



Lord, I Can't Handle This! Bible Study Leader's Guide

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, we can't handle this—whatever “this” is! We are not wise enough, strong enough, skillful enough, knowledgeable enough, or capable in any way. But You are all-wise, all-powerful, all-mighty, all-knowing. You are capable in every way! Use Your Word to encourage our hearts as we think and pray together now in Your name. Amen.

Getting Started

When people talk about stress in everyday life, they usually are describing “bad” stress, distress. Commonly, “stress” refers to problems like sick kids, overwhelming credit card debt, or arguments with co-workers.

Experts, though, remind us that not all stress is distress. Good stress, or “eustress,” gets us out of bed in the morning. It keeps us motivated and moving forward. That rapid heartbeat you experience at the surprise birthday party your friends planned for you is eustress. So is the rush that floods your being when your team wins. So is the feeling when that golden oldie starts to play and happy memories flood your heart, sending a smile across your face.

On the lines here, write down 5–10 positive stressors that have come into your life in the last month or two. How is each a blessing from our Lord? Allow a few minutes for participants to work independently. When most are ready, invite volunteers to share one or two of their responses with the whole group.

Into The Word

1. As God's people, we welcome eustress and thank God for the joys it brings. But while we live here on earth, we also struggle with negative stressors, with distress. Listen while a volunteer reads 1 Peter 5:6–11. Then comment on any insights you gain, particularly about stress.

You may want to point out that dozens of psalms focus on distress; the psalmists cry out to the Lord for relief. Multiple New Testament texts address anxiety—distress, too. One of these is 1 Peter 5:6–11. It's easy to read this passage as a checklist of random commands. But in reality, the ideas are closely connected with each other and with the freedom from sin and Satan Jesus won for us at the cross.

Ask for general comments now. The discussion that follows will provide a more in-depth exploration of the passage in detail.

2. The opening words of this passage zero in on issues of pride and humility.

a. What's the difference between godly pride and sinful pride? How does godly pride create eustress? Godly pride finds pleasure in what our Lord has done in us and through us. Self-forgetful, it honors our Savior. When we recognize His work, we can praise Him for it and rejoice in it. Sinful pride focuses on self. It accents what “I can do,” what “I have done,” and what “I will do.” It seeks recognition and promotes itself.

b. How can sinful pride lead to anxiety and negative stress? What examples of each can you cite? When we assume responsibility for the results of any effort we engage, we are bound to feel stressed and distressed. In any meaningful endeavor, failure results in embarrassment, the need to blame others, and perhaps even denial that the failure has occurred. We engage in cover-up efforts.

Share examples with each other, but avoid “confessing the sins” of other people by name.

c. Philippians 2:5–8 outlines the humility of our Savior. In utter self-forgetfulness, He died for our sins—even the sins we, in sinful pride, commit. Through faith in Jesus, forgiveness is ours—fully, completely. How does relying on His forgiveness and His love help us in times of anxiety and distress? For the child of God, failure is never fatal. We can come to our Father’s throne in repentance for our sinful pride and all the other sins to which sinful pride leads—especially the failure to love God and the people around us. Because of Jesus, we know we will always receive full and free forgiveness.

Knowing we can count on our Lord for wisdom, strength, and skill in the tasks and responsibilities we take on, helps us relax, and use with confidence, the giftedness he has given us. We can also choose those tasks and responsibilities wisely in the first place, considering our weaknesses as well as our strengths and trusting God to gift others to do those things we ourselves don’t do well. If time will allow, ask for examples.

2. Many Christians have memorized 1 Peter 5:7, counting it among their favorite Bible verses.

a. What makes this invitation so comforting? Let volunteers comment.

b. What does the little word “all” add to the invitation? Again, ask for comments. If no one mentions it, suggest that no anxiety is too small and no distress too large. The entire spectrum of human difficulty is encompassed in this promise.

c. In what ways has God demonstrated His care for you in the past? How does this encourage you to trust Him in the present? Throughout life, we see our Lord doing what He has promised to do in His Word. Again and again, as difficulties and challenges bring distress, we return to that Word for reassurance. Sometimes He acts in surprising and unexpected ways, and we may not always understand His purposes here on earth. But as we look back over years and decades, we can grow more and more thankful that He is God—and we are not!

d. How can simple, humble trust that “God’s got this” (whatever ‘this’ is) help turn distress into eustress? Have you ever experienced that? If so, talk about it briefly. When we commit our challenges and distresses fully to the Lord, we can stand back and watch Him work—in our circumstances, in the people around us, and in our own hearts. It can prove exciting, and sometimes amazing and thrilling. Ask for personal examples.

3. When we’re honest with ourselves, we must admit that oftentimes we create our own distress. Our sinful pride, our neglect of prayer, and our failure to trust our Savior’s promises keeps us from experiencing the peace the Lord wants us to enjoy.

Praise God for sending Jesus to earn forgiveness for us! Praise God that Jesus died for our sins and was raised again for our justification, as Romans 4:24–25 recounts.

But there’s another source of distress, too. Read 1 Peter 5:8–9.

a. What word picture in these verses underscores the dangers Satan poses for us as God's children? These verses picture Satan as a roaring lion, prowling about on the hunt for victims.

b. Satan uses three main tactics: deception (lies), temptation, and persecution. Give an example of each. Invite volunteer comments. Jesus called Satan out as "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). He tries, for example, to convince us that our Lord has not heard our prayers or, in anger at our sins, is not answering them. Satan also tempts us to solve our problems or alleviate our stress by taking actions that Scripture forbids. Finally, Satan stands behind every act of persecution Christians endure here on earth. In all these ways, and in many more besides, the devil seeks to increase our distress. Quite simply, he hates us because we belong to Jesus and our mere existence brings God glory. (See Ephesians 1:12.)

c. Tell about a time Satan used one or more of these to create negative stress in your mind and heart. Let volunteers comment. You may want to "prime the pump" by sharing an example of your own first.

d. What defensive measures does our Lord recommend in verses 8 and 9? How might these things help? (Remember, as you wield the weapons the Holy Spirit provides, He works in you and fights for you!) The text encourages us to stay watchful and to resist the devil's schemes. We are to stand firm in the truths of God's Word. It also helps to remember our Christian sisters and brothers around the world who are at this very moment undergoing persecution for the name of Jesus. We are all in this together! We are not the only ones under attack. We can count on one another's prayers and on God's gracious answers.

4. The closing verses of this passage contain a beautiful promise. Read 1 Peter 5:10–11.

a. Which words or phrases stand out as particularly and personally meaningful? Explain. Let volunteers respond.

b. How does remembering that we are "called to [God's] eternal glory in Christ" help put all earthly stressors—both eustress and distress—into perspective? As time will allow, you might have the group also read 2 Corinthians 4:17 which touches on the same issue and elaborates a bit further. In the light of the eternal glory we inherit through faith in Jesus, our best blessings and our biggest problems fade into insignificance.

c. The phrase, "to Him be the dominion," echoes the expression, common among Christians today: "God is in control." Think about that for a moment.

If we did not know God as our wise, kind, good heavenly Father . . .

If we could not trust in Jesus as the sacrifice for our every sin . . .

Then the thought that "God is in control" would be—not comforting—but quite frightening! Why?

Knowing an all-powerful, holy God is in control can (and should!) terrify impenitent sinners. Those who know the grace of God in Jesus Christ, however, find great comfort in His power and justice, as well as in His mercy.

But we DO know our Father's kindness, wisdom, and love! We DO trust Jesus as our Savior. And so we pray in confidence, "To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen!"

Taking It Home

Think about a stressor that is causing distress for you. With that stressor in mind, what one verse, thought, tool, or practice will you take with you as you leave today? When and how will you use it? (Jot your thoughts on the lines below.) This activity is designed to help participants put into immediate action the insights they have gained through the study. Encourage everyone to participate by modeling participation yourself.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, we can't handle this—whatever “this” is! We are not wise enough, strong enough, skillful enough, knowledgeable enough, or capable in any way. But You are all-wise, all-powerful, all-mighty, all-knowing. For Jesus' sake, forgive our sinful pride and our failures to trust you. In the hours and days ahead, increase our confidence in Your ever-present help and never-failing grace. We pray in Your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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Leader's Guide
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