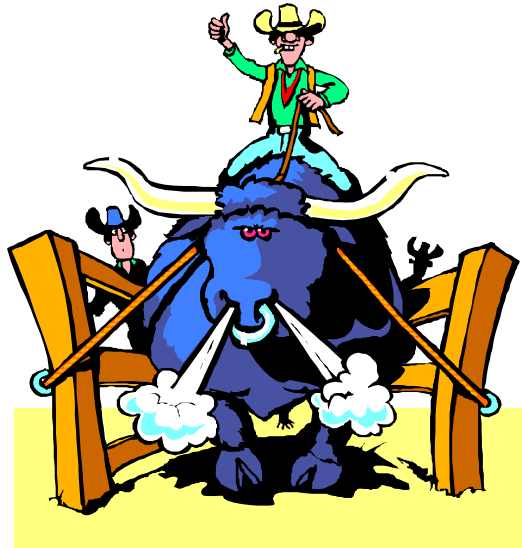


JUST
RELAX



Just RELAX

Having counseled as a pastor for over 30 years, I have heard myself say so many times, “You need to relax!” The familiar slogan, ‘Chill out!’ is sometimes the best advice a counselor can give. The question is, “How do we ‘Chill out?’”

We are continually bombarded with research studies that blame stress for everything from hiccups to cancer! We need some stress in our life, but too much is obviously killing us. What we seem to have is more like a pressure-cooker!

As a kid I recall mom opening up her pressure cooker (literally) before the pot had properly cooled. The result was pot roast a la kitchen ceiling! In similar fashion, some of us are stress-

pressurized, waiting to explode “all over” an unwitting friend or partner.

Join me as we look at some simple stress reducing relaxation techniques that are the result of some of my secular research, combined with thirty-five years of biblical studies.

RELAXATION RESPONSE

Years ago, in an effort to find something to help people I was counseling, I read a paperback book by Dr. Herbert Benson, The Relaxation Response¹. In it he detailed the health benefits from learning how to relax. Some sounded a little too weird back then, so I hardly ever referred anyone to the book.

Later he wrote a sequel, Beyond the Relaxation Response². He reaffirmed the power of learning how to relax. He found that medical treatments were enhanced as his patients learned how to relax. He documented his findings from the files of his surgical patients who did better and recovered faster when they learned how to relax.

Since the days when his research seemed weird to me, I have read of so many medical studies that confirm his

simple theories. What is weird to one generation is old hat to the next!

Some of what I share here is taken from Dr. Benson. Also, I have appreciated ideas that Dr. Andrew Weil has on the subject of breathing³.

I was intrigued by an advertisement of Dr. Weil's tape on breathing, so I purchased it and have truly received a "second wind" from his material. Again, his insights are so simple, as are Dr. Benson's. Simple, yet commonly overlooked.

As a Christian, I am fully aware that relaxation techniques which set our focus on anything discouraged by Scripture is dangerous. However, by comparing the thoughts of medical science with the wisdom of Scripture, we can find a safe "pressure-release."

LEVELS OF RELAXATION

There are at least three divisions to humans: body, soul (mind) and spirit. It stands to reason that we will need to relax each area, and there are no doubt various levels of relaxation for each of these areas.

For instance, let's say you are standing up and I hand you a heavy weight.

You then hold this weight until your muscles are exhausted. Pain extends up your arm and down your back. Seeing your condition, I say, “Just relax.” You immediately drop the weight. And you plop down in a chair.

After sitting for a minute (the room is cozy warm), you slump down in the chair and doze off. You begin to dream and go into what is called REM sleep – Rapid Eye Movement. If we were monitoring your brain waves, we could tell when you were totally relaxed.

The physical transition from total tension to total relaxation requires successive stages. I believe it is the same with our mind and our spirit.

In this short pamphlet I will share a relaxation technique that can be quickly used in almost any circumstance. Keep in mind that the more you practice it, the deeper the results go – refreshing you body, soul, and spirit!

Be careful not to settle for superficial relief when your soul is craving deep, total relaxation. Grab quick relief when you need it but build your life upon the deepest level of relaxation that I mention at the end of this pamphlet.

The three main tools for relaxation that we'll consider, are: Focus, Words, and Breathing (FWB). It's very interesting how these three areas are brought together in the Bible as well as in sports, medicine, singing and many other fields.

In an emergency, a paramedic will draw your focus onto his words as he tries to monitor your responses and get you to breathe deeply.

Learning how to breathe properly figures into many sports, as does focus and positive affirmations. Learning to relax is as simple as using these three areas for good instead of allowing them to get out of control. One of the signs of panic is an erratic breathing rhythm.

THE POWER OF FOCUS

When you first catch yourself getting "uptight," stop and take notice of what you're thinking about. We know we can be moved emotionally by what we hear or see. A good speaker can have us laughing one minute, crying the next, and then up in arms, all in a few moments.

What are you thinking about? The key to relaxing is changing our focus quickly on to something that refreshes.

Words direct our focus. Reassuring words can calm us and give us hope. Words can anger us, or make us afraid. The beauty of words is that they work at different levels and we don't have to "feel" any particular way for them to start working.

The book of Psalms (in the Bible) begins with the key to making it through stressful situations: meditate on God's words! Our first response when we need to "Just Relax" should be to change our focus by reaching for **good words!**

What is the average person's typical response when startled, injured or angry? Spouting off negative words, perhaps a reference to the stuff in barnyards? This, however, inevitably creates more frustration, impatience, and tension.

Swearing isn't just bad from a social standpoint, it's bad because it begins painting negative pictures that magnify stress producing emotions.

If we place a glass full of punch on a table and the table gets bumped, we're not at all surprised that punch comes flying out of the glass.

Jesus said that whatever fills our heart will come out of our mouth. So, a very important first step is to make sure we have plenty of peace-producing words down inside of us.

Fill your heart first thing in the morning by reading the Scripture. Allow God's positive promises to turn your mind into a green pasture where peace and life flow.

We can train ourselves to make our first response to situations "*Praise the Lord.*" I know some over zealous people have ruined this simple phrase for many; but it quickly reroutes our focus on to the greatest source of solutions – God Almighty!

Giving thanks **first**, sets the stage for positive results rather than panic and confusion. Try it – you'll be delightfully surprised at the power it releases!

I have found it helpful to have some of my favorite Scripture verses printed out on 3x5 cards. When my mind is too fuzzy to pull up positive words from inside, I can reach for my cards and read "focus-changing" words of life over and over until they start releasing their power.

Words work to create feelings!

BENSON'S DISCOVERY

Part of Dr. Herbert Benson's regimen for eliciting what he calls the "Relaxation Response," is to find a quiet place, sit in a comfortable chair, close your eyes, relax your muscles (first contract your major muscle groups then relax them), then say a simple word softly as you exhale.

He suggests using a word that is positive and that is within your "belief structure." An excellent example is the word "peace."

Slowly repeat this word as you exhale. If your mind starts to wander, gently bringing your focus back to the word you chose. Dr. Benson suggests doing this for ten to twenty minutes, yet I have found great results in shorter periods of time.

The doctor's research has revealed that this simple exercise of focus changing can produce many benefits, from reduced blood pressure to hastened healing.

For most of us in the harried Twenty-first Century, time for such "relaxation" is a luxury (except when we run out of gas [health] – then time is

plentiful!). Although it's a luxury that we can afford, we must schedule it in!

My favorite word is "*Jesus.*" He's my Savior and my friend, so I like to say His name, the name I cherish the most! It also becomes a subtle form of prayer—a simple prayer that focuses totally on Him! Connecting with Him for a few minutes at the right time makes a world of difference!

When time demands and pressures harass you, but no quiet place is to be found, use the next best thing – a pause that refreshes! Traffic lights, waiting in check out lines, waiting for your computer to boot or your ISP to download.

Times that might otherwise make you anxious or uptight can be great opportunities to draw in refreshment. When we blow our horn or blow our top in a fit of rage, we 'share' our feelings with others. All too soon anger or frustration can spread!

Try a simple experiment when you sense your tension building: Start saying some little phrase to yourself. Make it something positive and time it with your breathing. In your mind, as you draw in a slow, deep breath, say, "Peace."

Repeat the word as you slowly exhale. Do this for a dozen or so breaths. In a few moments you will notice your focus changing. It doesn't take long.

Try this with a simple prayer:

“Jesus (as you draw in a slow, deep breath), thank You (as you exhale).”

Can you see how effective this simple strategy can be?

During the first encounter Jesus had with His disciples after He arose, He breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit!”

I love this story and many times I have renewed my strength quickly as I reached out and took His hands (Focus), spoke His name (Word), and drew in His Breath (Breathing) – FWB!

If you've just received some bad financial news, turn this into a specific prayer: *“Jesus (inhale), thank You for meeting my needs (as you exhale).”*

If you need to speed up healing, insert the word “healing” in this slow, prayer of refocusing.

Wisdom? Peace? Strength? Why allow frustration to rob you any further? Use this simple technique and couple it with faith!

The beauty of this exercise, as I've mentioned before, is that you don't have

to feel it first to have it produce great results. Start physically (with your words). The mind will soon join in.

You will notice that **feelings follow focus**. Your feelings will change for the better. When your spirit person (the deep inside part) gets involved, you will feel totally refreshed instead of stressing out!

You won't be able to do this very long at a traffic signal or in a check out line. However, even a brief FWB response will minimize the sense of inconvenience and you'll find you're moving along sooner than you expected.

When you do have the opportunity, try doing FWB for longer periods of time. I do this simple exercise when I'm out on a long stretch of road and enjoy the rejuvenating effects.

When you use focus, words, and breathing this way, relaxation comes easier, faster and the side effects are tremendous.

A BREATH OF FRESH AIR

Simply being aware of your breathing and taking deeper breaths from time to time has great health benefits. One of the first things doctors and paramedics do is put oxygen on their

patients. We need air to live, however, if you notice, our tendency is to breathe too shallow.

Dr. Andrew Weil points to many health benefits that are available just from better breathing habits. Why not combine better breathing with better focus? Our minds will not operate in a vacuum, so fill your mind with simple, faith-filled phrases.

As you practice better focus, words, and breathing (FWB), you will notice something happening inside you. Peace and faith will be just some of the fruit from changing your focus from negative to positive thoughts. Energy once used to produce stress and anxiety will now be available for constructive purposes.

Something else can happen.

Miracles! Make God your focus! As your words and breath join in, you will draw from Him such abundance! When you do, because God is real, things will begin to change! He is near to all of us and He does care, but He's given us the freedom to draw from Him... or not.

I've tried the "do-it-yourself" thing, and I much prefer God's help! In His grace He's left it up to us to choose our responses to life. Deuteronomy 30:19

sets life and death before us; God suggests that we choose life! Good idea!

Jesus frequently let people know that it was their faith that triggered their miracle. The beauty of faith is that it does not depend on feelings. Faith is a combination of actions and belief. It's a team!

Experiment with this. Try repeating something simple when you feel tensions rise. Let your focus shift to your breathing. Draw in slowly, deeply, then exhale slowly, while focusing on words of faith. You will be delightfully surprised at the immediate results!

DEEPER RELAXATION

Anger is dangerous. I'm concerned about how we handle stress because of the impact that anger (the result of poorly managed stress) has on others – especially those closest to us. The ones who deserve our best are usually closest to us when our cork pops.

Anger generated by stress can quickly run our relationships aground! It pays big dividends to learn to manage stress. Ones we love will benefit!

Not to be outdone by anger, depression is another foe that feeds off of stress.

If you feel frustration building, the kind that leads to depression – quick, FWB!!!

Aside from changing our focus while on the go, there are huge benefits available for going deeper into learning to relax. Setting aside time each day for your very own, personal quiet time can help you tap into the river of God's grace. Prayer time and regular Bible reading calm the soul and feed the inner spirit.

If you think you are too busy to have a personal quiet time, consider the benefits: (1.) It gives you a chance to connect with the One who made you. (2.) Talking out problems with the Lord will almost always stimulate creativity and confidence in the way to respond. (3.) God still answers prayer, so time set aside to seek His involvement with your situations will result in miracles. (4.) Quiet time constructs a safe place to retreat to for healing, refreshment, direction and the deepest companionship.

You will notice your body, soul, and spirit responding as you monitor your focus, words and breathing. To learn more about the medical benefits of relaxing, I refer you to Dr. Benson's books.

To learn about gaining more power in your thought life, I suggest you read

my books *Winning the Inner War* and *The River*. These books (and others) are available free online by visiting our web site [www.spearministries.org], or you can get a complimentary copy by mailing the order form in the back of this pamphlet.

Religion, as I define it, is man's efforts to control God. People fight over religion. In fact, religion can actually raise your blood pressure and stress level. If we focus on what others think of us because we don't measure up to their "religion," it will only add to our tension.

So, I'm not suggesting you consider religion. Rather, I would encourage you to develop a more vital relationship with the One who made you!

The writings listed at the end of this pamphlet were designed to help you go deeper into the Lord God Almighty! He really does have a better idea!

TOOLS

I joke with my wife about needing more tools (me and Tim Taylor); so much can be done with the right tools! And God has given us the tools to make a difference in our lives, our families, our workplace, our nation, our world!

Just three of these simple tools are:

Focus

Words

Breathing...

F W B

Regardless of how our fast-paced world tries to entangle you, take back the controls to your own life...

“Just Relax!”

Please send your comments and insights:

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¹ The Relaxation Response, Herbert Benson, M.D.,

New York: Morrow, 1975.

² Beyond the Relaxation Response, Herbert Benson, M.D., New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1985.

³ Breathing: The Master Key to Self Healing, Andrew Weil, M.D. [audio cassette]

PAMPHLETS

Victory Over Anger
Conquering Curses
Medicine that Heals
The Place of Women in the Church
Victory Through Hard Times
Holy Spirit Power
Eternal Security or Security of the
Faithful
Changing Pictures

BOOKS

Winning the Inner War
The Abundant Life
SRD: The Traveler's Guide
The Law of Rest
Loving God
Tapping the Power of Denial
The River

SALVATION TRACTS

The Abundant Life
Facts About God