

MAKING FRIENDS WITH STRESS

October 12, 2025

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Luke 12:49-56

⁴⁹"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ⁵⁰I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! ⁵¹Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! ⁵²From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; ⁵³they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

⁵⁴He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. ⁵⁵And when you see the

south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. ⁵⁶You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

REFLECT & DISCUSS

1. Read the passage slowly. Then take a deep breath and read it again. What word, phrase, or image stands out to you?
2. Jesus describes himself in this passage as "under stress." Why might Jesus be stressed out?
3. Research on stress has indicated that not all stress is bad. Indeed, stressors, in the right dose and duration, and with the right recovery and rest, are how we grow, learn, and strengthen ourselves—both physically and psychologically.

Stress can be treated as a friend to be lived with, even grow from, rather than an enemy to be rejected or vanquished.

There are two kinds of stress: dis-stress (bad stress), and eu-stress (good stress). Good stress energizes us, focuses us, and often arises as we face challenges to live out our deepest

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values. Why might Jesus, facing great challenges, still be “stressed out” *in a good way*? Even so,

- a. How do you think Jesus coped or responded to the stress he was under?
 - b. What are the stressors in your life, and how do you cope or respond to stress?
4. The metaphor of “fire” in verse 49 might bring to mind punishment or wrath, and make Jesus seem harsh (perhaps an understandable response from someone seemingly stressed out). Fire is used in the bible to reference God’s presence (as in the burning bush Moses encountered and the pillar of fire that led the people out of slavery in Egypt–see Exodus). It is also used in the bible to speak of refinement and purification–removing what is harmful and hurtful. How might Jesus “bring fire” in these ways?
5. The message of Jesus and the choice of those to follow him led to divisions within families and communities.
 - a. How might the message of Jesus–and how he is interpreted–still be divisive today?
 - b. What fractures are there in today’s religious, political, and social environment?
- c. Do you think Jesus wanted to be divisive, or was he indicating an unavoidable reality that must be wrestled with?
 - d. How do you navigate the unavoidable disagreements, even divisions, that are present in your life and in our world?
6. Jesus is calling on the crowd to truly notice the present time–to see suffering, injustice, and death as signals that something needs to change, and to see that God is actively at work changing it in the compassion, forgiveness, inclusion, and empowering presence of Jesus. It’s a call to perception, and a call to action.
 - a. Why is this so hard to see? What blinds us to suffering and injustice?
 - b. What keeps us from wanting to embrace the need for change, even if we know it is needed?

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