

## BIBLE STUDY

**TITLE:** Three Ways to Conquer Stress

**REFERENCE:** Psalm 23

**FROM THE SERMON:** How to Handle Stress (#1361)

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide this Bible study produced from a sermon preached by Adrian Rogers while serving as pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee. This Bible study is intended for your personal, non-commercial use.

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## Three Ways to Conquer Stress

Is stress ever a problem for you? In this “Digging Deeper” online Bible study, we’re going to explore:

- Why so many of us are “all stressed up with nowhere to go”
- Three things you must know to relieve that stress
- Why we’re so tense, hurried, and believe it’s wrong to be still.
- Ways we try to cope with stress
- Why God calls us “sheep”

Let’s be honest: we all try to cope in unhealthy ways: worry, fret, eating too much, drinking, distracting ourselves by going on line, playing video games—the ways we try to cope are endless.

What’s the first thing you resort to when you’re feeling stressed out. Write down the first thing that comes to your mind.

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How well is it working?  
Has it removed the source of your stress?  
With no guilt afterward?

In this study, Adrian Rogers gives you 3 truths—3 things you must grasp—and when you do, it will advance you light-years in knowing how to handle stress. They’ll not only help, they won’t backfire with unhealthy consequences.

A woman called her pastor to complain. She’d tried to call him all day Monday, and he wouldn’t answer. He explained, “Well, Monday’s my day off. I take one day a week to rest.” “The devil never takes a day off,” she scolded. “Yes,” he answered, “and if I didn’t, I’d be just like the devil.”

Turn in your Bible to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, one of the most beloved passages in all the Bible, one of the most often quoted and memorized. You would do yourself a favor to memorize it too. Fill in some key words:

The Lord is my \_\_\_\_\_. I shall not \_\_\_\_\_. He \_\_\_\_\_ me to lie down in green pastures. He \_\_\_\_\_ me beside the still waters. He \_\_\_\_\_ my soul.”

We see that God wants His people, “the sheep of His pasture,” to learn how to get quiet and lie down in the green pastures. But there is so much more here than what we realize at first glance.

## A Closer Look at Do's and Don'ts for Sheep

Sheep and shepherds were all over Israel when David wrote this psalm and still are today. David himself was a shepherd as a boy, and it was while he was tending his father's sheep that God summoned him back to the house so the prophet Samuel could anoint him as the future king of Israel.

Sheep in the Middle East begin to graze about 4:00 a.m. The shepherd leads them out while dew is still on the grass. It's quiet; the sheep will nibble here and there. By 10 or 11:00 a.m., the sun is hot, and the shepherd will find some secluded, shady spot where they can lie down for three or four hours and just chew the cud. **That's when sheep grow the fastest, putting on fat, putting on wool, and maturing.** Every shepherd knows how important it is for his sheep to have a quiet time. *"He maketh me to lie down in green pastures."*

Sheep are afraid to drink from rushing, gurgling streams like those in the Middle East where springs come up out of the mountainside and rush down through the ravine. But they'll drink when the water settles in a quiet pool. The Shepherd *"leadeth me beside the still waters."*

**God wants you to experience regular times of "green pastures and still waters."**

God calls us "the sheep of His pasture" because we are much like sheep. But before you say, "Isn't that sweet" and feel all warm and fuzzy, let's look at the characteristics of sheep and ask yourself how these 4 characteristics unfortunately apply to us.

### ■ Dumb.

Sheep are among the dumbest animals around. You'll see trained dogs, elephants, horses—even sometimes lions—performing in a circus. But you'll never see a "trained" sheep.

You say, "Wait a minute—I'm pretty smart. I graduated top of my class." You misunderstand. I'm speaking about spiritual realms.

Turn to John 3:1-2:

*There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, \_\_\_\_\_ that thou art a \_\_\_\_\_ come from \_\_\_\_\_, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.*

So far the conversation is going well. But as Nicodemus "digs deeper," Jesus finally comes to this point in verse 10:

Jesus answered and said unto him, “Art thou a \_\_\_\_\_ of Israel, and knowest \_\_\_\_ these things?”

Jesus had to ask Nicodemus, an intelligent Pharisee, high on the academic ladder, “Are you a master in Israel—yet you don't know something this fundamental?” Nicodemus was intellectually tops but spiritually ignorant.

### ■ Defenseless.

Other animals can defend themselves fairly well: a horse can run, a mule can kick; a lion can bite, a tiger can claw, a bear can crush, a skunk, you know what he can do. But a sheep can't run. He has relatively weak muscles. He has poor eyesight. He doesn't have good hearing.

Turn to Isaiah 53:7.

*...he is brought as a lamb to the \_\_\_\_\_, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb [mute], so he \_\_\_\_\_ his mouth.*

Isaiah, writing prophetically 700 years before the birth of Jesus, is describing the Lord Jesus when He was led to the crucifixion. Isaiah describes what a lamb is like when it's taken either to have its wool collected or when taken to the slaughter. It's defenseless. You've heard the phrase, “...like sheep to the slaughter.”

Turn to Romans 8:36:

*As it is written, “For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as \_\_\_\_\_ for the \_\_\_\_\_.”*

Sheep need someone to defend them. Spiritually, that's the way we are. Paul had to say to the Corinthians, “our sufficiency is of God.” We don't have it in and of ourselves. In this regard, we are indeed the “sheep of His pasture.”

### ■ Directionless.

You've heard people jokingly say, “I'm directionally-challenged.” Or, “I couldn't find my way out of a paper bag.” In the natural realm, only some of us are “directionally challenged,” but in the spiritual realm, without God's direction, all of us are.

How much this sounds like us... Sheep are easily lost. A sheep will browse here, nibble there, browse and nibble, getting further and further away without knowing it. Soon he's away from the flock, the fold, the shepherd, and he's out there lost. That's bad enough, but he can't find his way home. Cows come back to the barn; a horse comes back to the stable. You hear of a homing pigeon, but never a

homing sheep. They don't come back. They have to be sought. They have to be brought.

Turn to Isaiah 53 again and see verse 6:

*All we like \_\_\_\_\_ have gone \_\_\_\_\_; we've turned, everyone, to his own way...*

Turn over to Hosea 11:7:

*And My people are \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ from Me: though they called them to the Most High, none at all would exalt Him.*

In plain English, we have a tendency to get away from God.

### ■ **Dependent.**

Sheep need someone to take care of them. A sheep is so dependent. Sheep can become “cast”—a term that describes a situation where sometimes it rolls over, paws up in the air, can't get up, and doesn't have enough dexterity to roll over and get back on its feet. In that position, it's vulnerable to predators like vultures and wolves. Gasses in the sheep build up from the inside, the sheep gets bloated, before long the circulation is cut off, and the sheep will die. That's called a “cast” sheep. Spiritually we are much like sheep.

I think it's what David had in mind when he wrote Psalms 42 and 43. Turn to Psalm 42:5. It begins with this lament:

*Why art thou \_\_\_\_\_ down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?*

...but ends with:

*hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise Him for the \_\_\_\_\_ of His countenance.*

Verse 5 of the very next psalm, Psalm 43, says the exact same thing. We get in a “cast down” position. Our Shepherd needs to come pick us up and put us back on our feet. Thank God for our Shepherd.

So far, we've seen that natural sheep are

- not that smart
- defenseless against predators
- directionless when they lean on their own understanding
- dependent upon their shepherd to rescue them in time of trouble.

You can see why then, spiritually speaking, God call us “the sheep of His pasture”. Thank God we have His pasture and He is our Shepherd.

## To Get a Handle on Your Stress, There Are 3 Things You Must Do:

### 1. Know you have SECURITY in your Shepherd.

You have a Shepherd who cares for you. Say to yourself, “I am secure in Jesus.” The Bible tells us He is the Good Shepherd (John 10:11), the Great Shepherd (Hebrews 13:20), and the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4).

**Jesus Christ gives you security, once you understand what He is like.**

What is your Shepherd like?

#### ■ Compassionate.

Turn to Matthew 9:36.

*But when He saw the multitudes, he was moved with \_\_\_\_\_,  
because they fainted and were scattered abroad like sheep having no  
\_\_\_\_\_.*

His compassion for us caused Him to leave Heaven and come to die for us.

#### ■ Caring.

One of the most beautiful verses in all the Bible is Isaiah 40:11.

*He shall feed His flock like a \_\_\_\_\_. He shall gather the  
\_\_\_\_\_ with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall  
\_\_\_\_\_ those that are with young.”*

Has he ever carried you? The Lord cares for us. He puts a weak lamb in his arms and carries it close to His heart. When I was a little lamb, a baby Christian, thank God, He carried me. If He hadn't, I never would have made it. He carries us gently.

Aren't you glad the Lord is so tender to us? Aren't you glad that God gives us what we need and not what we deserve?

#### ■ Courageous.

He left Heaven to come and give His life for you. Turn to John 10, describing

who the Good Shepherd is and what He does, and read all of it. Look specifically at verses 11-13, which describe His protector role as our Shepherd:

*I am the \_\_\_\_\_ Shepherd. The good shepherd giveth \_\_\_\_\_ for the sheep. But he that is a hireling and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming and leaveth the sheep and fleeth. The wolf catcheth them and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth because he is a hireling, and careth not for the sheep.*

How is Jesus our Shepherd completely different from a hired hand? Notice the phrase describing the “hireling...whose own the sheep are not....” How does this explain the difference between the protection of the Shepherd versus the abandonment of the hireling?

There were many dangers for sheep in that day: wolves, bears, thieves. A good shepherd fights for his sheep.

Turn to Matthew 16:21-25. Jesus is telling His disciples that in order to provide the sacrifice for sin, He Himself must die.

*From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then \_\_\_\_\_ took Him, and began to \_\_\_\_\_ Him, saying, “Be it far from Thee, Lord. This shall not be unto Thee.” But He turned and said unto Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan. Thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” Then said Jesus unto His disciples, “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it.*

Notice how verse 21 here, as recorded by Matthew, has so many of the specific details of what was about to happen in the last days of Jesus’ ministry on earth. List 3 of them from verse 21 here:

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Jesus came to earth full well knowing what was going to happen to Him to save us. The disciples said, “Jesus, don't you go to Jerusalem. It's dangerous down

there, Jesus. They're going to hurt you. If you go down there, they're going to kill you. Don't go to Jerusalem, whatever you do!"

How did He respond? The Bible says (Isaiah 50:7, Luke 9:51), "He set his face like a flint toward Jerusalem," just like that. He did it willingly.

Back in John 10 now. Turn to verse 7.

*Then said Jesus unto them again, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the \_\_\_\_\_ of the sheep. All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by Me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."*

You may ask—"Wait. Is Jesus the Shepherd, or is He the door to the sheepfold?" The answer is: "Yes." He is both the Good Shepherd and the door.

### **A Closer Look at Your Overnight Accommodations**

The shepherd becomes the door. I've visited these sheepfolds. In that day, the shepherd built an enclosure out of stones perhaps waist high—a large circle or square—then brings the sheep inside. He counts them all and makes certain they're all secure. And then the shepherd has an opening wide enough for the sheep to come in and out. When he gets all the sheep in and counted, the shepherd will lie down right across that opening. Nobody gets in and nobody gets out without him knowing it. The shepherd is the door. Jesus said, "I am the door. Nobody can get to you unless he comes through Me." That gives me a sense of security. He also said (John 10:27-29),

*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish. Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand.*

When you understand you may be weak like a sheep, but you have this compassionate, caring, courageous shepherd, it gives you **security**. He is the strong, Good Shepherd.

How does this portrait of a compassionate, caring Shepherd help you feel more secure?

## **2. Realize Your Shepherd's SUFFICIENCY.**

**There's nothing you need that your Shepherd cannot provide.** He doesn't make you lie down in brown, withered pastures or lead you beside muddy streams and dried-up water brooks. No. *He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters.* All I need and more, I find in the Lord Jesus Christ.

What are these “green pastures” and “still waters” we keep talking about? God isn't talking about having your bank account full. God wants healthy sheep. “Green pastures” describe His life-giving Word. “Still waters” are the waters of the Holy Spirit.

We need to find our satisfaction in Him, and if we don't, we're going to be stressed.

We get stressed because we think our needs are not going to be met. “I'm not going to have what I need!”

Turn for a moment to Matthew 6. Jesus is speaking to a large group, both His disciples and the people, gathered at what we now call “The Sermon on the Mount.” He's giving them, beginning with 5:1, a plan for how to live in a way that will be best for them and everyone around them, that will bring them more harmony, less stress, more peace with their neighbor, a deeper relationship with God, and more glory to Him.

In His sermon, Jesus told us not to worry about food, clothing, or shelter. Read Matthew 6:25-33. In verses 26 and 30 (below), what logical reason does Jesus give for believing that God is going to provide for us what we need?

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*Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?... (v. 26)*

*Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? (v. 30)*

In verse 32, what reason does Jesus give us for not wringing our hands, worrying about how our basic needs will be met?

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*Therefore take no thought, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink? or "Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (For after all these things do the Gentiles [unsaved people] seek), for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Most people are worried about food, friends, fame, fortune, fashion, and fitness. When Jesus said, "After all these things do the Gentiles [unsaved people] seek," He's not saying these things aren't important, but that when you seek God's kingdom and His righteousness *first*, all that you need (food, clothing, shelter) will be provided.

If you don't find your satisfaction in Him, you're going to be stressed, because the deepest needs of your heart have not been met.

What did Jesus say Matthew 4:4?

*Man shall not live by \_\_\_\_\_ alone, but by every \_\_\_\_\_ that proceedeth out of the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.*

Turn to Matthew 5:6. Jesus also said,

*Blessed are they which do \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ after \_\_\_\_\_, for they shall be filled.*

What bread is to the natural man, the Bible should be to our heart, mind, and spirit.

### **A Closer Look at "Blessed," "Happy," and Their Opposite**

"Blessed" is the Greek word *makarios*, which literally means "happy, satisfied, content, joyful."

Jesus did not say, "Blessed are those who seek after blessedness; happy are those who seek after happiness," but happy are those who seek after *righteousness*.

The most unhappy people in the world are people trying to be happy.

- Unhappiness comes from self-centeredness and sin.
- Happiness is something you never find by looking for it.
- Happiness is something you stumble over on your way to serve Jesus.
- Happiness is the by-product of righteousness.

And God has engineered it that way.

God allows problems and heartaches to cause us to wake up and say, “Hey—there’s something wrong in this world down here.” What’s wrong is sin. What’s the answer? Righteousness.

People trying to be happy are only treating the symptoms. If you’ll seek after righteousness, you’ll be dealing with the infection. You’ll be dealing with stress.

Drink of the Spirit. Feed on the Word of God. That’s **sufficiency**. The deepest need of your heart will only be met in Jesus.

### 3. Realize that only in Him will you have SERENITY.

Sheep will not lie down until they're content. Have you ever seen so many people who are driven, frazzled, constantly hurrying? Everybody is going, moving.

I was reading in the newspaper awhile back about a fighter plane. This is not a joke—it literally happened. The plane fired its weapon and was moving so fast, it overtook the bullet and shot itself down. Literally. I had to re-read that. The plane was moving faster than the shell.

Many people I know are doing the same thing, shooting themselves down. They don’t take time to “*be still and know*” that God is God (Psalm 46:10). This is the only way we will have that serenity, that quietness.

**It's not a sin to be quiet. It's a sin not to be quiet.** Listen to what God says:

*In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. (Isaiah 30:15)*

*Be still, be still and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)*

After a sheep grazes, the shepherd says, “Now, lie down and digest what you’ve got.” So the sheep begins to chew on it. That’s when the sheep is growing. That’s the most productive time for the sheep, that quiet time, that serenity. For us, “the sheep of His pasture,” when we rest beside our Shepherd, meditating on His Word, that quiet time will be our most productive time.

Turn to these passages—they’re all from the book of Psalms, quick to find—and think about them as you fill in some key words.

Psalm 1:1-2

*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But*

*his delight is in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_, and in His law doth he  
\_\_\_\_\_ day and night.*

Psalm 19:14

*Let the words of my mouth and the \_\_\_\_\_ of my \_\_\_\_\_ be  
acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord my strength and my redeemer.*

Psalm 104:34

*My \_\_\_\_\_ of Him shall be sweet; I will be \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_.*  
Psalm 119:5

*I will \_\_\_\_\_ in Thy precepts and have respect unto Thy \_\_\_\_\_.*

Worry, frenetic activity, your mind jumping from one thing to another—all block out being able to **meditate** on God's Word. You cannot meditate and rush from one thing to another. They are incompatible.

Most of us don't stop long enough to meditate, even those who study the Word. How much time do we take to digest and assimilate what God has given us? Most of us think we've done God a wild favor if we get to church on Sunday, and if we can halfway understand what the pastor is saying...right?

When you get home, do you meditate on what you've heard? When you study God's Word in the morning, do you really have a quiet time? Do you keep a spiritual journal? Do you write down the thoughts that God gives you?

Did you know that many of the things I preach to you are things God gives me after I've read the Word of God and sit back and think about it?

You ask, "How do people know what's in the Word of God? Where do you get that?" One way is to sit back and meditate. And if you expect God to give you something, then you ought to have something to write it down with. You ought to keep a spiritual journal.

Some say, "I'm just too busy." In this same "Good Shepherd" chapter (John 10), Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly" (v.10). If you don't make time to do this, you're going to miss life, looking for it.

You must stop and prioritize your life. I think God *makes* some of us lie down because we won't do it until He makes us.

David said, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray." He said in another place, "It has been good for me that I've been afflicted."

You see, “*He maketh me to lie down.*” Why make Him do it? Why not just do it yourself? Say, “Never mind, Lord, you don’t have to do it. I’d just rather slow down. I want to get quiet. I want to be still. I want to know that You are God.”

How do you deal with stress? Remember, a distressed sheep is a sheep that's not producing wool, not producing fat, not producing lambs. Your compassionate, caring, courageous Shepherd wants you to be a healthy sheep.

### **What is the cure for your stress?**

- Find in Jesus Christ your **security**: He's the Good Shepherd.
- Find in Him **sufficiency**: the green pastures and still waters.
- Find in Him **serenity**: He maketh me to lie down.