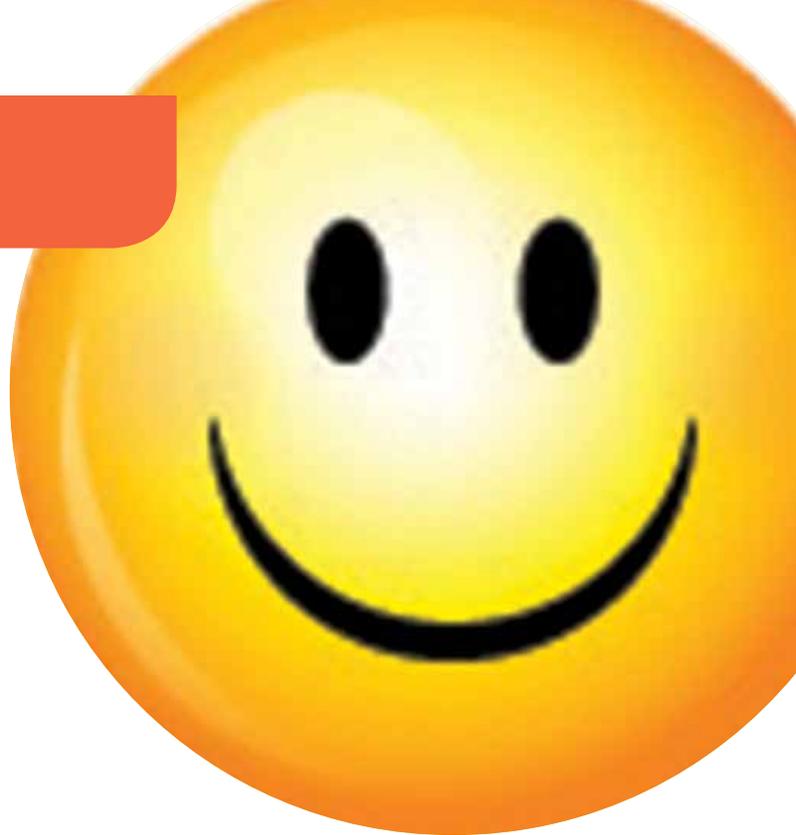
## DEVOTION: PEACE OF MIND

Research shows that the Millennial generation, today's young adults, are the most stressed generation to date. However, stress is not a new problem. Anxiety dates all the way back to biblical times.

Consider the disciples. They left the comforts of their homes and jobs to follow Jesus. When Jesus told the disciples that he would soon leave them, surely their stress levels ran high.

Jesus brought his friends assurance through the words written in John 14:15-31. As you read this passage, imagine that you are one of the Twelve, hearing these words for the first time.

Jesus promised that after he left, the Counselor—the Holy Spirit—would come to care for and direct the disciples. The Holy Spirit still dwells within us today, directing our paths and bringing us peace. Unlike worldly peace, which is commonly described as the absence of conflict, Christ's peace is a confident assurance in



any situation. When your life is full of stress, allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with God's peace that passes all understanding.

“The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you. Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid.” —John 14:26-27

**NEXT WEEK:** It seems like every time we turn around another school semester is ending, bringing with it the dreaded final exams and projects! Next week in LINC we'll talk about how we can find inspiration in the challenges we face.

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**Writer:** Tiffany Manning

**Editor:** Kevin Alton

**Lead Editor:** Jack Radcliffe

**Production Editor:** Pam Shepherd

**Template Designer:** Micah Kandros

**LINC**  
LIVING IN CHRIST  
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**Getting Ready:** You will need copies of Youth Page 6, pens or pencils, Bibles, 6 metal teaspoons, 3 glasses (about 4 inches tall), timer or clock, colored pencils or markers, and blank white paper.

## OPEN

### Flippin' Out (10 minutes)

Begin with a “Minute to Win It” challenge. To see a video of this challenge, search “spoon frog” on YouTube. Place three glasses in a row in the center of a table. In front of each glass, place two spoons. The rounded end of one spoon should be toward the edge of the table, and the rounded end of the second spoon should be resting above the handle of the first spoon. To complete this challenge, allow one minute for participants to launch three spoons into three glasses using spoons as catapults, hitting the rounded end of the spoon with their hand to launch the second spoon into the air and into the glass.

After teens have attempted this task, ask and talk about the following questions:

- ▶ What was challenging about this activity?
- ▶ During this game, did you feel stressed? Why or why not?
- ▶ What causes teenagers stress in their everyday lives?

Say: “April is Stress Awareness Month. Today we’ll talk about how people in the Bible managed stressful situations and the advice Scripture provides for managing stress in our lives today.”

## EXPLORE

### Talk Topic 1: I Just Can’t Wait to Be King! (15 minutes)

#### Middle School Option

Place colored pencils or markers in a central location and hand out copies of Youth Page 6. Ask teens to use the backs

of this page for this activity. Ask, “If you had a memorial dedicated to you, what sort of structure would you want it to be?” Explain that it could be a statue, a public building, or a space (such as a park). Ask teens to draw pictures of their individual choices. After about five minutes, invite volunteers to show their pictures and tell why they chose that particular type of memorial.

Say: “King Manasseh built many altars as monuments. However, these monuments were tributes to false gods, so you can imagine this made God angry.” Call on a volunteer to read aloud 2 Chronicles 33:1-13, then lead a conversation around the following questions:

- ▶ What did Manasseh do that made God angry?
- ▶ What did Manasseh do “in his distress” (verse 12)?
- ▶ What do you do when you feel stressed?

#### High School Option

Ask, “If you were president of the United States for a day, what would you do?” After a time of sharing responses, say: “We’re going to read about a young man named Manasseh who was twelve years old when he became king of Judah. Let’s take a look at the impact he had on the nation during his reign.” Call on a volunteer, or several, to read aloud 2 Chronicles 33:1-13. Lead a discussion based on the following questions:

- ▶ At the beginning of his reign, what kind of king was Manasseh?
- ▶ What finally caused Manasseh to change his ways?
- ▶ How does Manasseh’s response to a stressful situation compare to how you respond to stress?

#### BONUS SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

Say: “Many people believe that all stress is bad. However, there is such a thing as ‘good stress.’ Good stress is when we feel excited about something like riding a roller coaster or going on a first date. What, do you think, are some other examples of good stress?” After a few responses, explain how even good stress can be unhealthy when you have too much.

Read aloud Luke 5:12-16, or ask a student to do so. Ask the following questions:

- ▶ What types of activities filled Jesus’ daily schedule?
- ▶ How did these pursuits affect his reputation?
- ▶ What did Jesus find time to do, despite all the “good stress” in his life?
- ▶ Does your schedule allow time for you to be yourself and relax? If not, what changes do you need to make to include time for rest?





## Talk Topic 2: Listen to Me! (15 minutes)

### Middle School Option

Ask teens to pair up (if there's an odd number, call in an adult). Ask the pairs to spread out and sit back to back. Ask one member of each pair to look at his or her picture of the memorial drawn earlier (without showing to the other partner); give the other partner a blank piece of paper and a pen or pencil. The student holding the picture must tell his or her partner how to draw the picture—using no gestures, just words.

When most pairs are finished, allow everyone to compare pictures, then reconvene as a large group and talk about the following questions:

- ▶ Which role seemed easier in this activity: giving directions or listening to directions?
- ▶ What made listening difficult during this activity?
- ▶ When you pray, do you ever wonder if God is truly listening? Why or why not?

Say: “God always hears our prayers, even if God doesn't answer right away. In the prayer we will read, David is facing tough circumstances. He cries out to God, hoping that God is listening and willing to respond.” Read Psalm 55 responsively, inviting boys to read the odd-numbered verses and girls to read the even-numbered verses. Then, lead a discussion around the following questions:

- ▶ When you are faced with a conflict, do you usually face it head on or “run so far away” (verse 7) like David? Why?
- ▶ Do you pray when you feel overwhelmed? Why or why not?
- ▶ How does trusting God affect the impact of stress on you?

### High School Option

Invite teens to talk about what currently causes stress in their lives. Assure them God is always ready to hear their open and honest prayers when they feel overwhelmed. Read Psalm 55 responsively, inviting boys to read the odd-numbered verses and girls to read the even-numbered verses.

After the Scripture reading, ask and lead a conversation around the following questions:

- ▶ What is causing strife in David's relationship with his friend?
- ▶ Is it OK to pray for God to hurt other people? Why or why not?
- ▶ How do you tend to respond to stress?
- ▶ How has prayer helped you in times of trouble?

## Talk Topic 3: Got Boundaries? (15 minutes)

### Combined Middle School and High School Option

Ask, “What is the best thing that has happened to you this week?” After a time of sharing, say: “Paul reminds us in his letter to the Philippians that it is important for us to take time to rejoice in our blessings, even when we are feeling stressed.” Call on a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 4:4-9.

Explain that one way we can be less anxious in our everyday lives is by setting healthy boundaries regarding our time. Hand out copies of Youth Page 6 to those who need them and provide colored pencils. Point out the pie chart and ask teens to complete the chart with their daily activities, indicating how many hours they spend doing each activity by shading and labeling pieces of the circle according to the instructions.

When most everyone is finished, explain that doctors recommend teenagers spend 8 to 10 hours per day sleeping and 1 hour per day exercising. Emphasize there are also many benefits to downtime, allowing the brain time to refresh and improve memory capacity. Ask: “Based on these facts, when you look at your daily schedule, is it healthy? Are you getting enough sleep and exercise? Do you have any downtime?”

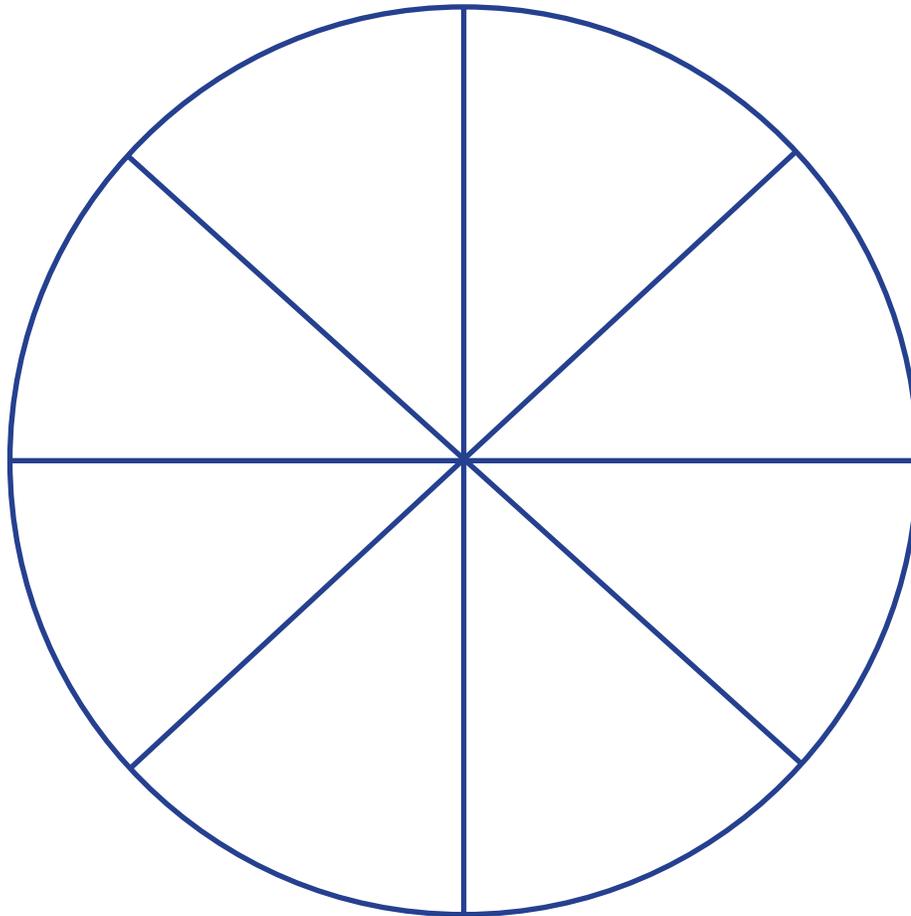
Invite teens to think about an activity in which they would like to participate that would help them live a healthier life, then determine what boundaries they need to establish to make that possible. Prompt students to think about the first step they need to take to accomplish this goal.

### TAKE AWAY

Play Tenth Avenue North's song “Worn” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zuIKcYItKIA>). Remind teens that when we feel worn out and overwhelmed, we can call on God to bring us rest.

# WORKING IT OUT

## TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR TIME



Most teenagers feel stressed by their busy schedules. Complete the following in order to help you live a more healthy life and feel less stressed.

**1.** On the pie chart indicate how your time is spent on a typical school day. **Each section represents 3 hours.** For example, if you spend 8 hours at school, shade 2 sections (6 hours) and 2/3 of another (2 hours) in the same color and label "school." Add additional line divisions and labels as needed in different colors.

**2.** Look at your finished pie chart and select one activity you want to spend more time doing (sleep, exercise, leisure, and so on) in order to feel less stressed.

**3.** Now, decide the activities to which you will need to say "no," so that you have more free time.

**4.** Finally, identify your first step toward making this goal a reality (for example, talking with your family about your schedule, limiting your screen time, or downloading a fitness app).

- ⓐ I'd like to find more time for \_\_\_\_\_
- ⓑ So, I need to spend less time \_\_\_\_\_
- ⓒ The first step to reaching my goal is \_\_\_\_\_



### In the Bible: Readings for the Week

**MONDAY:** Read John 14:23-27.

What is troubling your heart today that you need to give over to God?

**TUESDAY:** Read Psalm 118:1-8.

In whom do you place more trust: God or people?

**WEDNESDAY:** Read Matthew 11:25-30.

When can you find time in your schedule this week to rest during the day?

**THURSDAY:** Read Luke 12:22-31.

How would your life be different if you no longer worried?

**FRIDAY:** Read Isaiah 33:2-6.

Pray for someone you know who is in a time of distress and in need of prayer.

**SATURDAY:** Read Jonah 2:1-10.

When have you felt like Jonah? How did God bring you "out of the pit"?

### Inherit the Mirth



### WHAT'S TRENDING?

What spikes your stress levels? Tweet or post your response with the hashtag #stressedout on Twitter to @YMPartners or on facebook.com/youthministrypartners