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## Stress

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## Stress

For many of us, stress is the opposite of rest, peace, calm, or contentment. We do not enjoy being "stressed out. But some stress is necessary, even for our physical well being, as we have learned from those who became weightless while in space: without stress, our bodies lose bone density and muscle tone. Our minds also need to work with new problems, or we lose the capacity to think clearly. Some stress is beneficial to maintaining our memories, minds, bodies, and spirits.

We grow in almost every way when we accept challenges, whether they come to us from without, or we set them up for ourselves; whether we are asked to take on a leadership position, or we begin a program of regular exercise. The stress is real, and perhaps unpleasant in some aspects. Yet, like steel that has been subjected to both heat and cold, we gain much from our experiences.

Relationships are important to us, but they always require some stretching to accommodate the differences between one person and another. The more we know someone, and grow to love and respect him or her, the more we make changes in our thinking and in our behavior. Every friend and each family member is at times an occasion for stress, but that does not make us worse as a person. We make choices about our relationships based on many factors, especially the quality of our love, not just the degree of stressful feelings that might sometimes occur.

We might think of our experiences of stress as a form of suffering, but not all suffering is destructive. What are the consequences of the stresses we endure, of the challenges we face? If we decide to make changes in our lives in order to deal with the stress, we grow. If we refuse, and spend our energy blaming others, we suffer loss, and the stress might yet remain.

Reflection on past experiences is very useful to us in handling present stress. We can look back and see examples of challenges that were significant at the time, but are no longer so, because we successfully made adaptations and changes as well as at times standing firm. We value highly the growth that resulted from some of the trials that we passed. Much of what we have previously negotiated equips us to make appropriate decisions in our present circumstances.

Whenever we become aware of stress in our lives, we have an opportunity to meet God much more realistically than merely in our thoughts and considerations. We are in our most spiritual mode when we are deciding whether to go forward or to run away. God is present in every set of circumstances, ready to co-create with us a resolution that matches perfectly with who we are and who we can become, never forcing, but always supporting us in our deepest desire to choose the better option of what is available to us.

Not all stress is good for us, nor can we cope with any and all challenges that are either possible or proposed to us. Most of us have been faced with difficulties so severe that we could not imagine getting through them, but here we are. We have also endured the stress of small and large expectations and demands made on us by others. Some of the best decisions we have made about sources of stress have been to say "no:" not to accept a challenge, rule, or requirement that we judge inappropriate for us at the time. The same God who enables us to pass through many difficulties also enables us to sense when it is not our turn to step up, but rather to step back – and to do so with the familiar interior knowledge that recognizes the distinction between right and wrong.

Since we cannot live without stress, we continue to learn how to live with it.