

How to Manage Life's Stresses



Take Charge of Your Life!

HOW TO MANAGE LIFE'S STRESSES

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Disclaimer

This information is based on the experience and research of the author. He believes that those who follow the principles outlined in this book will find their lives greatly enhanced. However, he assumes no responsibility for reader's personal choices.

Written by David Pearce

HOW TO MANAGE LIFE'S STRESSES

“Life is difficult.” These are the words used by Scott Peck to commence his international best seller, *‘The Road Less Travelled’* (referring to the spiritual road). Most will agree that this statement is certainly true. However, our personal attitude can make life better or worse. He further states, *“Once we truly understand and accept life, then it is no longer difficult.”*

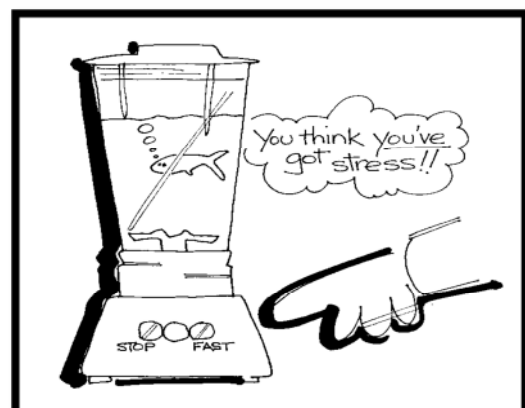
If we could view our life on a time line we would clearly see a series of problems. For example: experiencing the difficulties of childhood or the trauma of teenage years. The adjustment of moving into an adult world. Financial difficulties, relationship difficulties, children difficulties, sickness and old age, are a few more realities to face.

If problems are inevitable in life, we are wise if we learn how to cope, rather than bemoaning they exist. Learning discipline in life and relating to problems in an attitude of repair, is a responsible, satisfactory and better solution. This book attempts to find answers to some of life’s perplexities.

Coping with Stress

As long as we live, we face stress. Only dead people are stress free. Learning how to cope effectively is really the most important consideration. Stress is not bad; it’s simply the body’s normal biochemical response to pressure. If we handle the stresses of life, we will perform at our best. But if we are not coping with our daily stress levels we will flounder in inefficiency. To illustrate, consider a violin string. Too little pressure will produce poor sound, but too much tension may cause the string to snap!

This also happens to people who find life difficult and become stressed. They sometimes break under pressure. In the animal world stress is released by fight or flight, but it’s



not that simple for humans.

The situation is serious because stress is a breeding ground for disease. Unresolved or continuing stress can actually result in body organs malfunctioning, leading to physical and mental disorders.

There are several factors involved in stress management.

1. Attitude is important.

- a. We can let the problems eat at us, (this is destructive) or,
- b. We can constructively find solutions, or,
- c. If there is no solution, we can learn better coping skills.

A healthy attitude can certainly reduce stress levels.

2. Ineffective solutions such as drugs or alcohol are often resorted to as escape mechanisms. The effect of sedatives or depressants is temporary. They create an illusion, but when they wear off, the problems remain.

3. Treat the problem, not the symptoms. We can take a painkiller for a headache, but better results come from treating the cause of the headache. For example, if the headache is caused by fruitless worry, it's better to solve the problem. If an unhealthy lifestyle is to blame, make the necessary changes.

Effective coping strategies -

a. Relaxation therapy – stress free time out is important.

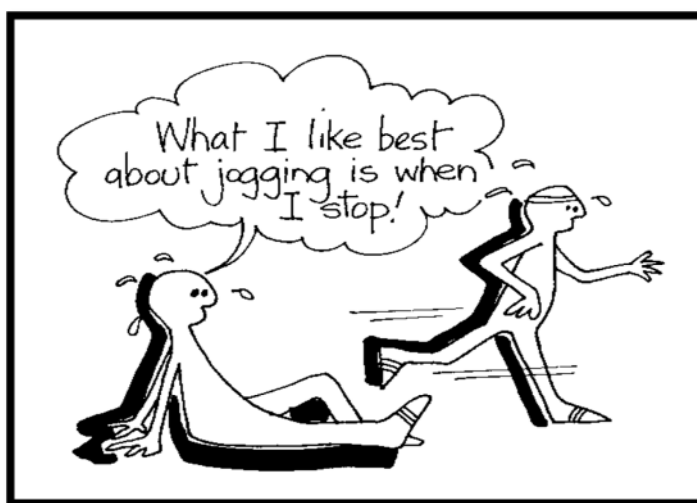
b. Regular exercise. If there is one point more important than another in coping with stress, it is engaging in **regular exercise**. Nothing in the natural world is more stabilising to the emotions than regular, walking, jogging, swimming etc. Experts have quoted that regular exercise is equivalent to the best stress medication.

c. Lifestyle adjustment. Following the requirements of healthy living is extremely important to achieve a happy emotional balance in life.

4. **Healthy relationships** are a good buffer in difficult times. Support is essential. Sharing problems with someone who cares helps tremendously.
5. **Don't be too competitive** or aggressive. Be a good loser. We can't always be on top. Some people are far too intense.
6. **Look for the positive approach.** A sound mind in a healthy body enables us to cope with almost anything.
7. **Have self-worth.** Set future goals. Have challenges but don't overdo them.

8. Those who choose the spiritual road are advantaged, according to recent research. David B. Larson completed a major psychiatric study on the subject and revealed the following discoveries. Those who include spiritual dimension to life have:

- a. Better physical health.
- b. Less depression.
- c. Less suicides.
- d. Lower drug use.
- e. More protection against illness.



These eight points are all-important considerations in handling tension. If you think your situation is impossible, it probably isn't. Put these coping methods into practice. They work well.

Matching the Pace of Life.

1. **Take two or three deep breaths.** No more or you may feel dizzy from absorbing extra oxygen. Breathing deeply has a relaxing effect and may help you cope for the moment.
2. **Laugh when appropriate.** This makes you feel better because endorphins are released similar to what happens when exercising, giving a

feeling of well being. A sense of humour does wonders. Laughter also enhances the bodies' immune system. An attitude of despair produces the opposite effect.

3. Take a mental holiday. When the constancy becomes too much, take a break for 15 to 30 minutes. This can refresh the system enough to continue.

4. Choose a fresh environment when possible. A change can help you feel re-energised.

5. Stretch tense muscles. Flexibility exercises can help release tight muscles brought about by stress.

6. Balance life with some leisure time.

7. Go for a walk.

8. Smile at people.

9. Relax over a meal.

10. If you feel angry or frustrated, count down from 10 to 1.

11. If the task at hand is too much, ask for help.

12. Read a book of inspiration.

13. Go out into the open air.

14. Limit your responsibility load. Sometimes it becomes necessary to say 'No.'

15. Don't cheat on sleep.

16. Enjoy a stress-free hobby.

17. Help someone in need. Taking the mind off self is extremely healing. Don't burden yourself with other's problems, just help where you can.

Goals to motivate us on the road to achievement are good, but overdone can be a source of stress. Avoid too high a goal or choosing too many goals or this valuable plan becomes counterproductive. Choose to proceed at your own pace. Be comfortable in the borders you set for yourself.

Stress expert Hans Selye said, *"You can't make a racehorse out of a turtle."* To try and perform on a level, for which you are not built, will cause frustration, stress or even ill health.

Conflict with family members, friends or work associates can contribute to stress. So can a low self-image. Also, stress is intensified with strong emotions like love, hate, excitement, moving to a new location or changing jobs. Other difficult emotions upsetting to stress levels are lack of recognition, job promotion, rush hour traffic, long distance travel, money or material needs and time management. One of the most difficult situations to encounter is coping with people’s unpredictable emotions. Adaptation and adjustment in these situations can be difficult or even traumatic.

We need a balance between boredom and change. Life without stress is not possible or even desirable. But avoiding extremes and coping is the desired goal.

Noise pollution

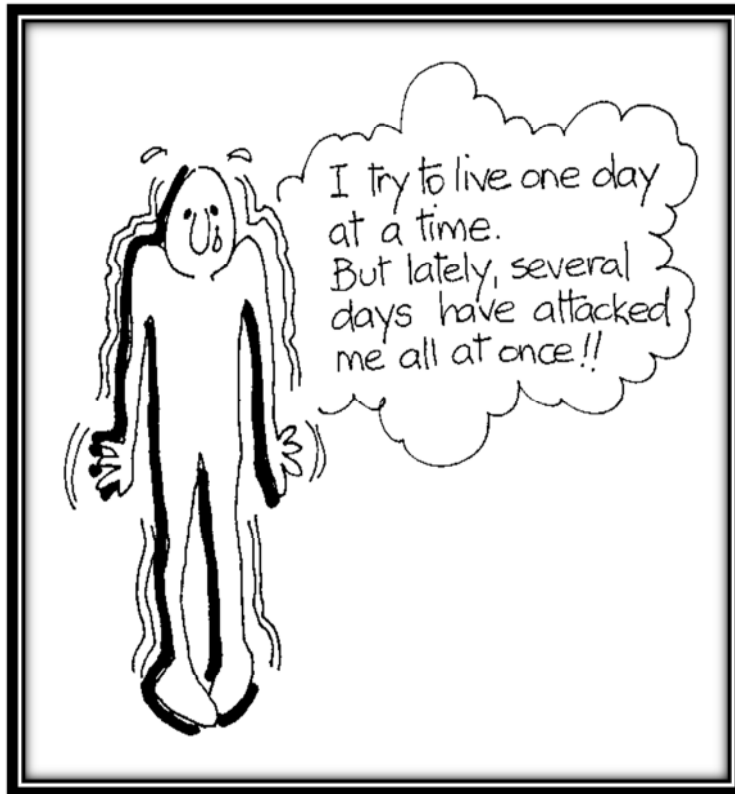
Excessive noise definitely contributes to stress levels. Check your personal level of exposure in the following figures.

Sound levels

Breathing	10	decibels
Whisper	20	
Conversation.....	60	
City traffic.....	80	
Sports car.....	95	
Lawn mower.....	100	
Circular saw.....	115	
Loud music.....	130	
Siren.....	130	
Jet take-off.....	160	

Affect of noise

75 - 80 decibels.....	Annoyance begins
90 – 110.....	Injury to hearing if prolonged
140 – 150	Pain and temporary loss of hearing (Permanent if prolonged)



Are you stressed? (Analysis questions)

If you have personally experienced any of the following events over the last year, place a tick next to the score. Add the total, and then compare the result with the scale at the bottom of this self-test.

Death of a partner	10
Death of a close family member	8
Divorce	8
Serious marriage problems.....	7
Prison sentence.....	7
Disgraced reputation	6
Low self-worth	6
Serious accident.....	5
Serious illness	5
Marriage	5
Retrenched	5

Marriage reconciliation	5
Loss of house	5
Retirement	4
New illness of family member	4
Pregnancy	4
Sex problems	4
New baby	4
Business difficulties	4
Relocation	4
Financial difficulties	4
Loss of a close friend	4
Occupation change	4
Minor marriage difficulties	4
Added financial responsibilities	3
Employment promotion	3
Child leaving home	3
In-law difficulties	3
Personal achievement	3
Difficulties with employer	3
Renovations	2
Employment changes	2
Sleeping difficulties	2
Social changes	2
Annual leave	1
Family gathering at Christmas	1
Traffic offences	1
Add any other personal difficulties	

TOTAL SCORE.....

Analysis-

- 0-15 No real problem
- 16-20 Mild difficulties
- 21-30 Moderate crisis

Above 30

Attention needed

This test does not take into account an individual's perception of a personal crisis. Attitude to problems can increase or decrease the score, in some cases, dramatically.



Burnout

We often hear of burnout, but what is it really? When extended and uninterrupted stress have gone on for too long, maybe for many years, the ability to cope breaks down, leaving the victim in a state of utter exhaustion and unable to continue normal tasks.

Some of the first signs of burnout are decreased energy, lack of concentration, decreased efficiency and loss of confidence. Also, unaccustomed forgetfulness diminished productivity and a lack of motivation. Life takes on a negative outlook with a loss of interest in most things. The immune system is weaker, causing the person to be more susceptible to disease. Some sicknesses occur which are unexplainable.

At this time many turn to chemical crutches, such as alcohol or drugs, both of which add to the problem.

Advanced signs are demonstrated by a loss of control, a feeling of helplessness and simply failing to cope. Some call it “*hitting the wall*”, grinding to a full stop. Deep depression is a possibility here and real help may be needed.

Here is the good news! There are solutions and they do work. First of all, to prevent burnout and secondly to recuperate from any of the various stages.

1. Plan to have adequate rest. Don't deprive yourself of sleep.
2. Don't carry your daily work into the evenings.
3. Enjoy a little recreation each day.
4. Have a proper vacation at least once a year.
5. Exercise regularly.
6. Obtain proper nutrition.
7. Organise your life by examining your priorities.
8. Live one day at a time.
9. Have a hobby or interest in life.
10. Enjoy some time with your family.
11. Read the book “*How to Manage Life's Stresses.*”

Following these points is really nothing more than living a simple, balanced lifestyle. We don't always find it easy to practise this solution, yet when analysed, improper living actually causes the problem.

Handling Grief

'Into each life some rain must fall', are the words of an old, popular song. This is unfortunately true. Experiencing loss, be it great or small, hurts deeply.

This is a reality of life over which we seem to have no control. We feel so helpless. All our visions and goals seem irrelevant at this stage. To find a

way through is important, in order to begin productive living again. To understand the grief process at least gives some future hope.

It's natural to grieve when we suffer the loss of something or someone important to us. At times we feel our world has blown apart and life seems meaningless. We tend to despair, to be despondent. We lose interest in all around us and grieve our great loss. An individual feels like saying, *"How can I possibly continue?"*

Because loss in life seems inevitable to most, learning to grieve in a healing way is important knowledge. Grief is a natural process, yet very distressing. Even so, it's necessary to grieve to heal damaged emotions. Its function is to repair a great hurt. At first we are hit with shock. We don't realise the depth of the loss, acting as though we are anaesthetised, which is really a protection to our human emotions and nervous system. During this stage it's better to keep busy rather than sit and brood. Close friends and relatives can help a lot. Next we *'let our emotions out'*. It's important to express grief and very dangerous to conceal it. Don't be ashamed to cry. This can be very healing and helpful.

In the next stage we may experience loneliness and depression. Once again, don't be surprised but almost expect these feelings. Some feel shocked with their emotions, begin to doubt themselves, and others, then become very negative. Usually, these feelings last for only a short time. Once again, friends and close relatives can be very encouraging and supportive.

Even physical ills can follow. When in a depressed state it's not unusual to experience headaches or other aches and pains. The stress of the experience can lower the immune system, opening the way to ill health. In time, a positive and hopeful attitude can open a new door to the future.

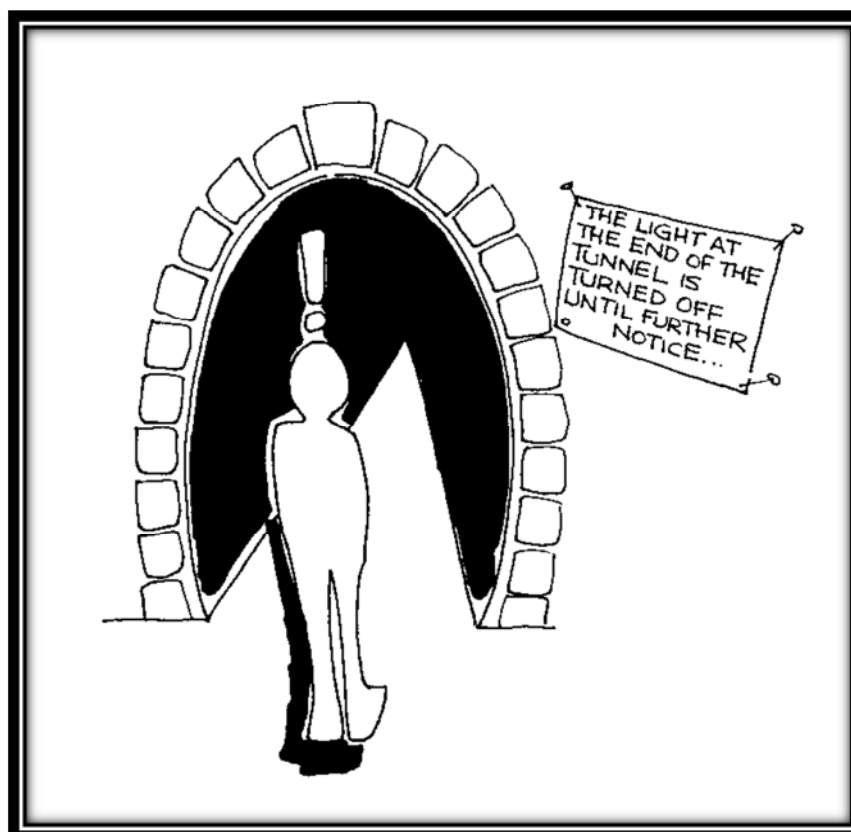
When analysing the situation, we can see how we sometimes tend to press the panic button. We try to forget, yet can't. We wonder if we can possibly be normal again. We have great difficulty concentrating and view

the future with fear. The mind plays games with us. Fear can overwhelm us. But having knowledge of the varying emotions can equip us to cope with the various stages of grief.

Some even experience guilt feelings, regretting why they didn't do more to avoid the loss. They illogically blame themselves. Such thinking is futile. It helps if we can rise above this feeling.

Human nature hates change, resenting this unwanted, forced intrusion on life. Some feel hostile. Some blame others for their situation. Those who feel this way are wise to pass through this stage quickly. This certainly is unhealthy thinking. Some feel they cannot recommence life, but like many others before them, they will eventually find future hope. The book of life can begin a new chapter.

A glimmer of hope will come shining through. Adjustment to real life begins. Not all people are the same. Some are stronger than others are, but by positive determination, all can develop an inner strength and a new vision for the future.



In a nutshell the grief process is as follows.

1. Denial, to escape from reality.
2. Emotional release - crying - talking - expressing feelings.
3. Feelings of depression and loneliness.
4. Feeling physically ill - loss of appetite - chest tightness.
5. State of panic. (Determine to live a day at a time.)
6. Feelings of guilt and out-of-proportion self-blame.
7. Feelings of anger and resentment.
8. Resistance to change with re-entry difficulties.
9. Hope begins to shine through.
10. Affirmation of reality. Acceptance of the inevitable.

We don't all experience the same emotions in grief, nor are they necessarily experienced in the same order. The time taken to satisfactorily recover is usually between two and five years.

Personally, I'm not a stranger to grief. What I am saying is not mere theory, but also experience. My first encounter with major tragedy was almost two years after being married. My wife and I were delighted at the prospect of becoming parents. We had been looking forward to the birth of our baby, but what was to be a delight turned into disaster. A complicated breach birth cut off the oxygen supply resulting in the baby's death in just a few hours.

At this early stage in my life I knew nothing about handling grief. To my wife and I there were no "*stages*" – just absolute chaos. The world appeared to totally fall apart. There seemed no future hope. In the process of time we accepted our loss and the hurt was eased by the birth of our three following children. Even so it's something that affects you for life.

Then in my later life I lost my wife. She was born with a heart defect, which finally caught up with her. Once again the world seemed so black.

How could I continue living without my wife, who was also my best friend and understanding soul mate. I did allow myself to feel the pain of grief and mourn my loss. However, for this tragedy, I had knowledge on how to cope with grief. While the hurt was very deep, I did practise the coping principles I had taught so many others over the years. I found they helped very much. It's hard to begin again, but after almost five years of widowhood; I am again happily married.

What to say to the bereaved.

At such a time, words can do little to compensate their deep loss. What they need is to feel your support. Simply being with them - perhaps a hand on the shoulder, a hug, a meaningful gentle touch or holding the hand can do this.

Say you are sorry for their loss. Offer to help if possible. Show your care and concern. If they wish, allow them to talk. This begins the healing process. Those who remain silent take longer to heal. If appropriate, talk about the good qualities of the lost loved one. It is most unwise to give advice or tell them how they should feel. **Never**, never, tell them to pull themselves together. This is extremely damaging to the healing process. They first need to feel the pain. Be very patient and considerate at this stage. It can help greatly if you offer assistance. Even if there is nothing you can do, at least they know they have kind support and this means more to them personally than words can ever accomplish.

Dealing with Divorce

Ideally, on the wedding day, we plan to live in happiness with each other for life. For many, this doesn't happen. Using proper communication skills may often prevent divorces, but this education is not learned by the majority, so in time, irretrievable breakdown in marriage can occur.

Most people in a divorced state feel the crushing hurt of their shattering experience. Feelings of hatred and bitterness tend to control the thinking processes unless measures are taken to deal with the past hurts. Without

repeating other helpful material already covered in other books in this package, here are a few suggestions for coping with the divorce problem.

1. Read this book carefully, especially the part on *'Mending a Broken Life.'*
2. Don't live in the past.
3. Endeavour to be responsible for the present.
4. Be positive with future planning.
5. Accept your share of the blame.
6. Resolve past issues and emotional trauma before remarriage. Rebound marriages often fail. Allow time to heal. True love will wait.
7. Avoid children becoming victims.
8. Avoid critical talk to children about the previous spouse. They find the break-up difficult to understand. As far as they are concerned, they probably still love both mother and father. To encourage them to take sides is emotionally disturbing to them.
9. Professional counselling is worth considering.
10. If you are a spiritual person, pray for wisdom.
11. Feel good about yourself.
12. Rather than bitterness, try to choose a better road. Let go of the past after allowing time to feel the pain.
13. Choose to forgive, or you may never experience emotional freedom.
14. Don't dwell on 'Why did it happen?' Look positively to the future and ask, 'What will I do now?'
15. When you settle down, read the books, *"Secrets of a Happy Marriage"* and *"Meaningful Relationships."*

Mending a broken life

Most have experienced loss and know how it feels to be hurt. It may be the loss of a sweetheart, a friend, a partner, a divorce, health, a job, a house, a business or even a failed exam. When the loss first occurs, the trauma seems overwhelming. The future seems black or non-existent. A common emotion at this time is a sense of believing you are at the end of the road. It doesn't seem possible to ever again carry on normal living.

Although it seems incredible, it is possible to face the reality of loss and begin again. Naturally, we don't feel this way at first, yet in the process of time, changed and corrected attitudes do help us grow and even turn loss into gain. Although hard to believe, when we are in a hurting state of mind, there is really sense in sorrow, even to the point where we can profit by pain. We can choose to look beyond the grief and sadness to future hope. Yes, life can recommence, even abundantly. Ahead, there can be a bright future. Finding the road back isn't always easy but is certainly preferable to always living in despair.

Strong feelings of denial influence us in the beginning. *"Why did this happen to me? Surely it can't be real"* is a common reaction. To make any forward moves from this position it's necessary to first face the reality of truth and accept the problem as inevitable. Let's be kind though. A reasonable period of time is required to grieve. To disallow this expression of emotion is to deny a necessary, vital healing medium. For as long as seems necessary, let emotions surface. Talk openly to supporting friends and relatives. This is helping to heal the hurt. Keeping it locked away is damaging for the present and even the future. Burdens don't appear as heavy when we can share with a supporting person.

When there is no person to talk with, it's helpful to sit down and write pages on how you feel and how you are hurting. Keep expressing hurt emotions until you are cried out. Then other emotions will tend to take over as explained in the stages of the grief process.

Look forward to the time when you can pick yourself up and accept your loss as irreversible. Take courage and be determined to move forward. Visualise and accept yourself as a person who has worth. A survivor will make positive progress to ultimately begin again. Those who have not recovered after several months may need professional help. Be aware, though, it takes some time to mend a broken life.

Remember this important reality; those who cannot accept the hurts of the past are unable to make progress into the future. This is why it's so

important to first deal with the past. There are many who continually feel sorry for themselves, ever dwelling on their past predicament. This is a non-productive activity because the past is impossible to change. Those who continually live in the past are in danger of repeating old mistakes. Though some want to doubt this fact, we can forgive and accept past wrongs, but we cannot change them. Survivors follow the forgiving pattern and attitude. They allow themselves to feel the hurt, go through the grieving process, forgive the past and then move forward to live again. We are educated by the past but we are unwise to attempt living there. It is history. We can only live in the present, yet it is profitable to make plans for the future. Accept the reality that the past is gone forever.

At this stage you can be in charge of your emotions and take control of your life once again. So many mistakenly blame the failures of life upon themselves. Don't permit this wrong assumption to control your thinking. You will be a wiser person but, hopefully, not hardened. It is preferable to allow your hurting experience make you a better person, not worse. I have seen many people become bitter, carrying feelings of resentment and develop hate for the world and some people. This is a snare. Thinking in a destructive fashion leaves nothing positive for which to live. Hope is extinguished and happiness is banished as well.

The Spiritual Road

Margaret Fishback writes some of the most comforting words I have ever read to encourage hurting people. She is writing for the spiritually minded, which is really the majority of people. Atheists are more in the minority whenever surveys are taken.

Her allegory is entitled:

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

One night I had a dream. I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord and across the sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonged to me and the other to the Lord. When the last scene of my life flashed before us, I

looked back to the footprints in the sand and I noticed that many times along the path of my life there was only one set of footprints. I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in my life. This really bothered me and I questioned the Lord about it.

“Lord you said that once I decided to follow you, you would walk with me all the way. I have noticed that during the most troublesome times of my life there is only one set of footprints. I do not understand why in times I needed you the most you should leave me.”

The Lord replied: “My precious child, I love you and I would never, never leave you during your times of trial and suffering... When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”

Sometimes life’s journey seems too great. We feel so alone and helpless. But there is One who cares about us on a personal level. On a number of occasions I have spoken publicly on the subject, *“Why does God Permit Suffering?”* There are some positive answers and logical explanations available, but nevertheless, many of life’s trials do seem unexplainable. To the person facing difficulties (which is every one of us at some stage in life) it is at least comforting to know that we don’t need to face them alone. A faith system gives incredible comfort and assurance when facing life’s hard times.

Those who choose the spiritual road gain a sense of freedom and enjoy peace of mind. Life takes on real meaning as we see a positive reason for living. We come to understand how there is truly a purpose for our existence. We are not here by chance, but we are on this planet for a definite reason. We can even help make this world a better place by our presence in being helpful to fellow human beings. This attitude to living enhances life’s quality, contributing toward a happy lifestyle.

Discovering our spiritual perspective increases our self-worth because we come to realise how we are loved and valued. We also see how life is more than the here and now. There is confidence and hope for the future.

We become more accepting of others and see people as important. Happiness becomes a reality to us personally as we seek the happiness of other people.

We are very conscious of our personal imperfections, but as we journey toward our eternal destination, life finds true success through the important values that we hold and share with other travellers. It's quite possible to make a spiritual rediscovery in our personal lives.

If this is your style, pray and meditate to connect yourself to a higher power. Practise the art of loving other people. Read the Bible. This is the best life manual ever written. Here you will discover your origins, how to live well, and how to choose your eternal destiny.

Facing Loneliness

Loneliness is another stress many have to face. In some situations feelings of loneliness follow a loss, which is the case when a partner has died or departs. The overwhelming feeling is, "*I am all alone in a big world with no one to share my personal feelings and thoughts*". You feel no warmth, only coldness and isolation. Immediately, panic seems to take control with feelings of desperation to fill the gap with a substitute. This seems logical at the time, but at this stage of dread, wrong decisions can be made. Clear thinking is unusual when emotions are jangled. The wisest procedure is to wait. To be able to move forward positively, as previously emphasised, it's more helpful to first experience the pain. Examine yourself and rediscover your worth. When you come to the point of accepting yourself as a worthwhile person, then you are ready to mingle with others to help vaporise your loneliness.

We all need other people in our lives, some more than others, but we are social creatures who don't cope well in total isolation. A positive, friendly, non-threatening approach to people produces a response of friendship.

One big mistake made by many in this fragile state of loneliness is to attempt escape by using alcohol or drugs, or engaging in illicit sex,

overeating or overspending. All of these are not considering the day of reckoning, when, in the future, the consequences of these actions must be faced. Running from reality today does not stop the haunting monster returning tomorrow. Facing the issue - coming to terms with reality - is the strongest foundation on which to build a new future.

There is another remedy, which does wonders in dispelling loneliness. After dealing with the problem on a personal basis, when the unchangeable situation has been accepted as an inevitable reality, is the time to help someone in need. This may seem an oversimplification, but it can be the best cure. Clearing personal thinking in preparation to begin again is vital, but actually doing something practical develops a refocus on living, which is very healing. While we may be giving good help to a person, we may in fact be receiving a greater benefit ourselves. Feeling sorry for self is damaging to progress. Reaching out to someone in need is personally restoring. This may be the last thing we wish to do when we are feeling depressed, but to over-ride these feelings and seek out a person to help will result in personal benefit. Such an action will even engender a feeling of happiness. When talking to a person you don't need to be an expert or give advice: just be there for them. Show sympathy and understanding. Show care. This means more than words can express.

Overcoming depression

We all suffer from feelings of depression, to a greater or lesser degree and at varying times of life. How can we describe depression? It is a mild, or even intense experience of feeling sad. When depressed we become apathetic, pessimistic and have feelings of self-condemnation. We feel very negative about life, even to the point of despairing, feeling that everything is hopeless. There seems to be no joy at all in living.

To find the reason is not always easy. Often the cause is related to stresses in life such as family or relationship problems, illness, financial difficulties or perhaps even plain boredom.

Losing what is important to us does cause depression. The loss of a loved one by death, divorce or separation, losing a job, our health or even self respect. Experiencing rejection, failure, hurt, guilt and low self-worth tend to place us in the doldrums.

Even unhealthy living can make us feel depressed, such as insufficient sleep, poor eating habits, not exercising or perhaps coping with an illness.

But depression doesn't go away easily. More is needed than an act of the will to reverse this deep, gnawing problem. But for those who choose to follow a positive solution, there are answers. However, those with deep depression problems may need to seek professional help.

The first important step to take is to acknowledge your depression. Admit how you are feeling, yet at the same time endeavour to analyse a cause for your condition. A friend or a professional person may be a valuable asset. If feelings of guilt are the cause, do what you can to rectify the problem, then move ahead by beginning again. Because the past is unchangeable, punishing yourself by guilt feelings is totally unproductive. But you can choose to begin again. The spiritual person has an extra advantage, by finding forgiveness for mistakes and praying for extra help in the future. This action makes beginning again an easier task. Maintaining a positive thinking attitude helps those who have not chosen the spiritual path. If you know the problem and a hopeful solution, you are well on the way to alleviate depression.

At best, anti-depressant drugs will only offer a temporary solution. The more enduring methods usually in the form of natural treatments offer a more permanent remedy.

1. Begin the day with a conscious effort to be positive.
2. Wash and dress. This helps you feel better about yourself.
3. Write down what you wish to accomplish for the day.
4. Set out to achieve these goals for the day.
5. Choose to be productive and not indolent.

6. Choose not to think about the sad past.
7. Think in the present and plan positively for the future.
8. Have hope for the future and work towards your achievable dream.
9. Believe in yourself as a person of worth.
10. Exercise regularly.
11. Endeavour to keep yourself pleasantly occupied.
12. Sing, or hum to yourself. Pleasing music encourages a happy feeling.



An incredible story

For many years I have conducted 'Better Living' programs. One of the films we showed, told the story of a man who was so depressed, he decided to commit suicide. He was physically unfit, so planned to take his life by excessive running. He felt his death would appear an accident and his wife would legitimately be able to collect his insurance. He obviously didn't know a lot about fitness. He was sure he would have a heart attack while running seeing he hadn't been exercising at all in the past. On the chosen evening he went running and ran until he could go no further, then

fell gasping to the ground. To his surprise, he did not die. Some people would have, but not this man. The next day he tried again, running until he was totally exhausted. He ran each day for a few days, until he realised his plot wasn't going to work. But he surprisingly noticed he wasn't depressed any more. He was very sore physically, but he felt happier. After another day or two he felt life was worth living after all. He was now fit as well as happy. He made a new start in his life and has been jogging ever since. The method he thought would take his life, actually made living more worthwhile. Exercise gave him a feeling of well being and took away his depressed feelings.

Dealing with Emotions

The behaviour patterns we develop are influenced by many factors of life. Why are some law-abiding citizens while others become dysfunctional or criminal? We don't have all the answers, but almost certainly the cause can be explained by a combination of influences. First of all we are born with a certain temperament, which is a major influence. Having parents who demonstrate love is vitally important to developing acceptable behaviour. Methods of child training, how the experiences of life unfold, choice of habits and self discipline, type of education, motivation influences and health are other reasons for choosing life's values. Perhaps the strongest factor of all, one that we personally choose in adult life, is mental attitude. Our whole life is built on our personal choices and how we **emotionally** respond to various issues.

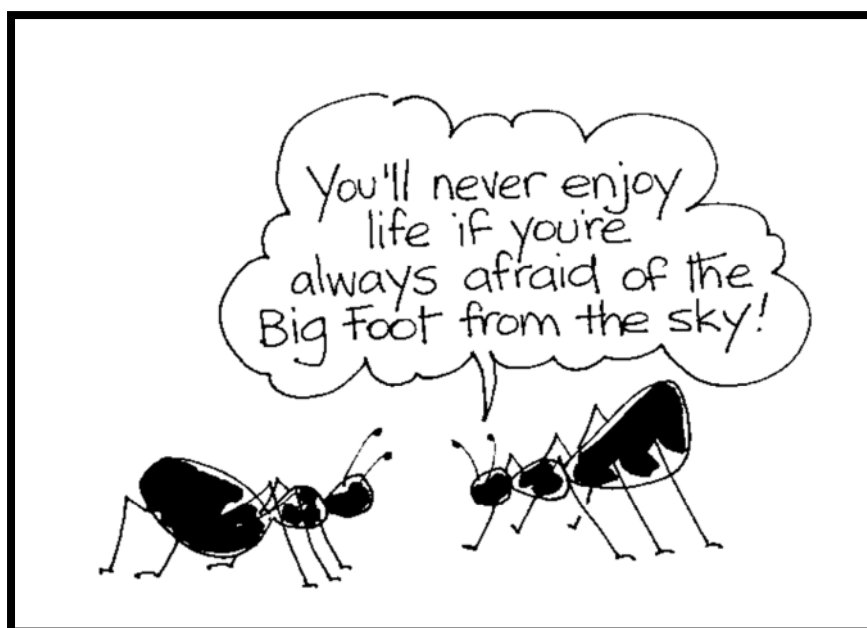
What we are emotionally tends to be the type of person we are in reality. When emotion is the motivating factor, even very intelligent persons have difficulty thinking clearly. Concentration can shatter and logic can vanish. But life will flow more smoothly if emotion is under the control of the mind, rather than controlling our thinking.

Some in the medical profession have stated how many physical illnesses are emotionally induced, having their origin in a disturbed mind. Negative mental attitudes cause chemical and organic function changes in the body,

which are detrimental to good health. Alternatively, positive, constructive thinking promotes a strong, healthy body.

The Giants of Fear and Anger

Two of our strongest emotions are fear and anger. If we can bring these emotions under control, we are more likely to cope with life's stresses. Extroverted persons tend to succumb to anger, while the introverted are more likely to be fearful. Both situations can cause us to behave in a way we may later regret. There is a healthy fear to save us from danger, such as being careful in traffic conditions. But when out of control, fear can be a paralysing emotion, with the possibility of destroying a happy life. The object of fear can become an obsession. For some, this monster of the mind becomes an all-consuming thought, every moment of every day, until it seems to eat out heart and soul. Unless some control is exercised, this horrible fear will destroy the very pleasure of living.



In this state of mind, many retreat from the real world and from people. They are denying themselves happiness, unnecessarily, which is rightfully theirs. If only accurate records could be kept. The truth is that most fears causing worry never actually happen.

When analysing why some tend to be fearful to the extreme, very helpful information can be found by looking into the past, right back to childhood. Without warm love and security, children see the world as a cold place, even to be feared. Other children are over-protected or dominated by parents, engendering deep insecurity and fear to step out alone. Then there are unfortunate children who have experienced trauma in their tender years, such as child assault or molestation. The thinking becomes confused and distorted because of their abuse. The emotions are damaged. Healing to a small degree can occur, but a deep scar may remain right through to adulthood. Proper counselling and understanding about how to build a healthy self-image can help such people start over again.

Others fear because of over concern for failure. They lack self-confidence, maybe because others have unduly criticised them for many years. The spirit is suppressed. With some, a guilty conscience is the basis of fear. Others have developed complexes of varying kinds. They concern themselves with body size, appearance or even intelligence deficiency. These mind benders distort reality. Others are, over-self-consciousness, or fear of failure, which prevents positive accomplishment in social and relational areas.

Some even justify or excuse fear, accepting this negative emotion as normal or even beneficial. But fear cannot be excused, because this emotion is destructive to progress in life and destroys happiness. Only by believing in ourselves, then choosing an attitude to look positively to the future, while forgiving the past, can we defeat the giant of fear.

Anger

Anger is a very misunderstood emotion. Some interpret the anger feeling, as wrong, believing such thoughts should never be experienced. Yet there is a purpose for this volatile emotion. In emergencies, we gain energy to meet a crisis by being angry at a life or death situation, a physical threat,

or perhaps an injustice. If the energy from anger is directed positively, solutions to a predicament may be solved.

But the wrong kind of anger has the opposite effect. Anger usually has the danger of being out of control and causing harm rather than help. What could be positive, becomes a negative emotion, causing other people to be hurt, as well as themselves.

Some mistakenly see this uncontrolled explosion as a desirable masculine trait of character. This is absolutely wrong. Out-of-order emotion is a destroyer of relationships and happy homes. Those who have never learned to control their anger can do untold emotional damage to members of their family and destroy good friendships outside the home. An interesting observation is to analyse the children of an angry father. Mostly they are angry too. But those children with a timid nature may be crushed, causing a loss of spirit, which is a vital need for strength to face the realities and hardships of life.

Turning the habit of impulsive anger around is not an easy task. But with perseverance and time, some steps can be taken to reverse this habit pattern. To be big enough to admit there is a personal problem, rather than choosing an attitude of denial, is the first step toward victory. Not until a personal admission is expressed, by facing the anger as a real problem, can any progress be made.

The next step regards our attitude toward the victim of our anger. Maintaining an attitude of hate or revenge is counter-productive. A full-scale war may develop with unresolved conflicts ever continuing. This is anything but a happy situation. If, in our hearts, we choose to forgive the person who has wronged us, a solution is now possible. Many say, *“Why should I forgive him when he’s guilty?”* This is a fair question, and we certainly believe justice needs to be met. But consider what personal anger is doing to our health and happiness. Should we punish ourselves as well as the guilty person? Constructively seeking a solution is a far better option than twisting ourselves in knots of anger.

Let me tell you of a lady who was angry with her father for sexually abusing her when she was a child. She now had a young family, made no contact with her father and continued to brood with seething hatred toward him for the wrong that he had done her. She was certainly justified in being upset with her father's most objectionable behaviour in the past. But now in the present, she was having health problems, even to the point of breakdown. A visit to a counsellor revealed how her anger of the past was destroying her adult life. After several weeks she chose to forgive her past and even though it was most difficult, she decided to call her father to forgive him. He was a changed man, very sorry for his past indiscretion, and was delighted to be accepted by his daughter. The situation turned from hatred to love. Family togetherness now brought happiness and health instead of a grudge and bitterness.

By changing her attitude toward him she resolved her feelings of anger. To forgive is difficult for human nature, but if such an action can be accomplished, there is a personal reward. Some say they can't forgive. Depending on the circumstances, this may indeed be difficult, even being impractical in certain situations. But with others the reality may not be the inability to forgive, but the unwillingness to forgive. To forgive is a matter of personal choice.



Dealing with anger

Bottling up anger and grievances is extremely harmful, both emotionally and physically. Anger does need to be released, but not uncontrollably, or you may find yourself in deep trouble. (At worst a person can be killed by someone whose anger is out of control.)

How do you express anger and control it at the same time? If you have been accustomed to reactive anger, you will have difficulty establishing a new habit pattern. But it can be done. The first step is to say at the moment of anger, *"I choose to be calm, I choose to allow a little time to look at the problem rationally. I choose not to make a decision yet."* You may even try the old formula of counting to 10 (or in more serious cases, 20 or even 100). This is helpful, because a cooling off time is provided, allowing the problem to be viewed more objectively. Some say 'reframing' is better than ventilating anger. This simply means purposely interpreting the situation in a positive light; like suggesting to one's self that the person has been overworking and is very tired.

Generally the situation is better if sufficient time is allowed to control emotions. Approach the person, couple or group, and say, *"I feel angry about what has happened. I want you to know my feelings on this point."* Whatever you do, don't be angry with the person, rather, express the feelings you have experienced. Don't insult personalities. Your motive isn't to start an argument or fight, but to resolve the situation. If you lose control or become abusive, you immediately lose credibility. The question method of dialogue, which has already been discussed, is more helpful in these situations.

Yes, express your anger, but under controlled conditions. You will find release, rather than bottling negative feelings, and at the same time have a greater chance of bringing peace out of conflict.

Some effects of anger out of control

1. Loss of self control
2. Loss of rational thought
3. Irresponsible actions
4. Loss of dignity
5. Loss of self-worth
6. Feeling of remorse
7. Creates muscular tension
8. Slows digestion
9. Elevates blood pressure
10. Increases risk of heart attack or stroke

Resolving conflict

Unresolved conflict ravenously devours and destroys relationships and greatly increases stress. An anxiety atmosphere develops, extending into feelings of deep insecurity. However, conflict is not altogether bad. Rather, it can be an opportunity toward better communication, if handled correctly. But if mismanaged, it results in unpleasant alienation. Read about resolving conflict in the book *'Meaningful Relationships'*. It is important and vital knowledge.

What if you are disadvantaged?

One of life's stresses for some is to be disadvantaged. Fanny Crosby lived in a world of darkness from when she was just a few months old, yet she could write the following words.

***O what a happy soul I am
Although I cannot see.
I am resolved that in this world,
Contented I will be.***

***How many blessings I enjoy
That other people don't!
To weep and sigh because I'm blind,
I cannot and I won't.***

Fanny had every reason to be negative about life, but she chose to be positive. As a result, she was happy and made the world a better place by her presence.

I once spoke to a man who fifteen months earlier had been involved in a horrific motor accident. His injuries were so severe his right leg had to be amputated. On the operating table his life was in extreme danger. His heart stopped several times, but responded each time to medical revival techniques. He had spent most of those fifteen months in hospital before being able to go home.

It would seem reasonable for this man to feel total despair. After all, he could no longer walk without crutches and he couldn't go back to his career. I remember saying to him; *"Life is sure tough sometimes"*. I was amazed at his optimistic answer.

He replied, *"I'm happy. At least I'm alive, and I should be able to start a new job soon."* He didn't wallow in self-pity. Instead he chose a positive, happy outlook. He had every reason to be morose, but to his credit, he chose to be happy with his life. What an example to those of us who are better off, yet who complain. Because of his positive attitude and acceptance of the inevitable, he experienced a sense of happiness, in spite of his tremendous disadvantage.

Then there's the young lady I spoke to who was born with a rare muscular disease. She could only use her left arm, but had become extremely efficient within her limitation. She had every excuse to sit back in life and have everything done for her. After all, she was greatly disadvantaged. No one would expect her to achieve anything exceptional in life in her incapacitated state. But this girl had great strength of character. At the age of nineteen, she was top of her class in the computer program course she was doing. She did not allow her disadvantage to hinder her, and as a result, was more successful than others in the class who had two hands. Her accomplishment was due to her positive determined thinking, not her physical abilities. For those with handicaps, life is certainly more difficult,

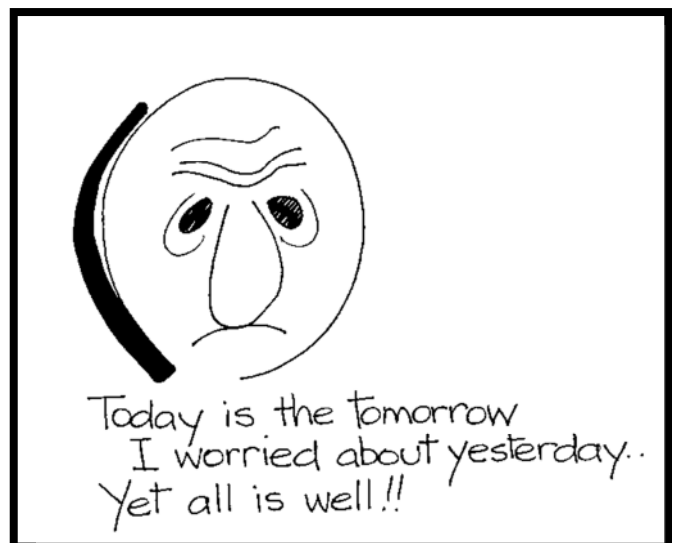
but need not create low self-image. Believe in yourself no matter who you are and no matter what your circumstances. Your determination will win through. The difficulties of life need not beat you.

Fruitless worry

If, for a period of time, we recorded every problem we worried over, then reviewed the list one year later, we would most probably find that more than 90% of our worry was unnecessary. Worry can be likened to sitting in a rocking chair. Plenty of action, but going nowhere! There is one thing certain about worry: it elevates stress levels.

Yet, we continue to worry. Why? There is no real advantage. Worry hardly ever accomplishes anything constructive. Thinking the situation through and **acting** on the problem can bring a solution. I suppose a person who worries is a caring person, and this is a virtue, but it's possible to be caring without fruitless worry. Worry definitely contributes to stress, which we know is destructive to health of mind and body. It can certainly **cause** problems, but it seldom solves them. We often hear about people being labelled 'a born worrier.' Some temperaments are more prone to worry than others are, but, basically, it is a personal choice to develop this acquired habit. Sometimes feelings of anxiety and apprehension are motivated by fear, maybe of the unknown. We cultivate the disposition to worry because we fear the future or the outcome of a problem.

Albie was a young successful salesperson. Though he was one of the best in the company, on occasions his results were very poor. Why? There were times when he was overcome with feelings of apprehension as to whether he would make enough sales to care for the financial needs of his family.



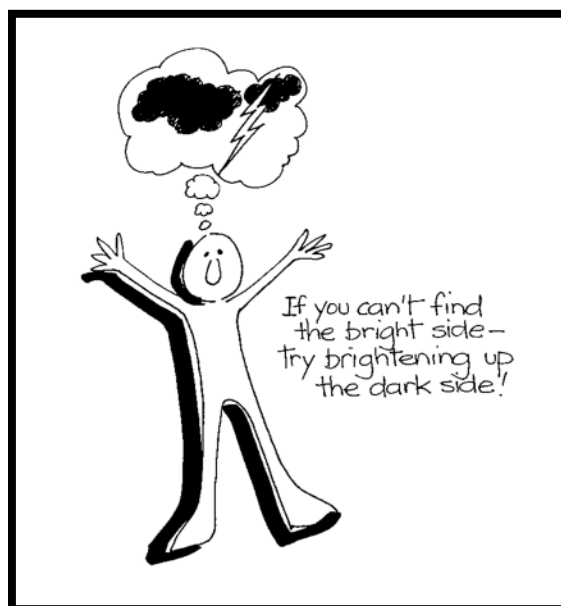
But in this frame of mind, his sales plummeted, often taking a week of two to recover. One day, while reading a sales training book, he read a statement that really impressed him. It said, "*We only have to live one day at a time!*" He had been trying to live tomorrow and the next day and even the next year, today! He realised that worrying unnecessarily about the future was making him miserable today. Yes, he saw how important it was to make plans for the future, but tying himself in knots of worry was no help, but rather a major hindrance. He decided to completely change his attitude and his sales never slumped again.

Worry can make us literally ill, but a peaceful mind and calm attitude tends to promote health. Worriers **can** learn to be positive. Habitual worriers allow their imagination to see problems before they develop. They think the worst of every situation. A more beneficial habit is to use our imagination and visualise solutions instead of difficulties and to look at life positively. This solution-type thinking helps crowd out worry. By thinking constructively, destructive thoughts are less likely to find a foothold. And if negative feelings do creep in, remember to visualise solutions as a counter attack. Positive words crowd out negative thoughts. Just as worry comes by practice, so we can learn to think positively by choosing to think in a 'solution' state of mind. This way of thinking makes life much happier.

When people talk to you about their problems it's kind to listen sympathetically, but don't let their worries become yours. Sharing their difficulties with you lets them unload and this can be very healing for them. Talk positively to worrying friends. Rather than give advice, ask them if they have considered certain solutions. A positive outlook will be an encouragement to them, and is also personally helpful to you. When you have finished your discussion with them, try not to have their problem on your mind continually. It's called 'switching off,' so that their burdens don't become your burdens or you may become stressed.

Don't worry be happy

How do you feel when you first get up in the morning? Most of us don't feel at our best. Sometimes an ill feeling is self-inflicted by high living, insufficient sleep, inadequate exercise, perhaps overeating, or even just an attitude of mind.



Yes, it's possible to develop a habit to be unhappy. Habits are hard to break but not impossible to conquer. We have the power to choose and when we face a new day we can choose to be happy or sad. An attitude of mind effects feelings in an incredible way. It's a better choice to decide to be happy.

If we visualise an unhappy day ahead, that's what we'll probably have. It's very possible to create our own unhappiness. Circumstances need not dictate our state of mind. Just as we can create an unhappy state of mind, so we can encourage a happy feeling, simply by using our power of choice. It has been said, 'Happiness is a state of mind'. There is a lot of truth in this statement. The following verse illustrates opposite ways of thinking. One way produces a miserable feeling, the other, a happy hopeful feeling.

***Two men looked out through prison bars,
One saw mud - the other stars.***

Yes, it's possible to be happy, in spite of personal circumstances. We can choose to look on the bright side and even if we can't find a bright side we can begin by brightening up the dark side.

From personal experience I know how we can all, at different times in life, face tragedies and almost insurmountable difficulties. It's not easy to be

happy on these dark days. Sometimes we need to express sadness - to grieve and cry. This is healing. But we cannot stay in the darkness of despair forever.

Life is brighter if we personally practise the habit to be happy. Also, helping others be happy can help us experience happiness. People who work for the good of others are generally unselfish people and are seldom discouraged.

If you have problems, address them. Pray about them if that's your style. Smile and laugh when you can. Do all that's possible to solve them, but don't worry about them.

Be happy - it sure beats being sad!

PERSONAL HAPPINESS EVALUATION - SELF SCORE

	YES	NO
1. Do you like most people?	_____	_____
2. Can you agree with most people?	_____	_____
3. Do you enjoy helping the young, old, or needy?	_____	_____
4. Do you have little spare time?	_____	_____
5. Do you have close friends?	_____	_____
6. Are you busy and useful?	_____	_____
7. Are you usually confident and unworried?	_____	_____
8. Are you usually easy to please?	_____	_____
9. Can you handle criticism?	_____	_____
10. Are you adaptable to change?	_____	_____
11. Can you say no to a request when you are overloaded?	_____	_____
12. Are you pleased for a friend who is promoted ahead of you or beats you in		

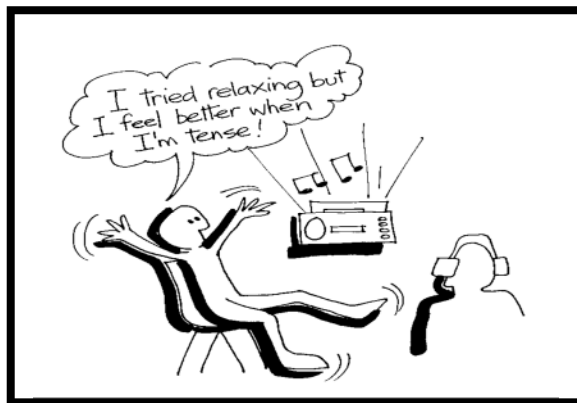
a game?	_____	_____
13. Is there someone special in your life who loves you?	_____	_____
14. Do you read spiritual literature like the Bible?	_____	_____
15. Can you forgive a hurt or overcome a grudge?	_____	_____
16. Do you feel an important reason for living?	_____	_____
17. Are you accepting of your present stage of life?	_____	_____
18. Do you mostly feel happy?	_____	_____
19. Can you overcome miserable feelings reasonably quickly?	_____	_____
20. Do you feel you can trust most people?	_____	_____
TOTAL	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Count your score. 1 for each 'yes'.
 A score of 12 or more = a good happiness quotient.
 9 to 12 is fair. Under 9 is poor.

A Mind of Turmoil or Tranquillity

Some people continually punish themselves with thoughts of fear, apprehension, worry, insecurity or guilt, to the point where they are physically sick, simply because of their unhealthy thinking patterns. To be 'worried sick' is not just a saying; it does happen. Symptoms may start with something reasonably simple like headaches, back or stomach aches, but, as we have discovered, in the long run, this continued tension contributes to a host of other more serious health problems.

The proverb, '*A merry heart does good like a medicine*' is scientific fact as well as an ancient saying. So, how can you experience serenity instead of turmoil? First, aim to have a regular time each day when you can



make a conscious effort to unclog the mind of cares, and renew your mental energies. For a mind in turmoil, this is not easy, but it will become better as you practice. Avoid negative, hopeless type thinking, which is very destructive. Realise that the past cannot be changed, and the future may not happen, as we expect. So think for today. Try not to dwell on the worst case scenarios for every event and potential situation.

Go somewhere private, sit in a comfortable chair, or lie on a bed and close your eyes. Take two or three deep, slow breaths and each time you breathe out say "relax". Concentrate on establishing a steady breathing pattern. Now begin relaxing the body. Starting with the head and neck, purposely tense the muscles for a few seconds by lifting your shoulders and clenching your jaw. Hold, then say aloud, "**relax**". Let the muscles go absolutely limp. Continue with the back. Tighten your shoulders and hold. Then relax. Next the stomach. Tighten the stomach muscles and hold for several seconds. Then relax and repeat the word "relax" aloud as you let the muscles go limp. Next the arms. Clench your hands into fists and hold. Then relax. Finally work on the legs. Tighten thigh and calf muscles by pointing your feet upward towards your face. Hold the tension, then relax and say "relax" aloud once again as you release the muscles. Repeat these exercises. First apply tension, then relax. Choose to empty your mind of anxious thoughts. Take a couple more deep, slow breaths and keep the eyes closed for a minute or two. Your body is now limp and relaxed. The mind is emptied of worries and fears. A temporary relief comes in the quietness, and brings healing.

You probably learned at school how "Nature abhors a vacuum". It's true! Even the mind is better not to be empty. It's preferable to think positive thoughts in place of thoughts of turmoil. Picture in your mind a peaceful, gentle scene in nature, like unhurried, moving water such as the waves of the sea, a flowing river or a waterfall. Feel the warmth of the sun and breathe the fresh invigorating air. Watch birds flying gracefully overhead. Hear the sound of the waves pounding on the beach, the seagulls squawking, and the sound of sand squeaking between your toes. *Tranquillity*. Also think of words that will help your personal situation and say them over to yourself. Try such statements as, "I choose to be at peace." "I choose to have courage." "I choose not to worry." **"I choose to be calm."** "I choose to be happy" or whatever is appropriate for you personally.

You may wonder why the word 'choose' is used so often. Making choices and continually reaffirming those choices, strengthens mind power, and puts you in control. You control your thinking instead of your thinking controlling you. As you practise these simple techniques each day, you can confidently face the world with courage. Your thinking will be optimistic. Instead of worrying about the 'have-beens' and 'may-bes', you will concentrate on searching for new adventure.

Gently Does It!

Do you ever feel like Atlas, carrying the world on your shoulders? Perhaps you are trying too hard. You may be a perfectionist, endeavouring to make every situation in life fit into a neat package, when life really isn't that way. It would be easy if every situation was black or white, but in reality there are innumerable shades of grey.

Sometimes it's good to look at yourself analytically and honestly make an evaluation. Only when you come to understand yourself can you begin a self-correcting process.

I well remember two fellow students when I was at university. There was Angie, who never appeared to hurry. Most times she seemed to have

time on her hands, and often chatted with her friends and other students. She wasn't always seen, however, and at this time she was studying hard. She was a 'high distinction' student. Sure, she was an intelligent young lady, but her accomplishments came from diligent study. She was also balanced, not neglecting her social life. Then there was Colin, who was always rushing. He hardly ever had time to talk, (although he did make an effort), but usually excused himself quickly to study. Colin did graduate, but his results were often just in the 'pass' range, when he really could have done much better. He over-stressed himself and didn't get the results his fine intellect deserved. He would have been more efficient and clear thinking if he had sorted out his priorities and balanced his program with some relaxation and exercise. Being in a dither, being anxious or frazzled will surely reduce efficiency.

Instead, aim to keep your mind in a state of serenity. Think the situation through, and then move forward positively, in an attitude of relaxed determination. As you feel the need, practice the relaxation technique outlined in this book. It only takes a few minutes, but makes your future time a whole lot more efficient.

Whatever your work or study, determine to enjoy your life and make the most of every day. A positive attitude makes most situations more pleasant, efficient, productive and less stressful.

One secret of making each day productive is to plan your work ahead of time. Working to priorities and plans reduces tension. The evening before, or first thing in the morning, make a list for the day. Then write the activities in order of priority. This is especially helpful on the days when you are under pressure. You will be surprised how efficient your day becomes as you check off your list. But remember, 'planning your work' only succeeds if you 'work your plan'.

Stress is a reality we cannot escape. Practise the coping skills in this book and you'll find life much sweeter and happier. A positive attitude can

open real life, satisfying dimensions and change your life very much for the better.



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