

Rest in the Midst of Stress

By: Jim Hohnberger

*“And He said, My presence shall
go with them, and I will give them rest.”*

—Exodus 33:14—

A lecturer, while explaining stress management to an audience, raised a glass of water and asked, "How heavy is this glass of water?"

His listeners called out answers ranging from 20g to 500g.

The lecturer patiently entertained all the best guesses anyone cared to make. He had their full attention. Then he made a statement that no one there would forget.

He said, "The absolute weight of this glass of water doesn't matter as much as the length of time I might try to hold it.

"If I hold it for a minute, that's not a problem. If I hold it for an hour, I'll have an ache in my right arm. But if I should try to hold it for a day, you would have to call an ambulance. In each case, the weight is the same, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes."

Is it really possible that holding such

a little thing as a glass of water could incapacitate a strong, grown man? Well it is, but who would willingly hold onto a little thing like that till he was in a crisis?

Well, friends, most of us do it every day. We do it automatically, without even questioning it. It's our lifestyle. And we end up in crisis!

That is why divorce is rampant, youth are in rebellion, and friends are alienated. Health problems escalate and crime increases.

And what are these "little glasses of water" that we hold onto so tenaciously?

Hurts received from others, unresolved conflict, perplexing circumstances, too much to do in too little time, worry, anxiety, ineffective problem-solving techniques, poor attitudes, guilt, negative thinking, the needs and expectations of others . . . the list could go on and on.

We think that these "little glasses of water" are indispensable, that we must hold on to them, that dire consequences will follow if we lay them down. Perhaps, we have been in the habit of carrying them

so long that they seem to be a part of us and we just accept their presence and the pain that accompanies holding onto them. And so we end up in a mess!

Well, what is the solution? Do we have to live our lives this way—trying to hold things together on the outside while we are hurting on the inside? That’s a “no-brainer”, isn’t it, for the man holding the glass of water! All he needs to do is to set it down, right? Right! He needs to go over to the table, lower the glass of water onto it, open his hand and release it, and then leave it there. When he does this, he experiences instant relief.

And it is just that simple with the other “glasses of water” that we carry. The reason we don’t find relief is that we try to manage them ourselves. We want to run our own lives, to be in charge, to be the ones in control. We juggle this circumstance, and that relationship all mixed up with our attitudes and history and we wear ourselves out!

And all the while, One Who will never leave us nor forsake us stands right by our side inviting us to rest our “glasses of water” in His loving hands.

He bids us, *“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*

Simple enough, is it not? Oh yes, it is! And the rest that is offered is as big as the God who offers it. Nothing is too great for Him to bear; for He upholds the worlds and rules the universe. Nothing is too small for His notice; for He marks the sparrow’s fall, and numbers the hairs of our heads. He is not indifferent to our needs. The Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy. He is touched by our sorrows, and even the expression of them moves His great

heart of infinite love. There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read, no perplexity too complicated for Him to unravel. Our Heavenly Father is not unobserving; He sees our tears, He marks our sighs, He notes our joys and sorrows. We cannot weary Him; we cannot burden His heart.

Our part is simple— “come” to Him. He doesn’t ask us to fix anything, adjust anything, or solve anything. He invites us to come just as we are and place ourselves under His management. The “glass of water” is still there, but we no longer bear it alone. We enter into a coalition with One Who knows no fatigue. Human effort begins to ally itself with Divine Power. He directs; I implement. He leads; I follow. He suggests new thoughts to my mind; I switch channels. If my “glass of water” is negative thinking, God will direct me to think positive thoughts. As I choose to cooperate with Him, He takes the stress out of whatever I am facing and replaces it with rest.

Unfortunately, setting down our “glass of water” is not a one-time necessity. We may have laid it down yesterday, or even five minutes ago, but we find ourselves gripping it again! When did we pick it up? It happens so easily, so automatically! Mastering the setting down of our “glasses of water” is the work of a lifetime. I’m still learning.

For example, I can think of few tasks in life that generate more stress than taking on the task of constructing a home—especially for a strong German like me who expects to see things get done promptly and on time! The tension that seems part and parcel of a building project has been known to devastate marriages, alienate best friends, and split churches.

Now I think I understand why!

We began our small project in late spring. As Empowered Living Ministries grows, we have sensed a need for a larger

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office. Also, as Andrew and Sarah have started their little family, Sarah desires to be a full-time Mommy and has passed on the general manager position to Janell. We needed an office large enough to accommodate our staff and our increasing shipping and receiving department. Our search for an already-built home in a quiet country location led us to conclude that God wanted us to begin with bare land and build what we need.

We began to move forward in that direction and were amazed at the doors that God began opening for us. We were able to purchase land for a reasonable price that was not listed on the market. We found building plans that suited us, an architect to tailor them to our needs and a builder who “just happened” to be available for this summer — usually his schedule is booked by the time we approached him.

I began setting up arrangements for a road, a level building site, power, phone, septic, and a concrete foundation. The pieces just seemed to fall into place. Unbelievably, we were able to schedule all those tasks to be completed in one week—just in time for my out-of-state contractor to arrive. “Oh God, You are really with me! You are really blessing me!”

Then the picture began to change. My new neighbors were not happy that we were building above them and began to look for ways to discourage us and block us from moving forward. I had to apply for and obtain a special permit to approach a county highway with my driveway. Perseveringly, we worked through that obstacle.

Then it began to rain. “Lord, You know our building schedule. Could you please see to it that the rain stops soon?”

It continued to rain. “Lord, did You hear me? If the rain continues, Wayne can’t put rock on the road—in fact the dirt on the road that he just cut in is washing out, Lord. It’s making a real mess and it’s

going to cost a lot of money to fix it. And if he can’t put rock on the road, the power, septic and well can’t go in either and neither can the concrete foundation.”

It continued to rain—unseasonable, soil-drenching, ground-penetrating, project-delaying rain!

“God, you hold all the elements in Your hand. You know we are building this project for the sake of Your people. You know how important the timing of everything is and if we get delayed, it might be

weeks before we can get it rolling again. This is the busy building season, Lord. Are You listening?”

It continued to rain—for three long, miserably wet weeks. Friends who have lived here all their lives couldn’t remember a wetter June.

“Why, Lord? Have You forsaken me? Have You led me through the Red Sea and then abandoned me to wander in this wilderness? This is costing me time and money. And You had it in Your power to prevent this.

Are you punishing me? Is there something I’ve done to offend You and I don’t know what it is? Where are you, God?”

As I mull over these disturbing sentiments, the feelings of discouragement and frustration that always accompany these kind of thoughts begin to rise. I am stressed out!

“Jim, do you know that you are a sinner?”

“Well, yes Lord, I do.”

“Do you know that sinners need a Savior?”

“Yes, God. I need a Savior every day. That’s why I was counting on You to stop the rain!”

“Has there ever been a time when I have forsaken a sinner?”

“No, Lord.”

“You see, Jim, even though you are constructing this building for Me, there is something that I am more concerned

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about than your time and your money. I'm interested in your character."

"My character, Lord? Can't that take the back seat just for once?"

"No, Jim, it can't. It's **all** about character. I love you so much that I want you to experience freedom from the dross that still clings to your soul deep within. I'm thorough and patient. I'm not as interested in building with 2x4's and nails as I am building right thoughts and feelings. I'll keep allowing trials to dig deeper and deeper until the dross is all gone and then I can place my seal on your forehead.

"Do you remember those two paintings you preach about?"

My mind instantly visualized a snug cabin resting calmly beside a mirrored lake. No disturbance, no clamor, no threat. Perfect rest. Or is that truly a picture of perfect rest?

The second picture came before my mind's eye. A turbulent, tumultuous waterfall casting up spray and thunder. Leaning out over the abyss is a wisp of a willow branch. Wedged precariously, but safely, on the end of the branch is a small robin's nest. The mother robin is sitting unconcernedly over her brood, not in the least concerned about the seeming insecurity of her position.

I know that the first picture is the rest found in quieting down and controlling all my circumstances. The second is the rest promised by Christ that is independent of circumstances. I know all about it. I've preached it. I've counseled others about it. And here I am, trying almost unconsciously to adjust my circumstances in order to find rest.

"Jim, remember that I have said: 'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' Wouldn't you like to give me this little 'glass of water' and let me carry it?"

I yielded myself once again to my loving Savior, changed the channel of my thoughts, and found peace in my God.

Hudson Taylor, pioneer missionary to inland China, learned this secret well.

He often ended his long days by playing his favorite hymn, "Jesus, I am Resting, Resting" on his little reed organ. Once, when letters reached him of serious rioting that threatened the lives of his fellow missionaries, he began whistling that familiar song. Surprised, one of his workers exclaimed, "How can you whistle when our friends are in so much danger?"

"Would you have me to be anxious and troubled?" Hudson calmly replied. "That would not help them and would certainly incapacitate me for my work. I have just to roll the burden on the Lord and to do what He asks me to do."

The rain did eventually cease and the project went forward. But the trials did not end. They just continued to take on different and unexpected forms.

I did find my rest—more than once! I had to find it again and again in knowing that my loving Saviour saw best to build my character first and then His office.

That same God is there for you, friend! He invites you to release your burdens, your "glasses of water"—whatever they may be—into His loving hands. Trust Him, obey Him, and find **rest**.

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LIVING
MINISTRIES**

Power to become the sons of God. —John 1:12

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Empowered Living Ministries

9550 High Mesa Road, Olathe, CO 81425

970-615-0046

Email: office@empoweredlivingministries.org

Web: www.EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org