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Good morning I am Josh Burnham and I'm the lead pastor here at Bethel. We are excited to continue a –new series called “**Because you asked.**” Last year during Christmas we conducted a survey and asked, “I’d like to hear a message on what the Bible says about:” The second most requested topic was stress. To illustrate the immediate effects of stress and worry, let’s watch this video:

Let’s watch this video together

Did you know that the majority of all stress is built upon **perception**. **Stress is the perceived disconnect between our situation and resources to deal with that circumstance.** It’s the perception of seeing your face as a fugitive on TV and knowing in that moment you don’t have the resources to change! As in this commercial, the operative word is **perceived**. If your mind, heart, or faculties perceive something to be a threat you are stressed. It’s the waking up in the middle of the night with the reoccurring dream that you have a sermon to preach, exam to take, presentation to give, and you didn’t prepare. What happens? You wake up- wide eyed- sweating because your mind perceived the threat as real. And it takes several minutes to calm down. **I pray today is your calm down moment.**

**Stress is also contagious.** Anyone find themselves becoming anxious as you watched the Nivea commercial? Maybe your heart started beating faster, or your chest tightened, or your hands clammy. When we are around **people who are highly stressed, we become so ourselves.** We have a **pug**; if you walk away from his presence he will most likely ignore you. If you leave in a hurry, he will immediately follow you. Why? Stress is contagious. Surround yourself with worried people and you will worry. **Stress is built upon perception and spreads through people.**

**Is stress sinful?** *Some of you are feeling guilty right now because you are stressed and you fully believe that your stress is sinful and when you think about your sin you become more stressed and the stress death spiral continues.* **Stress is not necessarily sinful.** The presence of stress does not necessarily **result from a lack of faith or disobedience.** Jesus nearing the cross stopped and prayed on the Mount of Olives in the garden of Gethsemane (Olive Press). Dr. Luke tells that **22:44 Being in anguish, he prayed more fervently, and his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground.** The word **anguish** *agonia* means a **severe mental or emotional struggle.** The stress was so overwhelming that his sweat became like drops of blood. Jesus, praying in the garden of the Olive Press, felt the pressing weight of his earthly mission.

**At this very moment, under stress, was Jesus sinning against His Father?** Of course not! He would not be the **perfect Messiah** if his anguish was a result of **personal sin.** **Some stress is natural and not immoral.** **Stress is the mechanism that wakes your brain when you hear a fire alarm and safely exit your family from a house.** Stress of the Great Depression and WW2 is what

forged the greatest generation. Scientists call this **good stress**. One theory suggests that experiencing some manageable stressors, with recovery in between, can make us mentally and physically tough and less reactive to future stress. Here is a great formula to help determine if your stress is natural or sinful. **Concern + unbelief = anxiety; Concern + faith = a biblical virtue – Bill Thrasher**. Is your stress leading you to the throne of Christ or away from His presence?

**Don't be fooled, not all stress is good.** Stress will kill you. Chronic and continual stress are taxing on the body, brain, and spirit and will lead to depression, poor mental health, exhaustion, and even death. **One doctor said it best, "I have never seen hard work kill a man, but have seen the stress of work kill many."** I believe this is the place that many of us live. Not in the moment of good stress that challenges, sharpens, and builds character. **We live in the valley of chronic stress.** The American Institute of Stress reveals that 77% of us regularly experience physical symptoms of stress. 33% of us are living with extreme stress, and 48% of Americans lay awake at night due to stress. It is not getting better. Some call millennials the most stressed generation ever and 3/5 say they feel life is more stressful right now than ever before. Brother and sisters, we must do better! By the grace of God, we can!

How does the Holy Word meet us in our need of stress? What is the heavenly prescription? **Matthew 6:25-34. "Too Blessed to Be Stressed?"**

1. **To manage stress don't worry (6:25).** The Messiah's use of the word don't issues a general prohibition (No start) or calls for the **cessation of an action already in progress**. This is where most of us are today: already under stress and in the valley of continual worry. To you Jesus says, "I know you are worrying so stop it!"

The word worry is also translated **anxious or troubled**. **Jesus didn't say you are too blessed to be stressed!** Notice Messiah did not command the crowd not to experience stress. Rather he commands us to not be troubled and riddled with anxiousness. **What's the difference? Stress** is your body's reaction to difficulty. **Worry** is sustained mental anguish that is the result of stress. **Stress goes away but worry doesn't fade once the stress is removed.** **Worry hangs on for the long haul and causes significant mental, emotional, social, and spiritual damage.**

**This brings me hope.** I used to think that once I followed Jesus that all stress would be removed in my life. **As if God was an eternal bulldozer parent.** I used to believe that if I were stressed I didn't have enough faith or simply did not trust enough. And then I realized that Jesus prayed on in the Garden of the Olive Press, He walked the Via Delarosa and died on the cross. In essence, the **mission of my Messiah was to walk into stress because of my sin.** **Jesus did not die on the cross to remove all stress and obstacles in life, but that I would be redeemed.** The acceptance of gospel message does not mean that you will never walk through stress; the glorious reminder is that you will never walk **alone**. **As sure as God puts his children in the furnace of affliction, He will be with them in it –C.H. Spurgeon** **When you are stressed, don't worry.**

2. **To manage stress, consider your worth.** I can imagine Jesus turning around and pointing to the skies or the trees and says to the crowd, "look at the birds!" Jesus immediately stresses the heart of the matter. The heavenly Father feeds the birds, aren't you worth so much more than poultry or

flocks? If we could go back to creation, the beginning we would witness on the 5<sup>th</sup> day the fish of the sea and birds of the area receiving their origin and purpose. And when the birds began to fly God said, “**it was good.**” However, something unique happened on the 6<sup>th</sup> day. God said, “**let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.**” **What is your worth?** You have the image and stamp of Yahweh upon your life and within your soul. No bird in history or flower in any field can say that. How much are you worth? *When we walked away from our relationship with the One true God because of your sin. He did not give up on you. He sent his one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.* **Consider your worth!**

Jesus does not leave us with superficial self-help antidotes. When we cry, “I am stressed help!” The Messiah says, “have you considered your worth?” The word Jesus **used means to be of considerable value and having distinctive characteristics.** In essence the Messiah looks at you and I who were stuck in this cycle of worry and says, “Do you understand how much I love you? Do you understand your worth?”

In Jesus Christ, God provided the most important need in your life, your eternal salvation. And if Yahweh provided for your **greatest** need, how much more will he provide for your **daily** earthly need? **Often my children who are younger get emotionally worked up because they don't know what is for desert or to eat. I want to look at them and say, your father loves you so much.** We feed the dog, we provide for the hummingbirds, and even water the grass. You are incredibly valuable to me. I love the dog-grass but I love so so much more. I won't let you go hungry and I am prepared. **Don't worry, consider your worth!**

3. **To manage stress, seek the kingdom.** Jesus is telling us to change our perspective. Now this is not the phenomenon of positive thought. Most of our worry is built on **perception.** **Stress is the perceived disconnect between our situation and resources to deal with that circumstance.** You might not be able to **change the situation, but you can change what you seek.** Think back to that horrible Nivea commercial where these men and women were immediately struck with fear upon the perception that they were wanted fugitives. **Now the moment they recognized the scam, the instant their perception changed.**

Most of our worry is perceived: bills, money and the future, job security, relationships, and health. Our perception is that if I don't have money in the bank I will die, but you won't. If you can't pay the cable bill, you will live. If a lion were chasing you, run because you are under stress! We must constantly seek first the kingdom. **A Kingdom perspective attacks the root of our earthly worries.** **Why? Because our heavenly Father has eternal and infinite resources to handle any stress.** If you have created undue stress (1<sup>st</sup> world problems) and worry in your life maybe it's time to get back to basics and seek 1<sup>st</sup> the kingdom. If you are spending yourself into cycles of anxiety, it's time to seek the kingdom!

**How can we handle all this stress? Change your perspective, and seek first the kingdom.**

4. **To manage stress, focus on today (6:27).** Can anyone of you add one moment to his life-span by worrying? Even more, don't worry about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Take one moment to think about all the items that bring you worry in your life: how many of these impact today? **This is why, in the same sermon Jesus taught us to pray, give us today our daily bread.** Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrows, but only empties today of its strength. —Spurgeon To manage stress, focus on today, a gift from the Creator.
5. **To manage stress, flee temptation.** Remember that temptation is often stronger in seasons of stress. It was no accident that Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness and during a 40 day fast. I once heard a pastor say that Satan HITS you when you are down- **Hungry-Isolated-Tired-Stressed (Invitation Cue).** During seasons of stress, run to Jesus Christ. Don't walk—Run! To manage stress, flee temptation.

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Are you living in a cycle of chronic stress, worry, and anxiety? Will you give it to the Lord today? Are **you willing to trust Jesus more than you are willing to trust yourself?**

What is God's will for you? Don't Worry

**What is your worth?** You have the image and stamp of Yahweh upon your life and within your soul. No bird in history or flower in any field can say that. How much are you worth? *When we walked away from our relationship with the One true God because of your sin. He did not give up on you. He sent his one and only Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.* **Consider your worth!**

# Notes

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Is Stress Natural?

Is Stress Sinful

How can stress sanctify me?

**Phil. 4:2** I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to agree in the Lord. **3** Yes, I also ask you, true partner, to help these women who have contended for the gospel at my side, along with Clement and the rest of my coworkers whose names are in the book of life. **4** Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. **6** Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. **7** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

**4** Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

**Phil. 4:4** Χαίρετε εν κυριω παντοτε· παλιν ερω, χαιρετε.

**25.125** **χαίρω**: to enjoy a state of happiness and well-being — ‘to rejoice, to be glad.’ **χαίρω εν τοις παθημασιν υπερ υμων** ‘I rejoice as I suffer for you’ Col 1:24; **ως λυπουμενοι αι δε χαιροντες** ‘although saddened, we are always rejoicing’ 2Cor 6:10.

**Luke 2:10** But the angel said to them, “Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people:

**Luke 15:5** When he has found it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, **6** and coming home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!’

**Luke 22:17** Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks, he said, “Take this and share it among yourselves.

**Matt. 27:29** They twisted together a crown of thorns, put it on his head, and placed a staff in his right hand. And they knelt down before him and mocked him: “Hail, King of the Jews!”

In this culture what the church at Philippi would have understood about rejoice was a call to public celebration (NT Wright).

When Christ enters into the world, or your world, joy also enters.

There are times when you will not “feel” like rejoicing. In these moments remember your Savior and let your mind tell your soul to rejoice! There will be times in your life where joy is an imperative.

Christian joy is a mark of faith because it depends not on changing circumstances but on the one who does not change (Silva, 194).

Our relationship with the Lord is so central and determinative in our lives that all other factors cannot shake our enthusiasm in the Lord (Hansen, 288).

**5** Let your graciousness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. **6** Don't worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

**5** το επιεικες υμων γνωσθητω πασιν ανθρωποις. ο κυριος εγγυς. **6** μηδεν μεριμνατε, αλλ εν παντι τη προσευχη και τη δεησει μετα ευχαριστιας τα αιτηματα υμων γνωριζεσθω προς τον θεον.

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*to know*, whether the action be inceptive or complete and settled; *to perceive*, Mt. 22:18; Mk. 5:29; 8:17; 12:12; Lk. 8:46; *to mark, discern*, Mt. 25:24; Lk. 19:44; *to ascertain by examination*, Mk. 6:38; Jn. 7:51; Acts 23:28; *to understand*, Mk. 4:13; Lk. 18:34; Jn. 12:16; 13:7; Acts 8:30; 1 Cor. 14:7, 9; *to acknowledge*, Mt. 7:23; 2 Cor. 3:2; *to resolve, conclude*, Lk. 16:4; Jn. 7:26; 17:8; *to be assured*, Lk. 21:20; Jn. 6:69; 8:52; 2 Pet. 1:20; *to be skilled, to be master of a thing*, Mt. 16:3; Acts 21:37; *to know carnally*, Mt. 1:25; Lk. 1:34; from the Hebrew, *to view with favor*, 1 Cor. 8:3; Gal. 4:9 → *know; realize; understand*.

**25.225 μεριμναω**: (derivative of μεριμνα ‘worry,’ 25.224) to have an anxious concern, based on apprehension about possible danger or misfortune — ‘to be worried about, to be anxious about.’ τις δε εξ υμων μεριμνων δυναται επι την ηλικιαν αυτου προσθειναι πηχυν; ‘can any of you live a bit longer by worrying about it?’ Lk 12:25; μη μεριμνησητε πως η τι λαλησητε ‘do not worry about how or what you are going to say’ Mt 10:19.

The present tense prohibition, do not be anxious, indicates that the readers must stop what they are habitually doing (Hansen, 289).

**Prayer**: Paul uses four different words for prayer. This variety does not indicate an attempt to identify four discrete types of prayer. The variation has a stylistic motive (Silva, 195).

Paul is not presupposing that God does not know our needs before we voice them. He is calling for self-disclosure in God's presence. By expressing our specific requests to God, we “acknowledge our total dependence upon God” (Hansen, 291).

W/out thanksgiving, prayer becomes merely a way of complaining to God about all the bad things that are or might be happening (Hansen, 291).

Because of prayer—you will be touched with a mark of the supernatural, be guarded, and have peace.

The opposite of anxiety—indeed its relief—is the peace that only God, in answer to prayer, bestows upon his people (Silva, 195).

The context indicates that the Philippians had plenty of reasons to worry, a thought that is also reflected in the next section—4:12 and 4:19 (Silva, 196).

**Gentleness:** this is how other people are to experience the Christian's joy in the Lord. Gentleness means "not insisting on every right of letter of law or custom, yielding, gentle, kind, courteous, and tolerant" (Hansen, 288).

Often uses of an attitude of kindness where the normal or expected response was retaliation (Thielman, 218).

Especially in a society hostile to the Christian faith, Christians are called to respond to opposition with gentles to all (Hansen, 288).

7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.  
7 και η ειρηνη του θεου η υπερεχουσα παντα νουν φρουρησει τας καρδιας υμων και τα νοηματα υμων εν Χριστω Ιησου.

**65.4 υπερεχωα:** to be of surpassing or exceptional value — 'to be exceptionally valuable, to surpass in value, to be better.' ηγουμαι παντα ζημιαν ειναι δια το υπερεχον της γνωσεως Χριστου Ιησου του κυριου μου 'I consider everything to be loss for the sake of that which is of surpassing value, namely, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord' Php 3:8; αλλα τη ταπεινοφροσυνη αλληλους ηγουμενοι υπερεχοντας εαυτων 'but in humility considering others as better than yourselves' Php 2:3.

2. intransitive, *to stand out, rise above, overtop* (so properly, first in Homer Iliad 3, 210);

**Guard:** this image of guarding comes from the presense of the Roman garrison housed in Phillipi to keep the peace of Rome, the pax Romana, for the benefit of the Roman Empire. The verb conveys the general meaning of "to provide security, guard, protect, and keep." (Hansen, 294).

This is a picture of a besieged citadel. It is the castle of the mind of the Christian. It is garrisoned strongly. Its walls are constantly patrolled and its sentries never sleep at their posts (Motyer, 208).

**Heart-** "the center and source of the whole inner life, with its thinking, feeling and volition" (Hansen, 294).

The position of the believer is not simply one of waiting for an absent Lord to return; it is one of enjoying the reality of a Lord who is always present (Motyer, 207).

**Isa 41:10** Do not fear, for I am with you;  
do not be afraid, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you; I will help you;  
I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand.

**1 Peter 5:7** casting all your cares on him, because he cares about you. **8** Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. **9** Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

**Matt. 6:25** “Therefore I tell you: Don’t worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Isn’t life more than food and the body more than clothing? **26** Consider the birds of the sky: They don’t sow or reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Aren’t you worth more than they? **27** Can any of you add one moment to his life-span by worrying? **28** And why do you worry about clothes? Observe how the wildflowers of the field grow: They don’t labor or spin thread. **29** Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was adorned like one of these.

## Illustrations

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## Application

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### 1. Stress is good (From psychology today 2016).

Stress is actually useful. Without stress, we would not be here to talk about stress. If our hunter-gatherer ancestors did not experience some stress when that lion was roaming around their sleeping quarters, or when those red berries looked good but also emitted a strange odor, they would have been eaten or poisoned. Hence, our ancestors experienced stress and used it to their advantage so that they could procreate, allowing us to have this discussion today.

Even in modern society, stress is useful. If college students didn't experience any stress over tests, they probably wouldn't study or show up for class. If workers didn't experience stress about project deadlines, they might end up getting fired.

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So, stress keeps us accountable for our actions. It motivates us and inspires us to be better citizens.

## **2. Stress is bad**

Unfortunately, there are equally as many reasons why stress is bad. Whereas mild stressors—such as what to get your spouse for his or her birthday—are motivating, major stressors can be debilitating. For instance, caring for a loved one who has a chronic illness is a serious stressor. Chronic or major stressors are extremely taxing on the brain and the body, possibly leading to [depression](#) and other mental health consequences, as well as physical health issues.

## **3. Stress is contagious**

Stress is intimately tied to our social world. Social stress, such as feelings of [loneliness](#) or isolation, takes a toll on the brain and body. These forms of stress can lead to depression, [anxiety](#), and heart disease. But stress does not have to affect us directly to change our brains. Stress can also be contagious. Many of the sources of stress in our daily lives may not be ours directly, but rather those of our loved ones, such as health problems affecting a loved one, family responsibilities, and relationship issues. These stressors also have mental and physical health consequences—for our loved ones and for us.

## **4. We can learn about stress from animals**

Animals can teach us quite a bit about stress. For example, prairie voles are social rodents. Scientists use them to study how the social environment influences health, and how we can cope with stress. Like people, prairie voles live in family groups, raise offspring cooperatively (both [parents](#) together), and display many negative effects from changes in their social environment.

We have learned from these rodents that social stress can influence the way that the brain communicates with the body and lead to poor functioning of the heart, increasing the risk for heart disease. We also have learned that exercise can be a useful strategy for reducing the effects of social stress. In fact, my laboratory is currently using these rodents to understand how the brain changes in response to contagious stress (stay tuned for results in a future blog).

## **5. Stress is about perception**

So this brings us back to the original question. What exactly is stress?

Stress is a perceived disconnect between a situation and our resources to deal with the situation. In other words, stress is a (real or imagined) threat that taxes our resources. The operative word here is perceived. Stress does not always arise from an actual threat; but if we perceive it to be a threat, then it's a threat. Consider a ride on a roller coaster, for example. For one person, this is a fun and fantastic thrill. For another person, it's a scary and stress-inducing event.

If we perceive something as [stressful](#), our brains release [hormones](#) into the blood. These hormones change our behavior, mental experience, and physical functioning. If the threat is real, such as a lion that is about to eat us, these hormones will help save our lives, for instance by helping to deliver necessary oxygen to our legs so we can run.

If the threat is imagined, such as thinking about a potential traffic jam each morning that will make us late for work, these same hormones flow through our bloodstreams. Over time, these hormones use critical energy, causing a detriment to our body and leading to psychological and physical problems.

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### **So what can we do to combat bad stress?**

The fact that stress is a perception also means that we can do something about it. We can train ourselves (or we can be trained by a professional, if necessary) to change our perspective.

Remember that stress is a perceived disconnect between the situation and our resources to handle the situation. Therefore, there are two possible ways we can change our perspective about stress.

First, we might be able to change the situation. If traffic is a chronic source of stress, can we take the train to work?

Second, in situations that cannot be changed directly, we can possibly change the way we view the situation. If we have no other option but to drive to work, can we use that time to our advantage instead of dwelling on how slowly the traffic is moving?

Perhaps we can use the time to mentally plan the day, so that when we arrive to work we are ready to get started. Perhaps we can use the time to relax and listen to some music or an audiobook. Perhaps we can engage in some mild relaxation exercises before we leave the house, so that when we get in the car we are equipped to cope with the traffic.

Some stress might be inevitable. But its negative effects on the brain and body do not have to be inevitable. By altering the way we interpret the world around us, we can gain control over stress. By changing our perception about a situation, we can even gain the power to see its benefits.

### **Is Some Stress Good for Us? (From Psychology today 2016)**

Some researchers have suggested that exposure to a moderate level of stress that you can master, can actually make you stronger and better able to manage stress, just like a vaccine, which contains a tiny amount of the bug, can immunize you against getting the disease. Richard Dienstbier's (1989) theory of mental toughness suggests that experiencing some manageable stressors, with recovery in between, can make us more mentally and physically tough and less reactive to future stress. One possibility is that such experiences lead us to view stressors as more manageable and become more skillful at dealing with them.

Some studies by Professor Seery and colleagues at UCLA seem to bear this out. They followed a national sample of subjects for several years, assessing how much stress they had experienced in their lives, their recent stressors, as well as mental health factors and life satisfaction. The researchers found that:

“People with a history of some lifetime adversity reported better mental health and well-being outcomes than not only people with a high history of adversity but also than people with no history of adversity.” (Seery et al., 2010, p. 1025)

People with a lot of lifetime trauma had the worst mental and physical health, but those with a history of some (greater than zero) adverse life events were less distressed, had less disability, fewer posttraumatic stress symptoms, and higher life satisfaction over time than those with no negative life events. Importantly, people who had experienced a bit of adversity were the least affected by recent [stressful](#) life events. The researchers concluded that:

“In moderation, whatever does not kill us may indeed make us stronger.” (Seery et al., 2010, p.1025).

### **What About Chronic Pain Patients?**

But was this just a freak result that may have had something to do with the particular sample they used? It turns out this was not the case. The researchers found support for the benefits of a little adversity in a sample of chronic low back pain patients as well. In a study of over 400 such patients (Seery, Leo, Holman & Silver, 2010), participants with the highest levels of adverse life events were the most sick and disabled overall. But, there was also a similar pattern to the previous study. In other words, those with some (greater than 0) lifetime experience of adverse life events reported less disability and used the healthcare system less often than those with no adversity.

### **Why Does Experiencing (Moderate) Stress Make Us Tougher**

Results of these studies suggest that some history of experiencing stressors might be good for us, perhaps because this makes us less reactive to our current life events.

Here are some possible reasons why:

- Perhaps experiencing a bit of stress make us hardier and better able to tolerate and adapt to life's difficulties.
- Going through a moderate stressor (like relocating or breaking a limb) may help us learn new skills (like sociability or patience) we can apply in later life.
- We may gain [confidence](#) in managing stress. ("If I can do this, I can do the next difficult thing.")
- We may be less likely to [fear](#) change. For example, we may learn that it's ok to leave a toxic relationship or bad job and that we can survive and even thrive afterwards.
- We may adopt a more positive attitude towards stress in general, knowing how it may have helped us grow. Research shows that seeing your stressor as a growth opportunity helps you perform better both in stressful laboratory tasks (like [public speaking](#)) and in stressful jobs (like sales).

People who report never experiencing any stress may be too averse to taking reasonable risks, making them less likely to reach their [goals](#) in life and relationships.