

RELIEF FROM STRESS PSALM 4:1-8

THE LIFE OF DAVID IN THE PSALMS #16

During their football season in 1985, the Nebraska team wore the number 94 on their helmets in tribute to Brian Hiemer who had died on August 13th at the age of 21.

As an all-state kicker and tight end as well as year book editor and prom king, Brian had lived a storybook high school career. But that was at the small school in Shelby, Nebraska- population 720. Could Brian make it in the big time, at the University of Nebraska? Well, at first there was some question. He was cut from the team his freshman year, but he didn't give up. He persuaded coach Tom Osborn to give him another chance, and he did make the team his sophomore year.

10th string on the depth chart, but he did make the team. Brian then proceeded to rise from 10th to 1st string. In his junior year, he caught 12 passes and led the team with 4 touchdown receptions. And now at a rock-solid 6'3", and 218 pounds, he was considered one of the pre-season stars of the highly ranked Nebraska Corn Huskers, a potential All American tight end.

And football wasn't his only claim to fame. Brian was an excellent student, maintaining over a 3 point grade point average, and he was active in many other activities, widely diversified, and excelling in all of them. His receiver coach Gene Huey said of Brian, "He is an high achiever, not wanting to fail at anything."

At times, his parents were concerned for him. Brian seemed to function under a great deal of stress in many areas of his life, but they overlooked them because they really wanted for him to excel so badly that they were inwardly overjoyed at

all of his varied accomplishments. So when his mother Lalola sensed that Brian was unusually quiet and restless on that Tuesday, August 13, she wasn't overly concerned. He was to report to preseason football practice the next day, perhaps he was getting ready mentally and emotionally for the new season.

But on that Tuesday, Brian walked out behind the barn, and shot himself with a 22 caliber rifle. He just felt that he couldn't take the stresses anymore. His family, his classmates, his football team and coaches, greatly grieved his death. Everyone viewing the games were reminded of his death every time they saw one of the Corn Husker helmets with the number 94 on it. Stress and the pressures of life had taken its ultimate toll on another soul, and thousands of students were left wondering as they examined their own stress-filled lives, "How much more am I going to be able to take?"

None of us is unaware of the stresses of living today. The very term "stress" is one of the most popular terms in our vocabulary today. Doctors continually speak of stress and the toll that it takes on our physical health. Employers speak of stress and the productivity that it costs the company. Our families tell us that stress is robbing them of quality time. We all know that stress is certainly among the top ten on the public enemy list.

Yet knowledge of the problem often does not seem to help with its remedy. Too often, in spite of our knowledge, the stresses continue to escalate. And our lives become more harried, our lives less productive, and our families more frustrated or worse yet apathetic.

It is of some comfort to us to realize that our generation is not the only one that

has had to deal with stress. Sometimes we think that because of the emphasis that is placed upon it today- but that assumption is not true.

David suffered thru periods of his life under great stress, and he often refers to this problem in the Psalms. This evening, as we look at Psalm 4, we would ask him to help us with this problem with his wisdom. We do not expect that all of the answers will be given in 8 brief verses- this problem is far too complex for that kind of unrealistic expectation. But we can and do expect some helpful principles in dealing with stress in our lives.

Let's read this Psalm together:

PS 4:1 Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.

PS 4:2 How long, O men, will you turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

PS 4:3 Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself; the LORD will hear when I call to him.

PS 4:4 In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

PS 4:5 Offer right sacrifices and trust in the LORD.

PS 4:6 Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?" Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD.

PS 4:7 You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.

PS 4:8 I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.

We will look at this Psalm in 3 sections. In verse 1, we find David's problem stated; in verses 2-6a, we see the reasons for his problem; and then in verses 6b-8, we will discover some helpful suggestions in dealing with the problem.

1. The problem simply stated in verse 1 is the problem of stress. READ Psalm 4:1.

1. Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.

Now the historical setting of this Psalm is important to consider in order to understand the stress that David was under at this point in his life. If you have a real good memory, you might recall that Psalm 4 is one of 2 Psalms that we have that were written by King David immediately after Absalom had attempted his coup of the throne. These Psalms are found back to back in our English Bibles. A couple of weeks ago, we looked at Psalm 3. The first one, Psalm 3 was written

very shortly after King David fled the city of Jerusalem. Many commentators feel that there is a distinct possibility that it was written on the very morning of the battle between David's army and Absalom's army - the conflict that would determine the future of the nation of Israel. Psalm 3 is divided into 3 distinct sections. The theme that wove through Psalm 3 like a thread is **FEAR**. We looked together at how David handled fear in his life.

1. The first segment of this Psalm shows David's willingness to face his fears honestly. *O LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!*² *Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."* 2. But David did not allow his feelings of fear to immobilize him, but he rather chose to put his trust in the delivering power of the Lord. ³ *But you are a shield around me, O LORD; you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.* 3. In the third segment David testifies to some of the results that occurred in his life because of the decision that he had made to trust in the Lord. David experienced the gifts of sleep, serenity and salvation as he trusted in God to deliver him.

Now we must remember the historical context of Psalm 4 in order to interpret it because it is the same as Psalm 3. David is experiencing the Political lowpoint of his entire life. He has been king for several decades now and has built the nation of Israel up to the place where it is the major power in the Middle East. But now, his own son, Absalom, has organized a coup against the throne. Secretly, Absalom has convinced key national leaders that it is time for a change and has mustered a sizeable army of supporters. David speaks of 10 of thousands in Absalom's army in Psalm 3 that we looked at a couple of weeks ago. Then, very

suddenly, in a surprise move Absalom openly attacked the city of Jerusalem. David was taken totally off guard. He was not prepared for Absalom's coup - and he was forced to run for his life, fleeing his palace and capital.

Now Psalm 3 & 4 deal with the 2 major emotions that David felt during this time in his life.

Psalm 3, that we looked at previously, revealed the **fear** that David felt. This Psalm was likely written before Psalm 4, probably on the very morning of David's battle with Absalom's army. David was fearful of what would happen that day, he was fearful for the future of the nation of Israel, he was fearful for himself personally. But David was able to overcome his personal fears and with courage take back the throne which God had given to him.

In Psalm 4, David speaks of the tremendous stress under which he was functioning. Even though this Psalm, unlike the previous one, does not have an historical subtitle linking it to Absalom's coup, most commentators link it to this time in David's life for 2 reasons. First, the content of the Psalm fits this period in David's life as we will see, and second, this 4th Psalm historically has been connected with the 3rd Psalm - even being connected in some ancient documents, and the 3rd Psalm clearly gives this historical setting in its inscription. So then, this Psalm was probably written by David just after his own son had driven him from his palace in humiliation. Certainly, this setting in David's life was one of the most stressful times that he endured.

The language that is used in verse 1 is most interesting for it paints a military picture in the mind of the reader in the original language- certainly an appropriate

one as David is considering his precarious situation. C.H. Spurgeon in his "Treasury of David" says of this verse, It presents "a figure taken from an army enclosed in a field, and hardly pressed by the surrounding enemy. God hath dashed down the rocks and given me room; he hath broken the barriers and set me in a large place."

David felt that he was pinned in by the opposing forces. He felt trapped in a canyon with mountains on each side, with no place to turn. So he pleads with God to give him some route of escape, some unknown tunnel, some relief from his distress.

Stresses have a way of smothering us in life. We feel trapped with no way of escape. It is interesting that this is even the derivation of the word Stress. Our English term comes from the Latin *strictus* which means to *draw tight or compress*. That is what stress does to us in life. It makes us feel almost claustrophobic, like we are being pressed upon by all kinds of demands. This was David's problem. Having fled from his thrown with the knowledge that Absalom was now ruling from Jerusalem with the hearts of the people behind him, David felt that there was no hope, no place to turn, no way of escape. He was suffering under great distress.

2. Now notice secondly with me the reasons for his stress. These are worthy of note because the reasons that David give here would not be the ones that we would naturally guess.

We would think that David's major fears would have come from his physical danger. After all, Absalom had an impressive army with him, and he was going to

come after David seeking to exterminate his own father as his rival once and for all. But David was not really that concerned with Absalom's military presence here- a military battle was something that David could deal with, and one that he had dealt with many times before. A battle was black and white, there was a winner and a loser, a victor and a conquered foe. This kind of clear cut event was not as difficult for a man like David to deal with.

But notice the factors that David mentions bringing stress into his life.

-humiliation (2a) *"How long, of men, will you turn my glory into shame?"*

David had gone from being king of the most powerful nation in the Middle East to being a hunted fugitive. The humiliation of it all is pictured in Shimei throwing rocks at him as he was forced to leave the city of Jerusalem in shame.

-slander (2b) *"how long will you love delusions and seek false gods?"*

Absalom's greatest tool in dethroning his father had been his slanderous tongue. As he sat by the city gate, he degraded his father the king saying that he would do this or that to help the people. You can promise everyone everything if you don't have to deliver, you know? Those who are out of power have a great advantage in that they can make great promises without ever having to deliver on them and then criticize every step that the one in power is making. That is exactly what Absalom had done. The Bible says that he had stolen the peoples' hearts away from David with his deceitful and slanderous tongue. And now as David had fled from the palace, the rumors and the gossip increased and spread. These caused great stress in David's life- a man who loved honesty, truth and integrity.

-personal frustration and anger (4). *In your anger, do not sin.* How easy it was

for David to boil with anger and frustration over all of these injustices that he had endured. And this natural tendency to seek personal revenge, not for the good of the nation or for God's program, but just for his own personal satisfaction caused stress in his life. Especially when he laid on his bed at night and his mind mulled over all of the events of the past days.

-gloom and despair (6a). *Many are asking, who can show us any good?* David's friends weren't helping him much. Instead of encouraging, they were just reaffirming that everything had fallen apart, that there was no hope for the future now, no light at the end of the tunnel could be seen. Perhaps this sense of hopelessness, not being able to see any way to get out of our stress-filled situation, brings the most stress of all into our lives.

So then David was under great stress, perhaps greater stress than any of us have felt. He was the king over God's people, responsible before God for the stability and direction of the nation. And now, he had been driven from his throne, the nation was in utter turmoil without a recognized leader, his own son Absalom was seeking his life, and above everything else, he had been totally humiliated, people were slandering him and telling all kinds of lies about him, he was battling frustration and vengeful thots in his own mind, and everyone around him seemed to be painting pictures of doom and gloom.

What a depressing picture! But that is what stress can do- in his life and in our lives if it is allowed to rule supreme.

3. Happily, David's life did not end in this state. He was able to once again gain control of the throne. The rival forces were conquered. And he lived many

more productive years, dying at an old age, full of accomplishments, and loved by his nation as a godly king. Part of the reason for his success was the fact that David was able to deal with stress productively in his life.

He gives us **3 remedies** in the final 3 verses that we want to observe this evening. As I mentioned earlier, these are not meant to be 3 quick and easy magical formulas to remove all stress from our lives- David continued to deal with stress. But they helped David, and they will also help us if we will put them into practice.

a. David maintained his fellowship with the Lord in the midst of his stresses.

READ 4:6b

Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD.

Now this is very critical to mention, because when stresses come upon us, when we feel hemmed in on every side, when our time and energies are at a premium, the first temptation that we face is to cut out of our schedule that which is not urgent, that which doesn't have to be done today. And among the first items to go can be our daily quiet time with the Lord in meditation and prayer. After all, we rationalize, we just don't have time for Bible reading today, we don't have time for prayer. We have too many other things which cannot wait, which must be done.

Now when we do this, we complicate our problem. We hurt ourselves for several reasons. First of all, totally apart from any spiritual value whatsoever, our daily quiet time with the Lord is of great value to us personally because it is a time when we break from the hectic schedule of life and have a segment of time in

quiet meditation. This in itself is of great value in combatting stress. But more importantly, we must recognize that our greatest helper in the battle against stress is the Lord himself. So when we fail to spend time with him, we cut ourselves off from our source of help, we sever ourselves from our greatest ally. He is the one who is able to clothe us with the shoes of peace. He is the one who is able to help us soothe our anxieties. He is the one who is able to give us a proper perspective on the situation.

So then, when we feel greatly distressed, one of the first questions that we should ask ourselves is "Am I spending regular time with the Lord in meditation upon his word and prayer?" Is the light of his face shining upon me in fellowship.

David realized the importance of maintaining fellowship with God- after all, he takes time to write this Psalm in the midst of this very stressful time. So too, we will be helped as we remember to not neglect times of meditation and prayer.

b. David also maintained proper priorities in the midst of his stresses. READ 4:7

⁷ You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound.

David had potentially lost a great deal in material possessions as he was writing this psalm. Remember, David was a wealthy man at this time in his life. Yet, potentially and probably from his perspective, David had lost his palatial home, all of his gold and silver reserves, tribute and tax money coming in, really all of his material possessions in the world. Rather than bemoaning his losses, however, David confesses that the joy that God gave into his heart was greater,

worth more, than their abundance of grain and wine. David's maintaining proper priorities helped him to deal with life's stresses.

I am convinced that some of the stresses that we endure in our generation, we bring upon ourselves because our priorities are out of whack. We look with covetous eyes at what our neighbor has when the Bible clearly says in the 10th commandment that we are not to covet our neighbor's wealth. And then we place ourselves in bondage in order to accumulate these material things that we could easily live without. And from that point on we bring stress after stress into our lives. Dads have to work more hours to maintain and to expand our material possessions bringing personal stress and family stress. Many wives are working simply to provide the extra material things, not necessities, causing a breakdown in family relationships, insecurity among children. Our lives are filled with stressful schedules, and instead of simplifying our lives, we try to solve the problem by taking on more. And we pay for our improper priorities. And stress is one of the major taskmasters.

Now I realize that we must work hard- it is God's will that we work hard. And every person has different tolerance levels so we certainly cannot set one model up as ideal for all family situations. What is God's will for one family might not be God's will for another family unit. And we go thru periods in our life when sometimes we have to endure that which is not ideal. I know that, and God's knows it. But within our own stress toleration, we must each search our hearts to make sure that our priorities are really right, so that we are not bringing added stress upon ourselves. David was a king with all of the fame, wealth and glory

that went along with that position. Yet he said that joy in his heart was worth more than the material prosperity of his enemies. Yes, David was under a great deal of stress. But at least he didn't compound his problem and add to it by having improper priorities.

3. But in the 3rd place, notice with me that David sought to maintain proper rest. READ 4:8.

⁸ *I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety.*

Have you ever wondered why God made us so that we need to have rest and sleep at night? After all, sleep appears to waste a third of our lives. If a person lives an average lifespan of 73-75 years, 25 years of that life will be spent in the unconscious state of sleep. God didn't have to do that you know. He could have created us like a battery with the capacity to run for 70-80 years before losing his power. But I believe that one reason for God creating people in the way that He did was that he knew that rest would help people to cope with stress.

If anyone had justification for staying up all night worrying about the state of the nation it would have been David. He had just been deposed as king. What was going to happen to his nation? His life was on the line. The world was falling apart. Yet he says that he will trust in the Lord and will lie down and get a good night's rest. In other words, David was careful to take care of himself physically.

Very seldom is anything constructive achieved by staying up all night worrying about something. Usually, the matter is bigger and more complicated the next day. We need rest. And I think that we are not violating the principle of the text by

expanding it and saying that this would include not only sleep at night but getting away from pressures and taking care of ourselves physically by having proper nutrition and physical exercise. Days off that are really days off. Not just days not going to work stewing about the problems at home, but days away from work's stresses. Vacations. Even short breaks of rest for the mind and body. Physical recreation. These are very important in our lives and must not be overlooked. But like our quiet time with the Lord, time off is something that is not urgent, so it can be continually put off to our own detriment.

So then David gives to us 3 principles helpful in dealing with stress. Maintain our fellowship with God. Then we will be sure that we don't cut ourselves off from our source of help. Maintain proper priorities in our life. Then we will be sure that we don't complicate and worsen our stressful situations needlessly. Maintain proper rest. Then we will be sure that we are keeping the balance in our physical lives that God intended for us to have.

Stress can be a wonderful spice to our lives. We all just need to be sure that we don't spoil the taste of the food by seasoning it too much.