

Recent data paints a sad picture of the stress landscape in the United States. Our nation is among the most stressed, with stress levels 20 percentage points higher than the global average, estimating that that we are subjected to a hundred times more stress than our grandparents and great-grandparents. Yet, Jesus emphatically stated:

John 10:10: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

- **Grammatical Usage:** "**life**" or in the Greek, "zōēn" meaning, "existence in the image of God"; "**abundantly**" or "perisson" meaning, "extraordinary".
- **Literal Interpretation:** I came that they (you) may not only have life in my image, but enjoy an extraordinary relationship with me.
- **Contextual/Comparison:** God keeps His Word: God continually uses His Word. A quick check of Jesus' life shows He experienced stress as well. Examples include:
 - As a baby in the womb. He was bounced for 90 miles while His mother rode on a donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem.
 - While an infant, His family was forced to flee from King Herod and go into hiding in a strange land.
 - It is believed that while He was still a young apprentice His father died and Jesus became the family breadwinner.
 - **Mark 3:21** records that early in His ministry His family came to take custody of Him lamenting: "**He has lost his senses,**" (NASB) or "**He is out of his mind.**" (ESV).
 - While Jesus was training His disciples it is apparent that they either didn't comprehend His message or resisted His reading of the Hebrew scriptures that the Messiah must be a suffering servant.
 - As Jesus heads toward Jerusalem and the last week of His life, He reveals "**how great is my distress**" (**Luke 12:50**).
 - At the death of Lazurus, "**Jesus wept**" (**John 11:35**).
 - According to **Luke 22:44** when praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, His sweat became like drops of blood.

In **Luke 21**, Jesus alerts His closest followers of impending troubles—wars and famines. In addition, for themselves personally they could expect hatred, betrayal by friends and even death because of their connection to Jesus. He offered six stress strategies:

1. **Stand tall.** Beginning with **Luke 21:28** Jesus commands: "**Stand tall and lift up your heads.**" These verbs are imperatives. Those with Christ are given a new status/standing in our covenant relationship. We are not simply

Jesus' servants, but he calls us friends (**John 15:15**). Jesus' command to stand tall means we should know whose we are and who is in ultimate control. This new standing under Jesus means we have a certain delegated authority at least in the spiritual realm.

2. **Your salvation is near.** The word salvation is often translated redemption or to be set free. One of the key Old Testament words for salvation is “yescha”. It means to have enough space that one can see enemies or impending trouble far in the distance. “Yescha” is the root behind “Yeshua”, “Joshua” and “Jesus”.
3. **The Kingdom of God is near.** This promise is found in **Luke 21:31**. In stressful times it often takes a discerning spirit or the ‘eyes of faith’ to perceive that God's rule is making inroads. However, the Holy Spirit is as close as we allow and is always available. The last prayer in the New Testament (**Revelation 22:20**) is "**Come, Lord Jesus,**" with an imperative verb. This prayer affirms our faith and anticipation of the ultimate restoration of creation. The command serves as a remainder of the temporary nature of earthly struggles and the assurance of our everlasting life with God.
4. **My Word will not pass away.** In **Luke 21:33** Jesus references **Isaiah 55:11** stating that God's word and promise will not return void of accomplishment. Making practical application, these passages assure us that for those in Christ the future is more certain than the present.
5. **Be on guard.** The New Testament verb form in **Luke 21:34** is again a strong command: You must continue to be on guard against sin and idleness in a personal sense. In a public sense, we are to be as alert as a snake in the grass (**Matthew 10:16**) to persecution from various venues, all originating from the kingdom of evil.
6. **Watch and pray.** Even though these words in **Luke 21:36** are commands of Jesus, to our ears they sound a bit passive such as "sit and wait." On the contrary: taking our place on the watchtower and peering through the fog propagated by the culture and Satan is the opposite of apathetic passivity. **James 5:16** corrects our thinking: "**The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.**" The world desperately needs our intercession, biblical discernment and righteous activity and witness.

By observing these commands of Jesus as well as other biblical stress strategies including solitude for peace, silence from confidence in the midst of chaos, the Sabbath for rest, and reveling in the splendor of our salvation, we can face the new year with God's ‘shalom’: peace, completeness, and well-being.

➤ **Conclusion:** Will I purpose in my heart to surrender my stress to God?