

Module Seven

More Ways to Stress Less

*And I said, if there's peace to be found in the world,
A heart that was humble might hope for it here.*

Thomas Moore

Welcome back! It's hard to believe how quickly these modules have passed. How did last week go for you and your family? Was there anyone you were able to forgive? Are you noticing that you are beginning to look at stress and conflict a little differently?

I would love to hear about your experiences; please post them in our Facebook group or email me at overtakenbygrace@gmail.com and share your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. We've covered so much material and I want our last module together to focus on some other wonderful ways to be more at peace with yourself and others.

Rest

In our fast-paced society, we are continuously plugged into a device, over-scheduled, and in all honesty, worn out. Being overtired can make us cranky, irritable, and overly sensitive to others, which can lead to more conflict. Yet the Bible has the perfect solution for weariness. It is found in Matthew 11:28–30. My favorite translation of this verse is from the Message: “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I will show you how to take a real rest.” What a glorious invitation from our Lord. The reason Jesus can speak life through this verse is because he lived it. Jesus was the perfect example of resting. Time and time again in scripture you find Jesus performing a miracle and then going off to be alone with the Father; speaking to the multitudes and going off alone to be with the Father. He saw great needs, people died, so he needed this time alone. Even when his beloved disciples

were caught in the middle of a storm, Jesus was sleeping. So, if our Lord and Savior needs to rest, how much more in our humanness do we need to rest.

Now think about God the Father, the creator of heaven and earth. After working for six days, he rested. Rest is so important to God he even gave us a commandment to keep the Sabbath day holy. The word *Sabbath* means to rest and abstain from work. During times of rest, we can take the Lord's invitation to come away with him, to learn his ways, the unforced rhythms of his grace.

So how do we do this practically?

- We can lie down, breathe deeply, and ask God to refill us with his love.
- We can get enough sleep at night or take a short nap during the day.
- We can listen to quiet music and let the peace of God wash over us.
- We can unplug from electronics for short times, put our phones on vibrate, or let voicemail take our calls.

Each of you will find your own way to rest your mind and body. Try it for a week and see if you are more patient and loving being well rested.

Gratitude

The apostle Paul talks about the key to having the peace that passes all understanding, in Philippians 4:6–9: “Don’t be pulled in different directions or worried about a thing. Be saturated in prayer throughout each day, offering your faith-filled requests before God with overflowing gratitude. Tell him every detail of your life, then God’s wonderful peace that transcends human understanding, will make the answers known to you through Jesus Christ. So, keep your thoughts continuously fixed on all that is authentic and real, honorable and admirable, beautiful and respectful, pure and holy, merciful and kind. And fasten your thoughts on every glorious work of God, praising him always.

Follow the example of all we have imparted to you and the God of peace will be with you in all things” (TPT). The powerful message of this scripture is that the key to peace comes from gratitude; prayer; asking the Lord for what you need; and focusing your eyes, mind, thoughts, and looking in the direction of God’s goodness.

Now let’s apply this to our relationships. How often are you having a bad day and all you can see are the things that are wrong with yourself or the people that you love? If you want to apply this scripture to the situation, do what we talked about earlier—stop, drop, and pray. Give the Lord all your worries, resentments, and anger and begin to thank him for the people in your life, asking to see them the way he sees them. Start looking in the direction how God sees them, what’s good about them, what is beautiful about them, what is kind about them. I’ve come to learn in my own life that *when I change the way I think about things, the things I think about change*. In every situation there is a gift and a challenge. We always have a choice about which to focus on.

A study at the University of Berkeley¹ conducted fascinating research on three groups of subjects, all of whom were receiving counseling. Group one wrote a letter of gratitude once a week to someone in their life. Group two wrote about their negative emotions. And group three did no writing. The group that wrote a weekly letter of gratitude had significantly higher self-reported peace, elevated mood, harmonious relationships, and higher levels of focus and attention. This group also reported being more grateful in all areas of their life, even when they weren’t writing the letters.

I’ve seen this in my own life. About 20 years ago our family experienced a challenging series of events: my sister-in-law was dying of cancer, my baby was in the hospital, and I was physically and emotionally exhausted. I called a friend, crying about all the suffering. She told me I needed to write a gratitude list. In all honesty I got mad at her, and I told her I had nothing to be grateful for. She told me to sit down and not get up until I wrote down 10 things I was grateful for.

1. ¹ Wong, Joel and Brown, Joshua (2017). “How Gratitude Changes You and Your Brain” Greater Good Magazine: UC Berkeley’s GGSC. Available at greatergood.berkeley.edu

Something amazing happened. At first it took me almost an hour to think of 10 things that I was grateful for. The next day, I did the same thing and it took me 10 minutes to think of 10 things I was grateful for. Then, the next day, something astonishing happened. It was like the floodgates of thankfulness opened, and I wrote 100 things I was grateful for. My circumstances had not changed but the direction I was looking in did. The simple act of putting pen to paper to write this gratitude list focused my mind, and I could see that God was still there in the middle of the suffering. The more things I wrote down that I was grateful for, the more I saw to be grateful for. It's now been over 20 years, and daily I thank the Lord in writing for both the joys and even the challenges of life. This simple act points me in the direction of God's fingerprint on my life.

Giving Thanks for How Much God Takes Care Of

How powerful to think about the magnitude of God's majesty, the miraculous nature of life.

We never have to think about beating our hearts, holding the planets in place, or having oxygen. By God's grace it just happens.

A baby never has to think about learning to crawl. Never has to figure out how to walk or talk. By God's design it just happens.

That we have thoughts and feelings that come and go and underneath it all the Holy Spirit gives us wisdom to take the right action. By God's grace it just happens.

We also never have to do anything to earn God's love and goodness, we only receive it. For it is God's nature to give.

2 Corinthians 9:8-10 The Voice expresses this so beautifully.

God is ready to overwhelm you with more blessings than you could ever imagine so that you'll always be taken care of in every way and you'll have more than enough to share.

Where have you seen God take care of things without you doing a thing. Post it on our Facebook group, others would love to hear your insights.

Here are some ways to practice thanking God and being more grateful:

- Ask God to help you to see the good in circumstances, events, your surroundings, and the people you love.
- Go outside and hunt for beautiful things, thanking God that he created every one of them because he loves you.
- Notice the smell, taste, texture, sound, and shape of objects.
- When you're with the people you love, slow down enough to notice the beautiful things about them.
- In the middle of a challenge, ask God to show you the gift in it.
- Write down daily at least three things you thank God for.

First Thessalonians 5:18 so beautifully expresses what God wants us to do: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." It doesn't get much clearer than that. It doesn't say to give thanks in some things; it says *all* things. This simple practice is life changing and so good for your relationships.

Unplug from Electronics and Social Media

Social media is amazing. You can connect with people all over the world, learn things you've never known before, and share your own unique gifts. Yet technology has a downside. When used in excess, we miss out on the gifts of human relationships, hugs, touch, eye contact, laughter, and the sharing of experience.

In a virtual world, we miss the beauty of nature; moving our bodies; and deep personal relationships with God, ourselves, and each other. Studies are showing the addictive nature of technology. When our brains are engaged in social media, texting, video games, and Internet

surfing, the pleasure center of our brains lights up the same way it would if we were using drugs. When this happens, the part of the brain that controls rational thought and self-control does not work. When used in moderation technology is a great tool, but the key is moderation.

Here are some practical tips to develop more balance between your in-person relationships and your virtual ones:

- Pray and ask the Lord to help you use technology in a healthy way.
- Set timers beforehand to limit your time on a device.
- While you are with others, turn off your phone.

Nothing is more important than the people in front of you and beside you. Make the time to slow down, give thanks, and deeply connect with God and those you love.