

MAKING WISE DECISIONS UNDER STRESS

James 1:5, Proverbs 3:5-6

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*⁵ If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. **James 1:5 (NLT)***

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. ⁶ Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take. **Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)***

Sequel to our last week's discussion on "*Rest and Sabbath in a Burn Out Culture*", I feel it is the right time to be discussing this topic, *Making Wise decisions under stress*.

Stress is a normal physical and emotional response to challenges. Stress comes in different form. It can be short term or long. Short-term stress can sharpen focus, but chronic stress can harm your health. Long-term stress increases the risks of headaches, sleep problems, weakened immunity, heart disease, and mood changes. What stresses me may not stress you. Most times it is not the stress that is the issue but how we manage the stress or the decisions we make while in those conditions.

Does it sometimes seem to you that you are trying to walk a tightrope, and someone is constantly shaking the rope? Life today is tough. We seem to be pulled in every direction. Often when at home, we feel strained because of pressures on the job. Work still needs to be done, but we have not had the time. When at work, we are being pulled by family responsibilities, feeling we just do not take the time we should with our families. Besides that, when we are at

work or home, we often feel as if we are letting the Lord down because we are not involved in church work. The strain of frazzled nerves, a churning stomach, and a pounding headache show in the eyes and walk of people all about us.

The signs on bumpers and sometimes on the side of the road declare, Christ Is the Answer. Does He have an answer for these stress-filled times? Is there an answer that will settle our nerves and help us get a hold on life itself? Yes, but we must apply it.

When stress presses hard upon us, our natural reflex is panic, leading to hasty and regrettable choices. Making wise decisions under pressure requires pausing to surrender our anxiety, anchoring our minds in God's peace, evaluating the long-term outcomes, and seeking trusted, godly counsel rather than reacting out of fear. Stress narrows our focus to short-term survival, while wisdom requires long-term perspective. Scripture repeatedly demonstrates that high-pressure moments require shifting from impulse to intentional, God-honouring discernment.

Signs Stress May Be Affecting You

- You have trouble sleeping or feeling unrested
- Having headaches, stomach issues, body pains
- Irritability, worry, sadness, or numbness
- Difficulty concentrating or making decisions
- Increased use of alcohol or other substances

The Danger of Pressure-Cooker Choices

Stress acts like a distortion lens. It makes temporary problems look permanent and permanent promises look doubtful. At that point, we tend to want to make the problem disappear and feel safe again. There are three things that tends to happen when we are under stress if not guided by the Holy Spirit.

- **The trap of haste:** When we rush to fix an uncomfortable situation, we often step outside of God's timing.
- **The noise of fear:** Panic drowns out the quiet whisper of the Holy Spirit.
- **The reactive cycle:** Instead of thoughtfully responding to a crisis, we merely react, leaving a trail of broken pieces behind. (Sometimes we feel everyone around us are the cause of the problem, our family suffers and the like).

What Can We Learn in Stressful Times (*Philippians 3:12-14*)**1. Realize Life Is a Growth Process, Not an Arrival (*Philippians 3:12, 13*)**

The very moment we begin to think we have already arrived we cut off the growth process. We never get beyond where we are. We can easily become so enamoured with the destination that we lose interest in the trip. On a vacation trip, we can be so anxious to get there that we pay no attention to each other, to sunsets, etc.

The same can be true of goals in life. Goals are important, but the destination must not overshadow the travel in that direction. We will feel less stress as we accept our frailties and failures and determine to keep growing. We should remember that Paul, a great man, continued to grow. Near the end of his life he still wanted his books and parchments (*2 Timothy 4*).

2. We Need Singleness of Purpose (*Philippians 3:13*)

Stress is often present because we are pulled in so many directions. We tend to think everything is vital. Our values only become true as we put things into perspective (*Philippians 3:1-8*). When everything is moving in the one direction, when we are all set to please Christ stress is eased. This is the solution to worry (*Matthew 6:33*). Note also that the one thing has action in it I do.

3. Forget The Past (*Philippians 3:13*)

Sins of the past become weights around our necks to hold us down. We are told how to meet Gods conditions of forgiveness (*Acts 22:16; Galatians*

3:26, 27). We must also forgive ourselves. We must likewise forget our past successes. We cannot live on past good works. Life must be lived today (*Matthew 6:34*).

4. Keep Reaching, do not give up.

Much stress builds on the inside because we have nothing to reach for. This is the case in the mid-life crisis. We either have received all we ever wanted or decide we never will get what we wanted. This also can happen to people of retirement age. Goals have already been reached and they often die. They just wait a few years to be buried. You hear people say, there is nothing left to live for. That's not true. There is a lot to live for if we keep reaching and do not give up.

5. Never Forget the Prize (*Philippians 3:14*)

Our prize is the upward call of God. It is never down here on earth. The reward is reserved in heaven. We may receive a few sub prizes down here, but the real prize is in heaven. This is why people like Apostle Paul never gave up. Remember Saul, Samson and the likes, gave up when it matters the most, because they felt there is nothing more to live for. They were not focus on the prize.

Pause and Exchange Panic for Peace (Decision making)

Before you make that critical choice, you must deal with the internal storm. Jesus does not promise the absence of trouble, but He offers an anchor in the middle of it.

The Model: Nehemiah Under Pressure (*Nehemiah 2:1-5*)

When King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah why he looked sad—a life-threatening moment for a royal cupbearer—Nehemiah felt intense fear. Instead of reacting out of panic, he executed a three-step pattern:

- **The Instant Pause:** He prayed silently before answering the king (*Nehemiah 2:4*).
- **Prepared Clarity:** Because he had already fasted and prayed for months (*Nehemiah 1*), his ask was precise, structured, and strategic.
- **Faithful Action:** He spoke boldly, trusting God's favour while presenting a practical plan.

Practical Steps

- **Pause Before You Pivot** - "*Be still, and know that I am God*" (*Psalms 46:10*). Stress triggers a fight-or-flight response. Take a physical and spiritual breather. A short "*arrow prayer*" like Nehemiah's, lowers anxiety and re-centres your mind on God rather than the immediate crisis.
- **Guard your mind:** Stop the spiral of negative thoughts before they dictate your words. Guarding your mind in stressful times is about establishing an active defence. In ancient warfare, a city's guard didn't wait for the enemy to enter before reacting—they stood watch at the gates to inspect every person and cargo trying to cross the threshold. When stress spikes, your mind becomes a high-traffic environment filled with intrusive thoughts, worst-

case scenarios, and panic-driven narratives. Guarding your mind means becoming the gatekeeper of your own thought life. In **2 Corinthians 10:5**, Apostles Paul says, *"We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."* The reality is that you cannot control every thought that pops into your head during a crisis, but you can control which thoughts you host by using the filter rule in **Philippians 4:6-8**.

- **Seek Wise, Objective Counsel:** *"Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counsellors there is safety" (Proverbs 11:14).* Stress distorts reality. Reach out to grounded believers or objective mentors who aren't emotionally tangled in the crisis. (e.g., Abigail intervening to stop David's stress-driven vengeance in **1 Samuel 25**).
- **Surrender the timetable:** Recognize that God is not panicked by your deadline. Surrendering to God's timing is not passive waiting; it is active

trust. Stress pushes us to rush, push doors open, or fix things immediately. Surrendering to His timing means choosing His schedule over your urgency.

Here is how to intentionally yield your timeline to God when stress is high:

1. **Shift from "When" to "Who" - The Struggle:** Anxiety demands deadlines—*"When will this resolve?"*, *"How long do I have to wait?"*
The Shift: Focus on God's character rather than the calendar. *"My times are in your hands" (Psalm 31:15)*. Remind yourself that the God controlling the timetable is simultaneously loving, wise, and sovereign.
2. **Recognize the Purpose in the Waiting Room:** God rarely works on our schedule because He is more concerned with who you become while you wait than just getting you to the destination. Delay is often God's protection or preparation for what's next. Waiting develops spiritual endurance and deepens faith in ways instant answers never can (**James 1:2-4**).

Summary Thought

Three Biblical Anchors for Wise Decisions

When facing the crossroad, apply these practical, spiritual filters to your options:

Principle	Biblical Anchor	Action Step
Examine the Outcome	Proverbs 19:2	Look past the immediate relief and weigh the long-term fruit of your choice
Seek Trusted Counsel	Proverbs 15:22	Consult people of proven spiritual maturity before making a final commitment
Wait in Patience	Isaiah 30:15	Rest your case in prayer and refuse to move out of sheer desperation.