

Stress Less this Summer



5 areas to thrive...not survive

# Introduction

Stress Less

I look forward to summer every year. Then, when it finally arrives, I usually don't know what to do with it. I struggle by settling into unhealthy routines and unrealistic expectations. Before long, I'm looking forward to school starting again, forgetting how anxious I was for the school year to end. This summer I want to thrive, not merely survive.

First, I have to remind myself that summer is a season. It doesn't last forever! This time of year looks different for all of us. Some of us have kids at home and these hot months are draped in boredom and mess. Some of us now have to juggle summer camps and sports leagues with our already busy work schedule. Some of us feel no change except longer hours of daylight and a filling of weekend plans. Some of us simply fear swimsuit season.

For these reasons and more, this season can be as stressful as the holidays. We can place high expectations on the summer vacation. We can create a huge list of summer projects. We can race to cram the summer schedule to avoid boredom. However, the very intent of these three months are to rest. The goal here is to **not** stress. Remember, this is just a season! I struggle with this and so I've put together a few simple ways to eliminate or at least fool myself into stressing less this summer. I plan on testing these out over the next months. I pray that together we find them helpful, our hearts resting on Him, and our summers less stressful.

Angie

## Chapter 1

# Start the Day Right

If you can sleep in, do it. If you have a child who always wants to snuggle in the morning, take the time to do it. This is what summer is for! Once you are out of bed, start the day right, with the things that bring you peace and calm. I would highly encourage Scripture and prayer to be a part of that routine. Maybe for you, having one verse to think and pray over while you sit outside with a cup of coffee is relaxing. Maybe you enjoy a fried egg, a tall glass of OJ, and some worship music. Maybe it's restful for you to wake up early and take a morning jog while listening to a podcast. *(I can't relate at all to your kind, but more power to you).*

Use this summer to discover how to connect with Jesus in a practical and stressless way. If sitting down at the table and trying to complete a 10-page devotion while the kids demand their chocolate milk from the other room is stressful, free yourself from the lie that compels you to believe there's one way to connect with Jesus. Don't do it! However, if that is the kind of thing that helps you receive the loving peace of Jesus, then make that practice a standard this summer *(and sorry, I can't relate to your kind either).*

Sometimes it can be hard knowing where to start when considering morning meditation and time with Jesus. Don't complicate it. Below are some simple places to begin. Tomorrow morning, take a **quick 5** minutes to look up one of the verses listed on the next page and another **quick 5** minutes to ponder:

**What does the verse tell you about God's character?**  
**What hope does the verse give you for today?**

Continue your time with a **quick 5** minute prayer. Ask Jesus to sustain you through the day, to breathe His peace and mercy upon you, and talk to Him about what the verse said to your heart. Take another deep breath, a sip of coffee or OJ, and listen for an additional **quick 5** in silence. He may have something special for you.

If you have children, resist fighting them for the space and time to have a moment with Jesus, and instead encourage them to have their own devotional time. I will soon be offering another free e-book with creative ideas for engaging your kids in daily devotions.

## Morning Verses

Genesis 28:17-18	Psalms 90:14
Psalms 5:3	Psalms 92:2
Psalms 30:1	Psalms 143:8
Psalms 30:5	Isaiah 33:2
Psalms 59:16	Ezekiel 12:8
Psalms 65:8	Zephaniah 3:5
Psalms 88:13	Mark 1:35

## Chapter 2

### Alter Your Environment

We all know how it feels to be frustrated, stressed, and impatient. When the long days of summer seem to never end, we can feel stuck in a cycle of yucky behavior. All of a sudden, those of us who experience some alone time during the school year are now constantly surrounded by people. It's enough to drive us mad. How can we get a grip? How can we flip a switch on our attitude? First of all, only Jesus can transform our hearts through the working of the Holy Spirit. So, perhaps the first step is to **pray for the Spirit's intervention**. After that, here are two ideas to help us shift our hearts.

#### Light a candle.

This may sound small and trite. However, there is something about fresh scents, other than bug spray and sunscreen, that can mentally put us somewhere else. When the laundry or dishes have piled up because the kids are home all day dirtying everything, I can light a candle and trick myself into believing that the house is calm and cozy. Setting the candle next to the kitchen sink while I wash dishes can alter my mood ever-so-slightly for the better. If you have to sit at a desk all day long, light a candle with tropical scents and watch the time fly by. (*Just make sure beforehand that an open flame won't set off the sprinkler system.*)

## Play some music.

If our house is suffering from boredom, arguing, temper tantrums, etc., sometimes it helps shake things up if I turn on some music. It's amazing the effect some calm instrumental music can have on children. It's equally impressive how the Jackson 5 can turn an apathetic and fatigued mom into a happy Disco Queen. Allow yourself to be ridiculous. Being ridiculous, especially when you don't feel like it, can release those happy-inducing endorphins. It's hard to be stressed out when you're getting your groove on.

This also applies to the office, the gymnastics waiting room, and the six-hour swim meet. While you might be too inhibited to dance on the tables, (*and I wouldn't suggest this*), get some earbuds and feel young again. Tap your foot. Escape in your mind to a different place.

Here are some verses for further insight into the Spirit's ability to transform our summer emotions:

Luke 8:15

Ephesians 4:1-3

Romans 12:2

Colossians 1:10-12

2 Corinthians 3:18

1 Timothy 1:16

Galatians 5:22-23

James 1:2-8

## Chapter 3

# Free Yourself from the Norms

**“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).**

I’m just going to say it: the pool counts as bath time. We cannot allow our rigid and necessary routines of the school year rob us of our summer rest. Just accept the fact that some extra dirt during the summer is going to happen, and it’s not only okay, it’s going to be good for your kids. Give in now to the idea that on some nights, even week nights, bedtime will be later than normal. Your kids will survive. You will survive. Instead of stressing that it’s 8:31pm and the kids are still outside making mud pies, take a deep breath, remember that these are the kind of summer nights they will remember for the rest of their lives, put down the soap and towel, grab the camera, and go join them.

Can I also suggest that summer is the time to free ourselves from other norms? When the school year is in high gear, we can focus on the kid’s grades and performance. Allow for moments of educational exploration that don’t have any other expectation placed on them, except to have fun. I call these activities undercover schooling. I listed a few below to help spur your own ideas. If you don’t have kids, these are actually good for adults, too. Use the summer to explore your creativity and to learn something new. It will keep your mind and the minds of your kids sharp. A pressure-free learning experience is a healthy way to battle stress.

### Visit a museum.

Most museums have printable activities on their websites for children to either do before they visit the exhibits. Some even have activities to print and do while at the museum, such as bingo boards or scavenger hunts, that keep children (and adults) engaged.

### Color.

Did you know that there is a movement right now in adult coloring sheets? Filling in these intricate patterns with crayons, markers, or colored pencils can immensely relieve stress for adults. Of course, there are tons of coloring options for children as well. Take a trip to the dollar store for a coloring book, or print some sheets from the computer, sit with your kids, and color. You will be amazed at how the levels of stress dramatically drop. *(Add some candles and some music and you might all fall asleep.)*

### Go to the Library.

Pick a topic for your family. Maybe everyone seems to have a shared interest in marine life. Find books, both non-fiction and fiction, that involve the sea and the life within. Have everyone find some books *(not stressing if they stray from the theme, of course)*. At the end of the week, have a family book club time. Depending on the age of the kids, have them share with the family something from one of their books. You'd be surprised how often children will want to make a diorama about a book when it's not an assigned project. Give them the freedom and time to explore creative ways to communicate what they've read.

If you're on your own this summer, with no kids, find some friends and grab a book or bible study to read together. Expand beyond your usual interests or authors. You might be surprised at what you find.



**Put on a puppet show.**

Now I understand that if you don't have kids, this idea may not appeal to you. So parents, take this idea as not only a chance for your kids to use their creativity to make puppets, but also to discuss relationships and social issues. So far this summer, our family has already had to battle, "It's not fair!" So I have "suggested" to the kids to make some puppets and put on a show. I hinted at the topic of fairness. Then I let them take the reins. I made a snack while they practiced and when they were ready, they performed for me. It was a great way for me to see if they had been listening to all my instruction about fairness and if they truly "got it." The message was reinforced in their minds as well.

**Get creative in the kitchen.**

I know for us, the school year is so hectic that we easily get into a diet rut. The same thing goes into the kids' school lunch boxes week after week. The same four meals seem to settle into a rotation for dinner. Use the summer to explore new tastes and healthier options. Have fun with it and involve your kids. Try making homemade fruit roll-ups. Explore crazy ingredient smoothies. It's tempting to buy a commercial size box of hotdogs for the entirety of summer. Resist the urge, and instead go through the produce isle at the store with your kids and pick out all the craziest looking items. Bring them home and just explore the tastes. Your kids may not like any of them, but at least they had fun trying (*and unknowingly learning*). Or, you might discover a whole new menu for their school lunches next year. So far we discovered we like horned melon. *Look it up, it's a crazy one.*

## Chapter 4

### Build in Days of Rest

Because there can be less routine during the summer, it's wise to prepare ahead of time and schedule recovery days. For our family, we fair best when we buffer long trips or a hectic week with a rest day before and after. If we have a week full of evening meals with friends plus days full of fun activities, I schedule rest days like bookends: a day of nothing before that week and a day of recovery after that week. The day of rest before the big trip is essential to lower the level of stress during the week of craziness. I am learning that if my children don't enter a fun adventure rested, then the fun of the trip dies quick. Their excitement takes more of their energy and stamina, so if they are not well rested beforehand, we all end up in tears.

The day of rest afterward is self-explanatory. Even if the week is only full of late evening swimming at the neighborhood pool and subsequently later bedtimes, my kids need the same recovery time they would require after a long trip. I am learning that I also need this recovery time to reduce the chances of stress taking me over.

How do we spend these days of rest? Ideally, not in front of the TV or any other electronic device. Realistically, this happens. This is another area, where my own unhealthy tendencies have a ripple effect on my children. On the next page are some alternative ideas for our bookend days of rest.

## The day prior:

### Reflect on expectations.

Take time to think about what expectations you have for your upcoming time. If you are going on vacation, consider what it is you really hope to achieve during your trip. Family time? Couple time? Fun? Rest? Adventure? Take a moment to consider if these expectations are realistic. Ask your kids and spouse, or others involved, to do the same. Get together and discuss what everyone feels would make your time meaningful and successful. You may discover that the most important thing for your child is time with you, not an expensive trip to an amusement park. This could actually save you money, time, *and* stress!

If you are about to enter a week of a full schedule and late nights, consider what your expectations are for each of those days. Is the most important goal time spent with friends at that special occasion, regardless of how late it gets? Do you still want to be home by a certain time, even if you are having a blast? Discuss these expectations with your spouse and kids so that everyone is on the same page. If those details about departure time are hashed through ahead of time, you are more likely to make your exit without fits and tears. *(It doesn't always work, but your chances are higher.)*

### Do the household chores.

Use a day free from other obligations to do the laundry, clean the bathrooms, etc. Everyone loves coming home to a clean house after being away. It makes your days of recovery less stressful. If you've got a week with a full schedule ahead of you, you won't have much spare time to clean or do anything else. Preparing the house by staying ahead of the household duties will only make trying to stay on top of them during the days ahead all the more possible.

### Pray for the time ahead.

Spend time praying for safety and health. Pray for Jesus to work through you as you interact with each other and others. Pray that He bless your time and your relationships. Pray for growth and joy. Pray for less stress. Listed are some verses regarding preparation:

Psalm 5:3

Isaiah 57:14

Ephesians 2:10

Psalm 23:5

John 14:2-3

Hebrews 10:5

Psalm 65:9

1 Corinthians 2:9

1 Peter 3:15

Psalm 147:8

2 Corinthians 5:5

## **Eat healthy.**

Preparing your body for a busy few days or week, is no different from preparing it for a half-marathon. Spend this day prior fueling your body with healthy nutrients. You are just giving yourself better odds of less stress during a potentially stressful time.

## **Sleep.**

Not much to say here. Get rest. Take a midday nap if possible and get a good night's sleep. If you are traveling and need to pack a bag, don't save the task for midnight. Get your stuff done during the day so that you can give yourself adequate rest. Same goes for your kids. Encourage good bedtime routines. Start bedtime a little earlier than normal. If you are going to Disney the next day, chances are their excitement will make it hard for them to fall asleep. Start the settling down and bedtime routine earlier to help them work out their excitement and still get a good night's sleep.

## The day after:

### Reflect and debrief on your time.

Now that you've gotten through the vacation or the crazy week, the reality is that you may have some things to process! Plans may have not gone as expected. Expectations may have not been met. Your time may have been perfect! It's wise to take some of your free day of recovery to work through anything that popped up. I know I have a hard time processing events and the feelings surrounding them when I am in the midst of busyness or numerous people. It's healthy to have a day set aside for which I am guaranteed the time to reflect. There is also a good chance that your spouse or your kids had an experience or conversation that they want to share with you, and you all may have been too busy up to this point to have the opportunity. Take advantage of this scheduled day of recovery to do just that...catch up with each other (*and yourself*).

### Be thankful.

Take a moment around the lunch or dinner table to thank God for the time you just had. It will lift your heart with joy and God will love to hear from you. Chances are, it will bring you closer together as well.

## **Eat healthy.**

Again, it's common sense to take care of our bodies after they have just run a marathon. However, this area I often neglect. Use this day to recover and refuel with healthy food.

## **Sleep.**

Yet again, not much to say here. Rest. Take care of yourself. Sleep in. Take a nap. Get to bed early. If you've just spent the last week sleeping in a hotel bed or on a pullout couch, tonight is probably not the night to start binge-watching at 11pm. Same rules apply if you've had consecutive late nights at home. Don't be a fool and stay up late if you have the opportunity to get a solid 8-10 hours of rest.

Some additional verses with insight on rest:

Genesis 2:2-3

Psalms 23:3

Matthew 11:29

## Chapter 5

# Gratitude

We're back where we started. Remember that summer is a season, one of which to be thankful. Scripture is clear that in all circumstances we are to be continually thankful. Gratitude is the antidote to stress and despair. Don't let summer be a break from thankfulness. The following are ideas to incorporate gratitude into your daily and weekly routine this summer. Perhaps some of these will continue after the heat of summer ends!

### Make a list.

Ann Voskamp wrote an entire book about her experience making a list of thankfulness. (*If you need a good summer read, her book, 1,000 Gifts, should top your list.*) This act of gratitude is simple and painless. Throw a piece of paper on your refrigerator or kitchen counter and keep an on-going list of things of which to be thankful. There are no rules. Whether big or small, acknowledging all the good there is, all the blessings you've been given, creates an amazing amount of joy. It also requires a slower pace. Your schedule may be full, but your heart, soul, and mind will settle into an intentional rhythm of gratitude. The world can be swirling around you, but with thankfulness, you can stand firm in the assurance of a gracious and bountiful God.



### **Fill a Jar.**

Place a jar in the middle of your kitchen table. Keep a supply of popsicle sticks and a pen nearby. When you find something to be thankful for, write it on a stick and drop it in the jar. At meal times, begin or end the meal drawing a stick from the jar. Pray together as a family, each member thanking Jesus for whatever is written on the stick, whether they wrote it or not. When the jar is empty, its a good reminder to remain thankful, and focus our eyes to seek out even the little things for which to praise Jesus.

### **Weekly praise hands.**

At the end of every week, have each member of the family trace their hand on a piece of paper. Inside each finger, write one thing or person from the week for whom to be thankful. In the center of the hand, draw a cross, or write: 'Jesus'. When this is done, spend some quiet time tracing around the hand. As each finger is traced, thank Jesus for the gift written inside. When the fifth finger has been prayed for, circle the center of the palm and praise Jesus for all His wonderful gifts. If this is done at the end of every week, the hands can be cut out and taped to a blank wall as a summer mural displaying your family's thankful hands lifted to Jesus in praise.

Thankfulness is not always easy and unfortunately, doesn't always come naturally. Here are some bible verses about thankfulness to encourage and inspire you:

1 Chronicles 16:34

Psalms 44:8

Romans 1:21

Psalms 7: 17

Psalms 69:30

Colossians 3:15-16

Psalms 9:1

Psalms 79:13

Ephesians 5: 19-21

Psalms 28:7

Psalms 95:2

1 Thessalonians 5:18

# Conclusion

Grace More

Above all, no matter what our summers end up looking like, we can be assured to fail. We will lose our patience. We will grow anxious about our plans. We will still fear the swimsuit. If there is only one thing of which we walk away from the summer confident, may it be that God's grace is more. If we squander this entire season of rest on stressful to-do's and limitless expectations, my prayer is that we walk away with the following:

His love is greater. His forgiveness is wider. His acceptance is all the more clearer.

"For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1:16).

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness'"  
(2 Corinthians 12:9).