

Module One
The Cause and Cure for Stress and Conflict

*The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach,
is joy. There is radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see;
and to see, we have only to look. I beseech you to look!*

Fra Giovanni Giocondo

As you and your family go through your day-to-day life, how often do you think about your emotions and your relationships? Most people function on autopilot when it comes to these areas. Many still communicate in ways that create stress and conflict. They ignore their emotions until they explode. While they may go through periods when this rarely occurs, some people will continually act in ways that push the emotional buttons of others.

Many are unaware of these issues until a crisis hits --a crisis can be fighting, addictions, illness, or even worse, violence.

Now, think about who or what causes stress or conflict in your life. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and ask yourself what the source of the stress might be. Take as much time as you need to explore your thoughts.

Did you see your friends, parents, partner or work as the source of stress and conflict in your life? Did you see the government, your responsibilities, or your problems being the cause of the stress and conflict in your life? Did you see yourself?

Let's examine some things that people say contribute to stress:

Financial difficulties	Poor communication	Illness	Emotional problems
What others say	Overworked	Work	Irrational behavior of others
Being bullied	Family issues	Overwhelmed	Disorganization
Addictions	Fear	Stress or anxiety	Problems

You may feel all these things are the root of your stress and conflict; it may look like your circumstances and other people are the source of your stress. Yet what if this is a misguided belief, a misunderstanding about how life works. In his book ¹“Clarity,” author Jamie Smart shares that our experience comes from thought in the moment. The wisdom writer in the book of Proverbs reinforces this truth: “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:6, KJV). It is not the circumstances themselves but the thoughts we have in the moment that lead to our feelings. When you see that thought in the moment creates our experience it takes so much unnecessary thinking off our minds because we don’t have to figure out our thinking or fix it only understand how it works.

You Don’t Have to Believe Everything You Think

As a human, your mind continually thinks a variety of thoughts. You have no control over what thoughts come to your mind, yet you do have control and power over how you deal with those thoughts. Remember that thoughts pass; you don’t have to act on every thought that comes into your head.

I love the metaphor of a train of thought. Our thoughts are like trains. So, let’s play with this a little bit. New York City is home to an enormous train hub called Penn Station. At any moment as many as 20 trains are in that station, going in different directions. Imagine you wanted to go uptown, but without knowing it, you innocently hopped on the first train that came by. After riding this train for a while, you hear the conductor announce, “Next stop, downtown.” Would

1. ¹ Smart, Jamie. (2013). *Clarity* audiobook. Available from: Audible.com [accessed 2018]

you blame the train or would you just get off the train and wait for another? It's the same with our thoughts. Sometimes we hop on a worry train, a fear train, an insecure train, a something's wrong train, a revenge train, an angry train, a not-enough train, or a multitude of other trains of thought. We all do it.

We can ride that train as long as we want. And just as the conductor announced you were heading to a destination you don't want to go to, you head toward unwanted or unexpected emotional destinations. Uncomfortable feelings are actually a warning system, to tell you that you're on a train heading away from wisdom and peace.

Your emotions are also like the gas gauge in your car that indicates when it's time to stop and refuel. A sign for you to stop and pray to gain clarity.

So, when these emotions come up, you can realize you hopped on a train of thought that is heading in a direction you don't want to go. At any moment you can remember that it is thought in the moment and you can choose to get off that train of thought and onto a train of wisdom and right action.

Psychologist Dr. Amy Johnson,² in her online program, *The Little School of Big Change*, says, "The problem is not that we have these thoughts; the problem is when we act on them." Everyone has crazy, irrational, and harmful thoughts from time to time. Yet when you understand the nature of thought, you can simply realize it is a thought and it loses its power. 1 Corinthians 10:13 New International Version (NIV) says it so clearly: No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.

2. ² Johnson, Amy. (2017) *The Little School of Big Change* online course, thelittleschoolofbigchange.com. [accessed 2017]

At times everyone feels overwhelmed and thinks, “I can’t go on any longer.” The people who take their lives are those who act on that thought rather than just noticing it’s a thought, and that once the thought passes they can move on. The same is true with thoughts of revenge or wanting to hurt someone else. These thoughts only become dangerous when acted on. If you have thoughts of suicide, hurting yourself or someone else, please remember that it is a random thought train, and you do not — do you hear me? *You do not have to act on it.* You have a choice. You can say no to that thought and ask the Holy Spirit to take over your thinking and show you how to move forward in peace. If you can’t unhook your mind from a harmful thought, please speak to somebody who is calm and get some loving support ASAP or text 741741 or call [1-800-273-8255](tel:1-800-273-8255) for crisis support.

This is where the power of God’s Word comes in. When you fill your mind and your heart with God’s Word, you are anchored in truth. Deuteronomy 30:19–20 says, “This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you, life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life.”

Here is how the word becomes so personal, you can pray *God help me to choose life, to listen to your voice and to experience your peace. In Jesus name.*

What I have seen in my own life is when I realize I am feeling “thought in the moment” the feelings pass much quicker. It seems to me that’s how humans work. We feel what we think and then it passes. When we get caught up in the contents of our thinking, the story and we feel that too, everyone does it. With God’s help we are one thought, one moment away from peace, clarity and wisdom.

Meaning

Are minds are also meaning-making machines. We’ve been hardwired for that, so when a circumstance happens our mind does what a mind does, and it tries to make meaning out of it and it tries to protect us. But what if the only meaning was, we feel what we feel because we

think what we think. And this is not to say that you have to fix or change your thoughts or heal your thoughts. Simply go to God, seek His guidance in what is truth.

The simplicity of this goes back to the word. Romans 12:2 says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." There is new thought always arising. A glimpse into God's word, meditating on his truth is how we renew our mind. From that space insight arises, wisdom arises. So what if, and I may be completely wrong here, what if you're always okay. Even when you struggle, even when you have feelings, even when you are challenged you are okay. Your mind does what a mind does, but it doesn't define who you are. Play with this for a bit. What if at any moment your one thought away from wisdom, clarity, an aha moment, from peace. How different would your life be?

Resilience within You

You are hardwired for resiliency, equipped and empowered by God almighty to handle whatever circumstances and challenges you face. I know I've walked through seasons where I felt overwhelmed. There were moments when I'd cry out to God, "I can't take another thing!" And yet I could.

What I realized was that no matter what challenge I faced, I also had wisdom within me from the Holy Spirit to guide me through. I wasn't damaged or broken by what had happened. But I was broken open so I could hear, experience, and receive the wisdom that was always there from God.

The same is true for you and your loved ones. Through God's power alive within us we are more than overcomers in Christ Jesus, see Romans 8:37. Your circumstances don't have to change for you to be OK. Other people don't have to change for you to be OK. Because of your God given resilience you were always OK. You may need to act, you may need to have hard conversations, you may need treatments, but the core of who you are is untouched by anything external. We are like a beach ball. If you keep trying to push a beach ball under water, it always pops back up. That's just the way we are.

We can feel overwhelmed in circumstances. We can feel overwhelmed by our own emotions. and we can feel overwhelmed by how much we think. And just like that beach ball, you feel like you're being pushed under the water and held down. But just like that beach ball, you too will pop up again. 1 Peter 5:10, oozes with hope. "In his kindness God called you to share in his eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So, after you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation."

Have you ever noticed that you can go through something really hard and feel pushed down, and then a day later, a week later, an hour later, sometimes a year later, all of a sudden, you're back up again?

Please hear me—you *are not your circumstances*. You are not what you have done; you are not what other people say about you. You are whole. You are resilient, made in the image and likeness of God, see Genesis 1:27. You've been given the mind of Christ, 1 Corinthians 2:16. But sometimes we get caught up in our thinking, and when our thinking overwhelms us, the wisdom that is always there, the resilience that's always there, simply gets covered up.

Take a good look at your own resiliency. If you woke up this morning, guess what? You already lived through everything you experienced before today. It didn't take you out. You're still here. The other image I really love to think about with resiliency is the ocean. At the surface are tons of waves, and the water can be choppy, with strong currents pulling in different directions. But if you go underneath that water, underneath the surface, it's peaceful and still. Because that's the nature of the ocean. What you see on the surface is what the weather is doing to it. We are just like that. Our thoughts determine what we are feeling outwardly in the moment, but underneath, as children of God, we have deep peace.

A well of wisdom, a well of resiliency, a well of clarity within you is untouched by the circumstances of your life and who you really are cannot be touched by external circumstances. Sure, you're going to have feelings and thoughts, we all think and we can't control which thoughts come into our head. But we don't have to take them so seriously. We don't have to

listen to those voices telling us, "You're not good enough for this. Why'd you do that? What's wrong with you?" That's just a little voice in your head, random thoughts that really are meaningless. But then you'll have a thought, an a-ha moment, where all of a sudden, all those voices quiet down. And when those voices quiet down, you'll know what to do. Wisdom will arise on what your next step is. Just like there's a butterfly inside every caterpillar, there is innate, God-given resiliency and beauty within each of us. The essence of who we are is untouched by our circumstances.

I love how Philippians 4:7 from The Message Bible says it, "Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life."

Even when you think and feel broken, you are whole. Underneath the thinking and the feelings there's a deep well of wisdom, peace and love within all of us. It is the essence of who we are; for we are from Christ within us.

I saw the evidence of this on vacation in Arizona. My husband and I traveled to a beautiful place called "The Boulders." As we drove, we were greeted by massive rock formations. It looked like tons of rock had been piled on top of each other. Then we began reading about the site and we discovered what really happened to the boulders.

Bedrock was shaken by a devastating tectonic plate shift, a massive earthquake led to a mammoth mountain of granite arising out of the rubble.

Then billions of years of challenges ensued. Water, wind, and acid rain carved these extraordinary boulders. What we saw was prehistoric. Awestruck and laughing, my husband and I waited for a T-Rex or Fred Flintstone to appear.

God and nature together in perfect harmony, continuously bringing beauty out of devastation.

I have seen this time and time again in life. The challenges we face pale in comparison to what God can do with them. The innate resiliency that is hard wired into all humans and nature is a pure gift of grace. Out of the challenge God brings wisdom, strength, blessings, and radiant beauty.

Yet, just like these boulders, what is most evident is not the devastation but the beauty that comes from it.

If you woke up this morning God has given you this gift of resiliency and something so beautiful may right now be arising from the challenge you are facing.

2 Corinthians 4:16 The Message Bible expresses this so eloquently, "So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace."

So Dear Ones, where have you seen resiliency and God's grace in your lives? It's there, just keep looking in that direction and you will see it. Post on our private Facebook group, we would love to hear what you're seeing.

Resiliency in Others

So now that we have looked at the resiliency within ourselves, let's look at it in those we love and the people in our lives.

As I began to understand a little deeper my own resiliency and the wisdom within, I noticed that same resiliency in the people I love. I have to admit, for many years I had a lot of anxious, worried thoughts about the people I love, about the challenges they faced, and their capacity to handle it. But as I took a deeper look into the nature of how we experience circumstances, that we are resilient, that we have everything we need in the moment to move through the challenges and joy in life, I began seeing that in my loved ones also.

One day I was feeling weary, exhausted from the challenges a loved one was facing, and thinking that this person's challenge was creating my experience of distress. I couldn't do much to change the challenge my loved one was facing. But when I realized that my thoughts about this loved one's challenge was actually creating my suffering, then I did have power over it. Because once I got a glimpse of my own thinking, the experience I felt faded away, dissolved, even though my loved one's challenge remained.

I realized that my loved one had his own train track and I was so weary because I was trying to pull his train on my track, and that was physically impossible because he had his own journey, his own train, his own track. God was his conductor not me. And what a beautiful thing to acknowledge that no matter what others are going through, they are just like you and me. They are whole, resilient and underneath their thinking and feelings, is a deep well of wisdom, a deep well of well-being.

We can never pull anybody else's train on our track. We can never control what another does. What we can do is love people, encourage them, pray for them, and understand them. If your children are minors, you have a different level of responsibility, yet seeing the resiliency even in little ones will help all of you!

And, I admit that in the past, before I knew this, I would try to control the uncontrollable, and that not only led to a lot of my own suffering but also to a lot of conflict that I regret. Yet I'm also aware that in that moment, I was doing the best I could at the level of thinking I had in the moment. It's the same with the people we love. We are always doing the best we can at the level of thought we have in that moment. It is wonderful we can see that resiliency, when we can

see the people we love the way God sees them, the way God created them. One of my prayers is, ***“God, show me how to see those I love the way you see them. Show me how to love them the way you love them.”***

So, here's a question for reflection: Where have you tried to pull someone else's train onto your track? Where have you seen the resiliency in those you love, in moments where you didn't think they would know what to do, but they did and it was completely different from what you thought? Jot that down and take a moment to give thanks for the well of wisdom, resiliency, and peace inside of you and the people you love.

Let's Review

Your journey to rediscovering the peace, love, and strength God placed inside of you begins now. For some of you it may feel like a long road, yet it's not. You have everything within you from the Holy Spirit to live a life of wisdom, peace, and blessing. Enjoy the experience as much as the outcome. Here is how you get started:

- Understand the truth of what is really creating stress and conflict in your life.
- Realize your resiliency
- Remember the thought feeling connection
- Notice the moments when you feel more peaceful
- Enjoy the ride