

BY JOHN BRADSHAW AND DR. DAVID DEROSE



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HEALING INSIGHTS | 1

DEALING

WITH **STRESS**



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DEALING WITH STRESS

FOREWORD

by John Bradshaw

A *New York Times* report on the Federal Supermax prison revealed some startling facts.¹

Located in Florence, Colorado, 40 miles southwest of Colorado Springs, the United States Penitentiary Administrative Maximum Facility houses some of the United States' most notorious criminals. Ted Kaczynski (better known as the 'Unabomber'), 9/11 plotter Zacarias Mousaoui, and Oklahoma City bomber Terry Nichols are among those incarcerated there.

The Supermax is unique in the American prison system in that every Supermax prisoner is held in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day. Inmates have little or no meaningful interactions with other human beings. *The New York*

1 Binelli, M. (2015, March 26). Inside America's Toughest Federal Prison. *The New York Times*.

Times reported that, subsequently, prisoners in the ADX are living in what one authority referred to as “a clean version of hell.” The effects of solitary confinement are described as “devastating,” with the conditions of causing “mental illness, stress, and trauma.” The *Times* quotes one source as saying, “Even if you tried to employ solitary confinement with the most humane intentions, people are still going to lose their minds and hurt themselves.”

No one is suggesting that the criminals themselves haven’t caused stress and trauma, or that they are undeserving of punishment for their considerable crimes. But the New York *Times* story highlights what Dr. David DeRose eruditely illustrates in this book: social disconnectedness is damaging not only emotionally, but spiritually. And stress can be incredibly damaging.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the story of how a loving heavenly Father has done and is doing all He can to draw back to the safety and warmth of His heart a race of sinners who have become separated from Him. Isaiah wrote that sin causes separation from God (Isaiah 59:2), so much so that it ultimately causes death (Romans 6:23). Apart from God there is no hope for sinful human beings. Jesus

Himself said, "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Again and again the Bible depicts oneness with God as an essential part of the salvation experience. The story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) portrays an estranged son finding reconciliation with his father through the recommencement of an intimate relationship. To the weak and burdened, Jesus says, "Come to me," (Matthew 11:28) and He states in John 6:37 that the essence of the problem experienced by the lost is that they will not come to Him. Closeness to God is healing.

Clearly, a healthy, wholistic Christian experience contemplates more than merely forgiveness for sin, as wonderful as forgiveness is. Or perhaps that is better expressed in this way: true forgiveness of sin cannot be experienced remotely. The spiritual wholeness offered by the God who declared, "I am the Lord who heals you" (Exodus 15:26) brings with it a personal connection with the Sovereign of the universe.

Union with God brings spiritual healing and emotional restoration. Jesus said He came into the world so people could live "life more abundantly" (John 10:10), and that abundant life is a life brimming with positivity and purpose. Just

as social disconnectedness negatively impacts a person's psyche, disconnectedness from God causes spiritual discord. Communion—with others and with God—is good for you.

Author Dan Buettner, commenting on the remarkable longevity of a group of Christian believers in Loma Linda, California, opined that a major factor in the health and longevity of this people group is that they “socialize with others,” which he stated was a significant aspect of “decompressing the stress” in their lives.²

Not all stress is bad. In fact, stress is responsible for saving many lives. Recently, the driver of a car I was in believed a vehicle was driving towards us on our side of the road. The stress of believing he was about to be involved in what could have been a fatal accident may well have saved our lives.³ A person who feels no stress when confronted with a demand for payment

2 Dan Buettner, 2009, *The Blue Zones*.

3 That is, if the car had actually been approaching us on our side of the highway. It turned out the car our driver saw was on the other side of the road, on the other side of the median in fact. We discovered our driver did not see at all well when driving at night, something I did not learn until after we had arrived at our destination. Had I known when we set out on our journey, the resulting stress definitely would not have been good for me!

for overdue rent may soon find himself or herself homeless. Stress is not always a bad thing.

But most Americans feel they are not managing their stress well, and that many are living with stress, which—if untreated—could “result in serious health problems including... high blood pressure and a *weakened immune system*.”⁴ Even though there is a positive side to stress, stress is a killer in modern society.

But the God of healing offers an antidote for stress. The one who comes to God is invited to cast “all your cares upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7). God says to the one who follows the path of His word, “When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid: yea, thou shalt lie down, and they sleep shall be sweet” (Proverbs 3:24). And through the prophet Isaiah, God addressed the deep need of the human heart, saying “O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea” (Isaiah 48:18).

Oneness with God is designed not only to ameliorate stress, but also to heighten our overall health.

4 Binelli, M. (2015, March 26). Inside America’s Toughest Federal Prison. *The New York Times*.