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*Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad. Proverbs 12:25 NKJV*Everywhere we look we can find stress producers. Finances, relationships, politics, health issues can definitely generate stress in our lives. We know it is not "healthy" to live with chronic stress because God did not intend us to live that way. Lately, as I have been praying for myself and others about anxiety, I realize more of Satan's devious plan is at work.First, his goal is to get our eyes off the Lord and onto ourselves. When we "feel" anxious, our natural response is to turn inward. We become self focused rather than others or God focused. When that happens, our faith level drops and there is often a struggle to get out of our heads and into His thoughts. Then Satan employs his next level of strategy, hopelessness.Hopelessness can begin subtly. Remember, Satan is here to steal, kill, and destroy. So he tries to steal your hope, making you feel smaller than you are. Could you tell me why you should even pray, because....(fill in your own blanks). Some of those blanks may get filled in with you not being worthy enough for God to answer, you are a disappointment to God, or even you don't have enough faith to believe for that prayer to be answered. So he subtly steers us away from even beginning to pray! Have you ever had Hebrews 11:6 thrown back at you when you tried to pray? *But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.* Condemning thoughts show up, just about the time you start to pray: "you don't really believe he is going to answer your prayer because you haven't been diligently seeking him, have you???" His goal is to deter you from coming to the Lord you love. This is condemnation, my friends, not something our God does. A condemned man has no hope, but that is not us! Our sins have been forgiven and we have been set free.Once your focus is distracted, he moves on to the size of your problem. He works to diminish the power and authority of our God, and magnifies the magnitude of the PROBLEM. As the problem gets bigger, your stress mounts--which again, clouds our vision of our loving Savior. We start to feel even worse and begin to look at how to get away from those stressful feelings.This is Satan's really sneaky attack. He suggests your right for relief. So instead of praying to the God who can change things, he tempts you with ways of escape. "Remember that pint of ice cream in the fridge? Go ahead, it's ok. Or just turn on the TV and binge watch that show you like." Now, neither of these things are wrong in themselves, but if they interrupt you from praying to peace, then you have been hoodwinked. He stole from you the opportunity to receive God's true peace.Satan then attempts to draw us into outright deadlier distractions. Alcohol, drugs and porn are powerful temptations. One glass of wine can turn into two or more, a prescribed anti-anxiety pill dose can be doubled, pornography can be substituted instead of fixing relationship issues. All of these temptations can lead to even more costly consequences. Every addiction began with the first step. When stress and anxiety are running high in our hearts, it is much easier to fall for these "quick fixes" rather than deal with the root issues. What started as a "relief escape" now becomes a trap, pushing the person farther and farther from the Lord and His correct solutions.My friends, counseling and prescription drugs can be helpful. But the most important way to deal with stress is going to the Lord first, or in the middle...or even if you think it is the end. He always has a way out or a way through. God has given us tools in His Word for us to use in times of anxiety. Don't forget to use them!We have so many promises from Him. *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16.* Don't let Satan steal your confidence in the Lord to respond to your every need with His mercy and grace. It is always there, no matter if/when we mess up. *Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. Psalm 57:1.* Stay close to Him, learn to hide and take refuge in Him. He is a strong tower we can run to.By following His teachings, we can avoid many stressors. *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?" Hebrews 13:5-6.* Turn to Him with gratitude and thanksgiving, even before the answer is evident. Rehearse what He has done before. Remind yourself of His faithfulness in the past, which makes Him bigger than the current situation. *The Lord is my strength and shield. I trust Him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving. Psalm 28:7.* The next time you are feeling stressed, I challenge you to burst out in song! It breaks the hold hopelessness, stress and anxiety have on us. If need be, put on worship or praise music and sing along. My family used to sing this song when we were children. It is still one of our go to songs when things are rough: "My Lord knows the way through the wilderness, all I have to do is follow. Strength for today is mine all the way and all I need for tomorrow, all I have to do is follow, my Lord knows the way through the wilderness, all I have to do is follow." It is quite simple, but it always brings breakthroughs and hope. Google it, if you don't know it.My friends, we don't have to let the stressors of this life rule and reign in our lives. Our God is the God of Hope. Jesus is the Prince of Peace as we allow Him to rule and reign in our hearts, we can live in that peace. Don't settle for less, it's not worth it. Satan really would like to enslave you in his addictions, don't let him win. We don't have to let stress run or ruin our lives.*Father, I ask You to open our eyes where we have let stress and anxiety rule and reign in our hearts instead of your peace. Anxiety can have a loud voice, but Your quiet one shuts it up quickly. Open our ears to hear Your wonderful words of life and hope, in Jesus' Name, amen.* |