



ASK THE  
CHRISTIAN  
COUNSELOR



# I'M STRESSED

A PATH FROM  
PRESSURE TO PEACE

ELIZA HUIE

“Eliza Huie’s book, *I’m Stressed*, is a concise yet comprehensive guide for helping both yourself and others with the pressures of living in a fallen world. The ‘stress tests’ at the end of each chapter are priceless and practical, and they point us to Christ and his Word for peace that the world can’t offer. I highly recommend this trusted resource!”

**Robert K. Cheong**, Founder and Executive Director,  
Gospel Care Ministries

“In *I’m Stressed: A Path from Pressure to Peace*, Eliza Huie masterfully combines biblical encouragement with practical strategies, offering readers invaluable tools to navigate stress. Through engaging exercises and relevant case studies, this book empowers readers with immediately actionable steps toward inner peace.”

**Emily Dempster**, Training Advisor, Association of Biblical Counselors; counseling ministry director, Salem Heights Church, Salem, OR

“I love this resource! Eliza simply and helpfully walks the reader through an acute understanding of stress. Saturated with biblical truth and hope, this book takes the concept and feelings of stress and breaks them down through godly wisdom and practical solutions. I found myself convicted and comforted in each new chapter. This small resource will make a huge impact! I’m certain I will come back to it time and time again.”

**Rebekah Hannah**, Director of Kids and Families, Redeemer LSQ; President & CEO, Anchored Hope Virtual Counseling

“This book is a transformative guide for anyone seeking to navigate the tumultuous waters of modern life with grace and resilience. Eliza offers a refreshingly honest and biblically grounded approach to managing stress. Whether you’re dealing with daily pressures or overwhelming challenges, *I’m Stressed* will provide a clear path to fruitful well-being and is a must-read for anyone seeking clarity amid the chaos of daily life.”

**Dwayne Bond**, Lead Pastor, Wellspring Church,  
Charlotte, NC; CEO, Proximus Group, LLC

“We all deal with stress, but navigating it with wisdom and hope can be tricky. In this little book, Eliza Huie combines a counselor’s experience, real stories that resonate, and lots of wisdom for dealing with this common struggle. Drawing from Scripture and practical insights, Huie helps us chart a better way forward.”

**Kelly M. Kopic**, Author of *You’re Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God’s Design and Why That’s Good News*

“In this highly practical guide, Eliza Huie explores the multifaceted nature of stress and offers a plan for navigating life’s demands in a redemptive way. If you find yourself feeling constantly crushed by layered concerns and responsibilities, this insightful book is especially for you.”

**Christine Chappell**, Certified Biblical Counselor;  
author of *Midnight Mercies: Walking with God through Depression in Motherhood* and *Postpartum Depression: Hope for a Hard Season*

“In *I’m Stressed*, Eliza Huie provides a compassionate and practical guide for navigating the pressures of life from a biblical perspective. Her wise counsel and gentle encouragement will help readers find true rest in Christ. If you find yourself burdened by stress and seeking lasting relief, this book will refresh your soul and renew your trust in God’s loving care.”

**Joe Carter**, Senior Writer, The Gospel Coalition;  
author of the *NIV Lifehacks Bible*

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## INTRODUCTION

*"I need you to take me to the hospital."*

Those are never the words a husband wants to say to his wife. But on a Friday afternoon, Chris picked up the phone, called his wife Claire, and said just that. Chris knew something was wrong, and in an effort to avoid an ambulance ride, he had called Claire's cell and tried to remain calm. Chris explained he was having chest pain and shortness of breath, and he feared it was his heart. Luckily, their house was only minutes from Chris's office, and they stayed on the phone together until she arrived. She drove him to the nearest emergency room. After a series of tests and several long hours of waiting, they finally had a diagnosis. Stress. Chris was not having a heart attack; his body was telling him that it was overwhelmed.

The verdict was relieving but also discouraging, and it led Chris to contact me for counseling. He knew

his life had become incredibly busy. Every day he felt there was not enough time to do all that was demanded, and yet there was little he could delegate. Both work and home life came with unique demands. Chris was committed to being a loving, attentive husband and father, but he knew he was often distracted while with his family. He was physically present but mentally and emotionally elsewhere. As much as he sought to have balance, both Chris and his family knew it wasn't working, and the trip to the emergency room confirmed this.

You may not have had a trip to the emergency room, but if you are reading this book, you are likely feeling the impact of stress in your life. Or perhaps you are seeking to walk with someone who feels overwhelmed by the pressures of life. Before we go any further, a clear understanding of what stress is will be helpful.

Stress is an emotional or mental state resulting from actual or perceived pressures and demands in your circumstances. In simplest terms, it manifests when we lean too heavily on our own understanding and results in a departure from the peace that comes through trusting and resting in God's providence and care. Prolonged stress results in negative mental, emotional, and physical effects on your life. It creates a sense of tension that makes you feel overwhelmed, discouraged, or burned out, and it often manifests troubling physical symptoms. It not only impacts you mentally and physically but also affects your relational and spiritual health as well. This book will focus on the negative experiences of stress and will guide you in ways to alleviate the stress in your life.

However, stress is not always bad. After reading the explanation of stress in the previous paragraph and recognizing its potential to negatively impact your life, you may be scratching your head and wondering how stress can be anything but bad. It may surprise you to read that stress can be helpful.

### **GOOD STRESS VS. BAD STRESS**

The demands of a work project will cause you to direct your full attention to completing the task by the set deadline. If you are a student, the pressures of exam week can cause you to decline invitations to hang out with friends and stay home to study instead. The stress that comes when your wife reminds you that you're having dinner with the neighbors will cause you to wrap up your Saturday house project and jump in the shower. The stress of a manuscript deadline caused me to rearrange my schedule for a season and write this book. Without that pressure, I would continue to go about my usual plans and find little time for the disciplined work of research, reading, and finally putting my fingers to the keyboard to write!

Stress is a normal reaction to the demands of life. It is a strong motivator and can help with achieving goals, leading to a sense of accomplishment and feelings of satisfaction. This type of good stress is also called *eustress* and it is a regular and even essential part of life. One article describes other experiences of good stress in this way: "You might feel this type of stress when you ride a roller coaster, compete in a game, or go on a first date. Good stress is short-term, and it inspires

and motivates you, focuses your energy, and enhances performance.”<sup>1</sup>

The problem is that, while we need good stress, our lives are filled with bad stress. More than ever before, people are stressed out. Consider the statistics, listed below, most of which come from the American Institute of Stress.<sup>2</sup> (The fact that we have an American Institute of Stress is also very telling of just how pervasive stress is in our lives.)

- 43 percent of people report they have recently lost sleep because of stress.
- 55 percent of Americans report feeling stressed during the day.
- 63 percent of workers say they are ready to quit their job due to stress.
- 76 percent of people report that stress has had negative effects on their health.
- 77 percent of adults say that the future is a significant source of stress.
- 87 percent of people say money or the economy is the main cause of stress in their life.

The effects of stress are not isolated to the person experiencing it. As a counselor, I commonly hear how stress negatively affects friendships, marriages, and work relationships. Have you ever noticed that even when you are not stressed about anything, encountering someone who is stressed causes you to feel pressured too? We pass stress to one another. To make matters worse, individuals who carry around a weight of stress can compound their tension when they get together.

The truth is undeniable: stress has a major impact on us all.

## **ON THIS JOURNEY TOGETHER**

I too am no stranger to these feelings, as writing this book added to my already stress-prone life. Though my stress isn't manifesting in symptoms like the ones Chris experienced, I have my own challenges that come from too much pressure. As I share what can help, please don't assume that because I have written a book on this topic that I am a worry-free Christian who is unbothered by the challenges in life. Instead, I remain on this journey with you. I have found that continual dependence on the Lord and being tethered to his Word are the most helpful components in dealing with this struggle.

It is my hope that you will embrace the fact that God does not expect us to white-knuckle it through this stressful life. He knows our frame and our tendency to be overwhelmed, and he offers peace amidst a stressful world. This book will give tips and practices to help all of us manage stress. It will provide you with practical ways to connect to God's Word, but it will also connect you to a Person—One who knows what it is to be overwhelmed by circumstances and yet able to rest perfectly in God. Jesus is not only our example in this stress-filled world; he is also our hope and our peace (John 16:33).

## **WHERE WE ARE HEADED**

To help you overcome your stress, we will begin our journey by exploring three common reasons why stress

takes hold in life: fear, the desire for control, and temptation. Next, we will closely examine stress and how it impacts your life. I'll share skills, tools, and some exercises you can use to help reduce the stress in your life. Finally, we will look at Jesus, how he dealt with stress, and what that means for you.

Each chapter will end with a brief stress test to help you immediately apply and practice what you are reading. Please do not skip or skim these sections, but rather consider yourself in the counseling room with me as we practice them together. It will be helpful to have a journal and a Bible handy as you read, as there will be times for you to engage with the content more deeply. You will be asked to rate your stress level. This is to help you become more aware of how much stress is impacting you and how certain practices may help to bring your stress level down. Keep in mind that the stress test ratings are not intended to show immediate or drastic change. Though you will likely see some shifting take place, the goal is simply for you to be more aware of what raises and lowers stress. The stress tests are also not intended to be something you do once after the close of each chapter; rather they are practices to return to whenever you notice your stress levels begin to rise. Be intentional as you work through these application portions. For an even deeper level of engagement, ask a friend, mentor, or counselor to go through this book with you. Share what you are learning from the stress test sections together.

As part of the Ask the Christian Counselor series, this book aims to answer your questions so that you may better understand and address the stress in your

life. Key to this will be exploring how knowing Jesus changes your approach to stressful seasons. As you read, I encourage you to patiently engage the content. Reflect on any adjustments or changes needed in your life. Allow yourself time to pause and revisit any of the chapters. Don't rush; it is okay to put the book down and pick it back up from time to time. Reading a book about stress should not be an additional stressor in your life. Let's begin together.



## PART 1

# The Causes of Stress

Your worries will not add hours to your life, but they might take hours away. Most people don't start their day wondering how they might shorten their lives—at least I hope they don't. But the amount of stress people carry may be inadvertently doing just that. According to an article in *Science Daily*, being under heavy stress may shorten life expectancy by more than two years.<sup>1</sup> In Part 1 of this book, we will take a closer look at the stress in our lives—its causes and its impact.

## Chapter 1

### FEAR: THE STRUGGLE THAT AMPLIFIES STRESS

**K**ara was the type of person who seemed to be successful at everything she did. In her job, she was respected for her ability and character. Her work ethic was outstanding, and her supervisors recognized her for being a valuable part of the company. She worked hard and achieved excellent results. So why did weighty feelings of inadequacy overwhelm her? Why was her mind plagued with all she needed to do? Why was sleep becoming more difficult at the end of a full day?

Fear was at the core of stress and anxiety for Kara. Kara's fear of not measuring up might have seemed unbelievable to anyone who looked at her life and all her successes, but her stress revealed that she was far from the confident person most people perceived her to be. Her fears both motivated and impeded her. Maybe you can relate.

Working hard and managing your responsibilities well are good things. They show that you want to approach life with excellence and be a faithful steward of the roles, relationships, and responsibilities God has

given you. However, the motive behind *why* you work hard is crucial. It can take some exploring to figure out, but understanding your driving motivation can help you get to the root cause of your stress.

I sat down with Kara to revisit the last time she felt like she didn't measure up. She mentioned a meeting she'd had with the executives in her company. She felt like she barely contributed to the conversation and that the comments she made were average at best and irrelevant at worst. She was embarrassed. *What if* she lacked the expertise needed to contribute effectively to the conversation? *What if* her boss was embarrassed by Kara's contribution? *What if* she let the executives down? These fear-based thoughts stayed with her through the day, and she stayed up late that night considering how she might be more prepared for future meetings. When she finally fell asleep, her sleep was restless, and she woke feeling weighed down and exhausted.

During her counseling session with me, I allowed Kara to unpack her fears by reflecting on all the ways she felt she had failed. I asked her to tell me what else had gone wrong at work and what that meant for her. For a few minutes, we considered the possible results if she truly hadn't contributed anything helpful to the meeting. She quickly rattled off several dreaded possibilities that came to her mind. *Maybe I was too quiet? I should have shared more. They probably thought I was clueless.* She went on. *When I suggested that the direction they were taking had some concerning outcomes, I probably looked like a worrywart who will only hold the company back!* Going further into her *what-ifs*, I asked what those scenarios said about her. She feared she would no

longer be asked to contribute, or even worse, that she'd be replaced.

After a few minutes of exploring her negative thinking, I then asked Kara to share something positive about her work situation. It could be anything she wasn't thinking about at that moment yet was still true about her situation. It took some time, as negative thoughts seem to always come easier and more quickly than positive ones. Eventually she called to mind the personal invitation from her boss to attend that meeting, an invitation that was not extended to all her colleagues. She was also included on an email after the meeting encouraging recipients to submit their feedback at their convenience. She then recalled how her boss had expressed appreciation for Kara joining their team. After I gave her time to add to the list of encouragements, she admitted the fears of being replaced seemed almost silly.

Until this point, the conversation had been focused on Kara. However, it seemed that when she started to consider the positive realities of the situation, her focus shifted from herself to God. She began to share times in the past when things had been difficult, but God was faithful to help her. She recalled the process of getting hired with this company. It was so sovereignly orchestrated that there was no way to deny that God had given her this job. She recounted many other times when God gave her energy and insight to do her job well and affirmed that even if the things she feared most happened, she believed God would be faithful to help her. *Even if* her boss was disappointed in her, she

was loved by God. *Even if* she lost her job, she knew God would provide.

Kara's *what-if* fears had enlarged her stress. But as she switched from focusing on herself to focusing on God, her *what-ifs* turned to *even-ifs*.

## **YOUR OWN WHAT-IFS AND EVEN-IFS**

What fears are you struggling with that may be leading to stress in your life? *What if* you cannot work out the relational conflict in your life? *What if* you don't get that promotion? *What if* you get sick? *What if* your kids make poor choices as they grow up? *What if* people reject you?

*Your what-ifs can turn to even-ifs when you focus on who God is and how you have seen God work in your life.* How has he sustained you? In what ways has he been faithful? Consider the many ways he has helped you. These can become what are sometimes called Ebenezers, taken from 1 Samuel 7:12. "Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'" You can fight stress by composing a good list of the ways God has helped you thus far. These "stones of remembrance" can give you confidence that the same God who faithfully carried you in the past will continue to do so in the future.

Rehearsing the aspects of God's nature and character as given to us in Scripture can also help refresh our understanding of what is true in our situation. What has God said about himself that gives you peace? Here is just a sampling of truths given to us in Scripture to

help train your thinking when the *what-ifs* start to flood your mind:

- **God will help you.**

Psalm 34:17: “When the righteous cry for help, the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.”

Psalm 46:1: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

- **God will give you grace.**

2 Corinthians 9:8: “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

2 Corinthians 12:8–9: “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

- **God will give you rest.**

Psalm 4:8: “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.”

Psalm 23:2: “He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.”

No matter the circumstance and despite how we feel, these truths are unchanging. They are sure. Are there other truths from Scripture that come to mind? As you read and ponder these verses, notice any shifts

in your thinking. Allow those realities to affirm that *even if* things feel overwhelming or volatile, God is your steady help. This kind of thinking alleviates, rather than elevates, stress.

As a believer, you are a loved child of God. You are a valued son or daughter of the King and a friend of Jesus. You are precious in the sight of God. This is true of you not because you are successful at work, have a completed to-do list, or because you never worry about situations. These truths are not contingent on you never failing or struggling. These are not true because of what you have done or left undone. They are true only because you trust in Jesus's perfect work for you. Take your *what-if* fears to the Lord and rest in the knowledge that *even if* the worst happens, you can trust him.

## STRESS TEST

Rate your stress on a scale of 0 to 10 right now. A rating of 0 means you feel little to no stress when you think about your circumstances, and 10 is the worst you can possibly feel. Without thinking too long about it give yourself a rating. Write your rating here or in your journal. \_\_\_\_\_

Take time to journal through these prompts. Go at whatever pace you need to work through this exercise in a way that is helpful.

1. Identify one fear that is currently bringing stress to your life. In your journal write out one or two sentences to describe the situation.
2. Write three or four more sentences to expound on the fear from prompt 1. Answer these

questions: *What if* the fear is true, what will that mean for your life?

3. Now, shift your thoughts to the Lord and write down your answers for each of these questions: How has he helped you in the past? Where have you seen his care for you? What Scripture gives you hope despite your fears? Write as much as you need to process your thoughts.
4. Reflect on the truth about God that you wrote about in prompt 3. *Even if* your fear is true, it doesn't change who God is for you. Does knowing this change your level of fear, and how?

Once you have completed the exercise above, take a moment to take a few deep breaths and turn your heart to the Lord in prayer. Then rate your stress on a scale of 0 to 10 once more. \_\_\_\_\_

*Note:* Two things to remember as you engage this section of each chapter.

1. If your score does not change, it's okay! The number is not a grade. The purpose is to help you become more aware of what raises and lowers stress. Stress recovery is a process and a practice. In time you will notice changes, but it may not happen right at the start.
2. Revisit these exercises anytime you feel stress rising. Take time to review what you wrote, breathe, and pray. Allowing space to meditate on the exercises will reinforce what you are learning in each section.