

# How to Handle Stress God's Way

## *PRAISE Part II*

12 - Metamorphosis: The Way of Transformation

Church on the Park | Sunday, 14 NOV 2021 | Glen Gerhauser

**Text:** “The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, “Don't harm yourself! We are all here!” The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house” At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.(Acts 16:22-34, NIV).

**Theme:** Stress gives us a unique opportunity to see God's glory manifested in our difficult situations.

**Intro:** How can you handle stress God's way? In Acts 16:22-34, Paul and Silas' response to being stripped, beaten and locked up gives us the answer. Their response is very similar to Jehoshaphat's response: praying, singing and praising the Lord. Paul was soaked in the Scriptures from a young boy, and now he's putting into practice the very thing he learned from the Rabbis—it's the power of praise.

Last week, we focused on 2 Chronicles 20:1-30. Our first point of response when under pressure is to PURSUE GOD. Our second point was to RAISE A VOICE OF PRAISE. Praising God welcomes his Kingdom on earth, transforming our atmosphere. Today, we will cover four more points that spell the acrostic PRAISE. I also made a new infographic to help you remember. You can find it at [www.brisbanefire.com/infographics](http://www.brisbanefire.com/infographics).

### **1) A - Appreciate the attributes of God (Acts 16:25-30; 2 Chron. 20:12, 21).**

- There's a greater miracle in Acts 16 that we often overlook.

- Amazingly, through Paul and Silas' praying and praising, the earth violently quakes, and all the gates flew open, and the prisoners' chains fell off.
- This meant the end for the jailer—all the prisoners would run for their life—right?
- But that's not what happened.
  - Instead, Paul, Silas and the prisoners stayed put.
- The prisoners staying put—not moving even though set free—is the greater miracle.
- To stay for the sake of the Gospel when you have an opportunity to escape is the apostolic way.
  - You see, all the prisoners were following the lead of Paul and Silas.
  - Today, in stressful situations, people are looking to genuine believers.
    - What are they going to do?
    - Are they going to live selfishly?
    - Or are they centred around the good news?
- This greater miracle—Paul and Silas caring about their jailer and staying put—allows them to lead the jailer to Jesus.
  - The jailer went from suicide to salvation in one day.
  - The salvation of the jailer and his whole household is the greatest miracle in this story.
- Jesus saves.
  - And how did he save?
    - He used the praise of Paul and Silas as the catalyst.
- Stress can cause us to have two reactions.
  - 1) To focus on the problem and come up with a solution—a solution in the flesh
  - 2) To focus on God and get our eyes on him.
    - This response always unleashes the supernatural power of God.
      - It also unleashes God's love.
        - The power led to love—loving those who needed saving.
        - “Well, this person just had us locked up. We should just let him commit suicide. He should get what he deserves.”
      - No, no, no. The greatest miracle in this story is how praising God led to love.
        - Why is that?
- When you praise God, you focus on his attributes, especially his hesed—his kind and loyal love.
  - According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, when you look at Jesus, you are transformed into his image, going from glory to glory.
- The glory of God is like a diamond, and God's attributes are facets of this otherworldly diamond.

## 2) I - Inquire (Acts 16:25, 30).

- In both the story of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 20) and Paul and Silas, there's praying and inquiring of God.
- To inquire is to ask.
- God loves questions.
  - But there are two kinds of questions.
    - 1) First is asking a question to seek understanding.
    - 2) Second is asking a question to trap.
      - The Pharisees were experts at this kind of questioning.
      - It's like the questioning of a prosecuting lawyer.
      - Look at Luke 20:22-23: "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Cesar, or not? But he detected their trickery..."
- When you ask the Lord questions, it should be to know him more.
  - The foundation of the questions we ask should be surrender and submission, not fighting and rebellion.
  - Neither should we inquire of God to find out about stuff and do the opposite.
    - We are not sampling wine and tasting at a buffet.
- The Father answers the sincere heart—the heart that wants to know and obey him.
  - And it's critical that you inquire so that in your stress, you don't react in the flesh.
    - Remember, under stress, you can either fight in the flesh, flee or fervently seek God.
      - Be aware of the natural mode of 'fight or flight.'
      - Instead, SURRENDER TO GOD.
- Listen to how Jesus teaches us to pray in the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9-13).
  - We can divide it into ten portions:
    - 1) The Person of the God ('Our Father')
    - 2) The Place of God ('who is in heaven')
    - 3) The Praise of God ('Hallowed be your name')
    - 4) The Presence of God ('Your Kingdom Come')
    - 5) The Purpose of God ('Your will be done...')
    - 6) The Provision of God ('Give us this day...')
    - 7) The Purification of God ('Forgive us...')
    - 8) The Preservation of God ('Lead us not into temptation...')
    - 9) The Power of God ('For yours is the Kingdom, power...').
    - 10) The Perfection of God ('and the glory forever. Amen.')
  - It's these ten principles that should guide our prayer and inquiry of God.
- Let's remember it was the sincere inquiry of the jailer asking, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved," that led to his and his household's salvation.
  - The answer back then is the same as today: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31).

### **3) S - Sing (Acts 16:25, 2 Chron. 20:21-22).**

- Listen to Colossians 3:16:
    - “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”
  - One study suggested that singing was more effective at relieving stress than a full body massage.
    - <https://healthymagazine.com/singing-stress-reliever/>
    - The article above mentions several different studies.
  - Yet, singing is not just for our benefit.
    - In Acts 16 and 2 Chronicles 20, we see that it welcomes God’s Kingdom and moves him to fight against our spiritual enemies.
    - We also see it brings salvation to people, setting them free from their prisons and chains.
  - Listen to the song in 2 Chronicles 20:21.
    - It wasn’t long, but it was potent.
    - It focused on giving thanks and God’s eternal love.
      - Hessed
- הוֹדוּ לַיהוָה כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ ■  
 (2 Ch 20:21)
- Compare with Psalm 136.
    - Psalm 136 continually repeats *ki l’olam chasdo* (for ever is his kind love).
- In the same way, our singing should focus on thanking God for who he is, what he has done and what he is doing.
    - Jesus is Lord above our storm and stress.

#### 4) E - Express your praise (2 Chron. 20:18-19).

- Praise is not meant to be locked in your heart but expressed.
  - Stand, sing, lift your hands, dance, and raise your voice. Jesus is worthy (2 Chron. 20:18-19).
- Remember all the examples of active praise in Scripture.
- When we gather together, it’s not a funeral. It’s a time to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection.

**Conclusion:** Let’s put this into practice now. And remember, there’s also an infographic @ [www.brisbanefire.com/infographics](http://www.brisbanefire.com/infographics) to remind you of the message and share it with others.

## ENDNOTES

698a חֶסֶד (ḥesed) kindness, loving-kindness, mercy and similar words (KJV). (RSV usually has steadfast love, occasionally loyalty, NASB lovingkindness, kindness, love, NIV unfailing love.)

698b חַסִּיד (ḥāsîd) holy one, godly, saint. RSV faithful, godly one, loyal. NIV, saint, godly.

698c חֲסִידָא (ḥāsîdâ) stork (perhaps because it was thought to be kind to its young).

For centuries the word ḥesed was translated with words like mercy, kindness, love. The LXX usually uses *eleos* “mercy,” and the Latin *misericordia*. The Targum and Syriac use frequently a cognate of *ṭob*. The root is not found in Akkadian or Ugaritic. The lexicons up through BDB and GB (which said *Liebe*, *Gunst*, *Gnade*, love, goodness, grace) are similar. KB however is the “mutual liability of those ... belonging together.”

In 1927 Nelson Glueck, shortly preceded by I. Elbogen, published a doctoral dissertation in German translated into English by A. Gottschalk, *Hesed in the Bible* with an introduction by G. A. LaRue which is a watershed in the discussion. His views have been widely accepted. In brief, Glueck built on the growing idea that Israel was bound to its deity by covenants like the Hittite and other treaties. He held that God is pictured as dealing basically in this way with Israel. The Ten Commandments, etc. were stipulations of the covenant, Israel's victories were rewards of covenant keeping, her apostasy was covenant violation and God's ḥesed was not basically mercy, but loyalty to his covenant obligations, a loyalty which the Israelites should also show. He was followed substantially by W. F. Lofthouse (1933), N. H. Snaith (1944), H. W. Robinson (1946), Ugo Masing (1954), and many others.

There were others, however, who disagreed. F. Assensio (1949) argued for mercy, basing his views on the OT versions. H. J. Stoebe (doctoral dissertation 1951, also articles in 1952 VT and in THAT) argued for good-heartedness, kindness. Sidney Hils and also Katherine D. Sakenfeld (*The Meaning of Ḥesed in the Hebrew Bible, a New Inquiry*), held in general that ḥesed denotes free acts of rescue or deliverance which in prophetic usage includes faithfulness. For this historical survey and references see Sakenfeld pp. 1–13 (hereafter called *Sak.*); also LaRue in the book by Glueck (here called *G.*)

The writer would stress that the theological difference is considerable whether the Ten Commandments are stipulations to a covenant restricted to Israel to which God remains true and to which he demands loyalty, or whether they are eternal principles stemming from God's nature and his creation to which all men are obligated and according to which God will judge in justice or beyond that will show love, mercy and kindness.

On the meaning of our word ḥesed it is convenient to start, as *G.* and *Sak.* have done, with the secular usage, i.e. between man and man. Glueck argues that ḥesed is practiced in an ethically binding relationship of relatives, hosts, allies, friends and rulers. It is fidelity to covenantal obligations real or implied. Sakenfeld goes over the same material and concludes that indeed a relationship is present (love almost necessitates a subject-object relation) but that the ḥesed is freely given. “Freedom of decision” is essential. The help is

vital, someone is in a position to help, the helper does so in his own freedom and this “is the central feature in all the texts” (p. 45).

Glueck certainly seems to find obligation where there is none. Stoebe gives an extensive treatment of *ḥesed* in THAT (pp. 599–622) and remarks (p. 607) that I Kgs 20:31 is an instance where *ḥesed* is unexpected. Benhadad was defeated. He could claim no obligation. He hoped for mercy, kindness. Stoebe cites the men of Jabesh also (II Sam 2:5). Saul had died in defeat. The care of Saul’s body seems clearly to have been a free act of kindness.

Also Laban’s willingness to send Rebekah to Isaac was not from any covenant obligation (though G. cites the appeal to providence in v. 50). It was a kindness to a long-lost relative. He could easily have said “no.” The beautiful story of Ruth is tarnished by considering Ruth’s action as motivated by contractual obligations. The Lord had no obligation to get the widows new husbands in Moab (1:8–9). Ruth went with Naomi from pure love. Boaz recognized her action as goodness in 2:11–12 and calls it *ḥesed* in 3:10. Even Glueck inclined toward kindness here. The action of Rahab was kindness (Josh 2:12). Her loyalty would naturally and legally be to her king and city. The angels in Gen 19:19 were hardly bound by covenant obligation—or any obligation—to Lot. Indeed the basis of their action is said in v. 16 to have been their compassion (cf. Isa 63:9). In Gen 21:23 Abimelech cites his previous *ḥesed* as grounds for making the covenant with Abraham which required further *ḥesed*. Glueck makes something of I Sam 20:8, 14, 15 where David and Jonathan swore friendship. This covenant, says G. was the basis of the *ḥesed*. Here, perhaps, is G’s major mistake. He forgets that covenants arise on the basis of a relationship and that the obligations are often deeper than the covenant. Verse 17 shows that Jonathan’s love moved him to make the covenant. When Jonathan died, David lamented for him out of love, not obligation (II Sam 1:26). David’s *ḥesed* to Saul’s house is said to be for the sake of Jonathan, not because of a legal obligation (II Sam 9:1, 3, 7). Glueck seems to miss the mark widely when he says it was neither grace nor mercy; it was brotherliness required by covenantal loyalty. Such a view has failed to see the depth of David’s character. Stoebe calls it the spontaneous proof of a cordial friendly attitude (*herzlich freundlich Gesinnung*). Other examples must be omitted, but they are similar. All parties agree that in Est 2:9, 17 the word is used of favor, kindness, but some try to make this usage unusual being post-exilic.

When we come to the *ḥesed* of God, the problem is that of course God was in covenant relation with the patriarchs and with Israel. Therefore his *ḥesed* can be called covenant *ḥesed* without contradiction. But by the same token God’s righteousness, judgment, fidelity, etc. could be called covenant judgment, etc. The question is, do the texts ascribe his *ḥesed* to his covenants or to his everlasting love? Is not *ḥesed* as Dom Sorg observed (see Bibliography) really the OT reflex of “God is love”?

A prominent early usage is in God’s declaration of his own character: Ex 20:6 parallel to Deut 5:10 and also Ex 34:6–7. These passages are discussed by G., Sak. and Stoebe from the viewpoint of documentary division first. But aside from this Sak. emphasizes the freedom of God’s *ḥesed*. in all these passages. She notes the proximity to words for mercy in Ex 34:6–7 and remarks that it is “this aspect of God’s *ḥesed* (as his mercy) which takes on greater importance in exilic and postexilic writing”—of which she envisions a good bit—(p. 119). However, she considers Ex 20 and Deut 5 as in a “covenantal context” (p. 131) and holds that “those who are loyal (loving) will receive *ḥesed* while those who are disloyal

(hating) will be punished” (p. 131). She is led into this covenantal emphasis by the prior idea that since secular treaties speak of love, brotherhood and friendship between suzerain and vassal, that therefore these are covenant words and show that a covenant was at least implied. This view forgets that love is a covenant word because kings borrowed it from general use to try to render covenants effective. They tried to make the vassal promise to act like a brother, friend and husband. It does not follow that God’s love is merely a factor in a covenant; rather the covenant is the sign and expression of his love. McCarthy more acceptably says, “the form of the Sinai story in Ex 19–24 which is reflected in the text without later additions does not bear out the contention that the story reflects an organization according to covenant form.” His view is that the power and glory of Yahweh and the ceremonies conducted effected the union “more than history, oath, threat and promise” (McCarthy, D. J., *Treaty and Covenant*, Pontif. Bib. Inst., ed. of 1963, p. 163).

The text itself of Ex 20 and Deut 5 simply says that God’s love (ḥesed) to those who love him (’āhab) is the opposite of what he will show to those who hate him. The context of these commands is surely God’s will for all mankind, although his special care, indeed his covenant, is with Israel. That ḥesed refers only to this covenant and not to the eternal divine kindness back of it, however, is a fallacious assumption.

The text of Ex 34:6–7 is fuller and more solemn, coming as it does after the great apostasy. It was a tender revelation of God’s self to Moses. Sakenfeld is right here “that forgiveness must always have been latent [at least!] in the theological usage of ḥesed” even before the exile (p. 119). The association with divine mercy is surely patent in the words and in the context of the occasion of the apostasy. The word *rahûm* with its overtones of mother love, and *ḥannûn* “grace” combined with the phrase “slow to anger” all emphasize the character of God who is love. He is great in ḥesed and ’emet (of which more later). He keeps ḥesed for thousands which is immediately related to forgiveness of sin. That all this simply says that God keeps his oath seems trivial. The oath is kept because it is the loving God who speaks the oath.

Sakenfeld nicely brings together the several passages dependent on Ex 34:6–7. They are: Num 14:18–19; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8 (cf. 9 and 10); Joel 2:13; and Jon 4:2. Of these passages, only Ps 86:15 includes the word ’emet after ḥesed. They all speak of the love of the Lord and some mention his forgiveness. None specifically ground the ḥesed in covenant.

The phrase ḥesed and ’emet “truth” mentioned above is thought by some to argue for the concept of loyalty or fidelity in ḥesed. It occurs some twenty-five times with about seven more in less close connection. Most agree it is a hendiadys and one noun serves to describe the other. Therefore the phrase means “faithful love” or “true kindness” or the like. Kindness and faithfulness is a fair equivalent hendiadys in English. The combination hardly seems to further the idea of fidelity to a covenant in the word ḥesed. If the term already meant that, why would the qualifier “faithful” be added? Usually, as in the usage of ḥesed alone, there is no covenant expressed to which fidelity is due. It is alleged in I Kgs 3:3, but although God’s ḥesed to David in making his son king was indeed according to covenant; it was also according to his love which lay back of his covenant. The text does not ascribe it to covenant loyalty. Stoebe points out in Ps 89 that the covenant of v. 3 is based on the ḥesed of v. 2 [H 4 and 3] (THAT, p. 615).

Another pair of nouns is covenant, *bērit*, and *hesed* used seven times with some other instances of use in near contexts. The main instance is Deut 7:9, 12 which has echoes in I Kgs 8:23; II Chr 6:14; Neh 1:5; 9:32; and Dan 9:4. It itself is called by Stoebe (THAT, p. 616) a paraphrase of Ex 34:6. He remarks that Deut 7:8 already bases all God's favor on his love. If this pair be translated "covenantal love" or "covenant and love," it should be remembered that the love is back of the covenant. This point is illustrated by Jer 2:2 where the *hesed* of Israel's youth is likened to the love of a bride. The love of a bride is the basis of the promise, not the result.

It should be mentioned that *hesed* is also paired about fifteen times with nouns of mercy like *rahûm*, e.g. Ps 103:4; Zech 7:9 (and cf. Ex 34:6–7 above), *hēn*, e.g. Gen 19:19; Ps 109:12, *tanhûm*, Ps 94:18–19, etc. These instances usually stand as paired nouns not really in an adjectival relation. The implication is that *hesed* is one of the words descriptive of the love of God.

So, it is obvious that God was in covenant relation with Israel, also that he expressed this relation in *hesed*, that God's *hesed* was eternal (Note the refrain of Ps 136)—though the *hesed* of Ephraim and others was not (Hos 6:4). However, it is by no means clear that *hesed* necessarily involves a covenant or means fidelity to a covenant. Stoebe argues that it refers to an attitude as well as to actions. This attitude is parallel to love, *rahûm* goodness, *tôb*, etc. It is a kind of love, including mercy, *hannûn*, when the object is in a pitiful state. It often takes verbs of action, "do," "keep," and so refers to acts of love as well as to the attribute. The word "lovingkindness" of the KJV is archaic, but not far from the fulness of meaning of the word.

חֲסִיד (ḥāsîd). Holy one, saint. Whether God's people in the OT were called ḥāsîd because they were characterized by *hesed* (as seems likely) or were so called because they were objects of God's *hesed* may not be certain. The word is used thirty-two times, twenty-five of them in the Pss. It is used in sing. and pl. Once, Ps 16:10, it refers to the Holy One to come. The word became used for the orthodox party in the days of the Maccabees.

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