

Stress Management: Young Children Can Teach Us Well

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Several years ago, I attended a two-day conference on stress reduction. During the last few minutes of the conference, the speaker told us that if we really wanted to know about reducing stress, we should observe a four or five year old child for a day. She theorized that young children do not have stress because they live in the here and now. I was intrigued by this idea so I took her suggestion and made some general observations about young children.

One observation I made, was that young children are good at setting boundaries. They are very adept at saying, "No." Somehow as adults, we lose the ability to say, "No" at times. Our decisions are often made in reaction to pressure, wanting to avoid guilt or wanting to make others happy. Young children do not respond to those kinds of pressures. We need to ask ourselves; are we over-promising, over-committing or over-doing?

Secondly, I noticed that young children find enjoyment in simple things: picking dandelions for mom, eating ice cream, playing, or watching the rain. As adults, often we do not take time to appreciate the simple things. Instead, we often look for fulfillment by trying to fill the void in our heart with expensive toys, prestige, or food. When we do not get what we expect, how often do we grumble? How many of us are truly thankful for all of the Lord's blessings?

Thirdly, I observed that young children freely express their emotions, even when those emotions are negative. As adults, we often have problems with this. We pretend that everything is fine and we internalize the negative emotions. These can morph into anxiety or depression. Sometimes, we can stuff the negative emotions so far down that they become unrecognizable. These negative emotions can mutate into physical ailments. These physical ailments can become quite serious. The negative emotions can also mutate into distorted thinking. We come to believe that we are unloved, unlovable and unworthy. Negative thoughts and emotions can be discerned and dealt with according to God's direction.

Lastly, I observed that young children are quick to forgive. They relate in the here and now and can forgive in the here and now. Young children do not carry grudges. In contrast, adults find it difficult to live in the here and now. We worry about too many things instead of giving our worries to our Heavenly Father. We compound our stress by carrying grudges and not forgiving easily. On our own, we cannot forgive; however, with God's power we can. It is through Him and only Him that we can forgive others.

Young children tend to live in the here and now and do not worry. As adults, we can better manage our stress successfully by leaning on our Heavenly Father.

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