

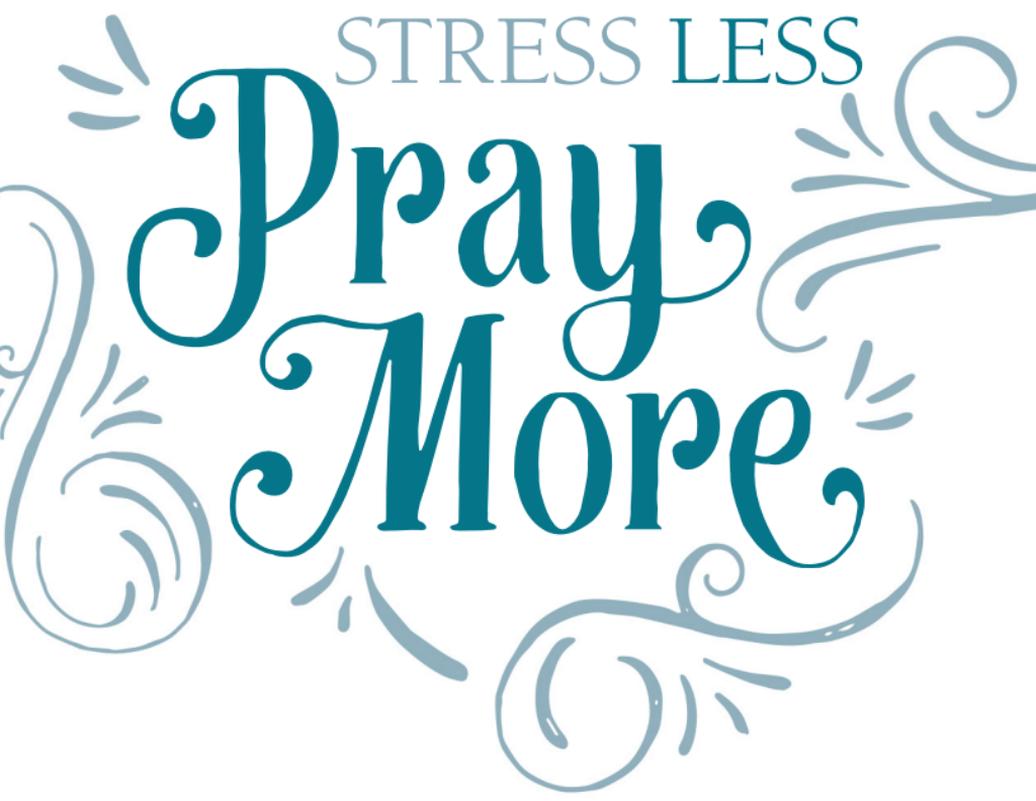
STRESS LESS

Pray
More

The text is surrounded by elegant, light blue decorative flourishes. These include swirling lines, loops, and small tuft-like shapes that frame the central text, creating a soft and artistic background.

Donna K. Maltese

STRESS LESS

The title 'Pray More' is written in a large, elegant, teal-colored script font. It is surrounded by intricate, light blue decorative flourishes that resemble calligraphic scrolls and swirls, some with small radiating lines at their ends. The background is plain white.

Pray
More

A Woman's
Devotional Guide to
Tranquil Living

BARBOUR BOOKS

An Imprint of Barbour Publishing, Inc.

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Print ISBN 978-1-68322-451-8

eBook Editions:

Adobe Digital Edition (.epub) 978-1-68322-811-0

Kindle and MobiPocket Edition (.prc) 978-1-68322-812-7

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Published by Barbour Books, an imprint of Barbour Publishing, Inc., 1810 Barbour Drive, Uhrichsville, Ohio 44683, www.barbourbooks.com

Our mission is to inspire the world with the life-changing message of the Bible.



Printed in the United States of America.



Introduction

More prevalent in the world today than ever before, stress affects twice as many women as men. We're anxious about everything from piles of laundry and doctors' bills to job security and the economy. Amid all these worries, we are surrounded by the noise of technology and information overload. But God has a time-tested solution: prayer.

To help women navigate their way through stress and into the peace of God's presence, we introduce this devotional guide featuring 180 readings and prayers based on this promise: "Make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. . . . Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work he began when we first believed" (Romans 13:11–12 MSG).

Each reading is designed to teach a woman how to live in God's freedom and reinforces the truth that with her focus on Him, she can reconnect with the power and peace to live a more wonder-filled life every day.

Read on to stress less and pray more!



Our Avenue

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. . . . Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

JOHN 14:1, 27 ESV



Stress is nothing to be ashamed of. It's just a signal to be recognized and addressed. The problem is when we let stress take over, try to ignore it, or imagine we can handle it in our own strength.

God knew we'd have trouble in this life, that we'd find ourselves with anxiety-causing stress. But He also gave us a way out: Jesus. Our faith in Him is our avenue to an out-of-this-world peace.

Jesus is waiting. Take a deep belly breath. Exhale. Enter that secret place where He abides. Ask Him to cover you with His wings, to raise you up. To give you the word you need to hear, the peace you need to inhale.



*I'm here, Lord, limp in Your arms.
Please fill me with Your peace.*



Attuned to God

“Give in to God, come to terms with him and everything will turn out just fine. Let him tell you what to do; take his words to heart.”

JOB 22:21–22 MSG



How many times do we not let God in on our plans, run ahead of what He has planned, and miss the blessings He’s waiting to pour out on us?

Perhaps it’s time to stop trying to figure things out on our own, thinking we know best. Maybe our thoughts and feet should come to a screeching halt. This just might be the day we get it right.

Consider spending some time in the Word and in prayer, allowing God to lead the way. Know that with God on your side, everything is and will be fine. Open up your mind to the wisdom and insight He has for you. Store His words in your heart. Then, and only then, attuned to and in step with Him, walk on.



*Lord, I’m so tired of trying to do all this on my own.
Show me what You would have me do, be, and see.*



Above the Storms

Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him.

MATTHEW 14:29–31 ESV



At times, stress is like a storm raging within and without, drawing our attention away from God bit by bit. Then, when we suddenly realize our eyes are no longer on Him and our ears are deaf to His voice, we begin to sink. That's because we're looking at the waves instead of Jesus. We're listening to the howling wind instead of the Holy Whisperer. Before we know it, fear has supplanted our faith and we're in danger of drowning.

The remedy? Make Jesus your main attraction. Fix your eyes on the Water Walker. Keep your ears open to His Word. In so doing, you'll be riding above the storms within and without.



Jesus, help me to keep You in the forefront of my heart and mind, for You alone are my safe haven.



Watch Where You're Going

*Let your eyes look right on [with fixed purpose],
and let your gaze be straight before you.*

PROVERBS 4:25 AMPC



One way a woman gets stressed out is by not living in the moment. She's wondering about all the what-ifs. She's consumed by all the what'll-happens of tomorrow. And all the could've, would've, and should've of yesterday. But worrying about the future and ruminating about the past only serve to ruin her present. Not only that, but such distractions from the now also set her up for a major fall because her eyes have left the path laid out for her.

The safer route is for her to leave all those stressors by the wayside. To focus on taking one step at a time, knowing that God intends for all things to work out for her good—no worries. To simply walk on the faith side—and let all else be.



*Lord, give me the wisdom to watch my way,
knowing You have already gone before me and
made the path safe for my feet—and heart.*



Strength for the Journey

“Arise and eat, for the journey is too great for you.”

1 KINGS 19:7 ESV



Even God’s most faithful can find themselves stressed out. Consider Elijah. After his victory with God, Elijah received a threatening message from Jezebel. Yet instead of waiting for a word from God, this prophet ran for his life. Over eighty miles later, Elijah sat down under a broom tree, asked God to take his life, and fell asleep.

God responded by sending Elijah an angel who touched him, said, “Arise and eat,” and provided him with bread and water, giving Elijah enough strength for his next steps.

When you feel threatened, remember God and what He has done for you time and again. Tap into the knowledge that nothing can withstand His power. Wait for His word. But if you find yourself already on the run, remember that He will provide for you no matter where you go. Just rest in Him—He’ll give you hope and strength for the next steps.



Thank You, Lord, for providing for me no matter where I go.



His Story

What are you doing here?

1 KINGS 19:9 AMPC



On Horeb, the mount of God, Elijah reaches a cave and sets up camp. There God asks—not once, but twice—“What are you doing here?” In response, Elijah tells God—not once, but twice—his story. How he’s been fighting for God. But the Israelites don’t seem to care. Other prophets have been murdered and the people are now looking to kill him, the only one of God’s prophets left!

Yet God knows the true story, His story. He knows more prophets are left (see 1 Kings 18:4). That Jezebel is the only one who has threatened him. That Elijah seems to have forgotten His previous mighty acts.

When we replace God’s story with our own, nothing but despair echoes in our heads. That’s because our feelings have usurped God’s truth. The story in our mind has overtaken His story for our lives. That’s when we know it’s time to change the thoughts in our head and get back to the true story.



Lord, help me to zero in on Your story for my life.



A Heart for Hearing

*A quiet voice asked, “So Elijah,
now tell me, what are you doing here?”*

1 KINGS 19:13 MSG



Not happy with Elijah’s initial version of events, God tells him to come out of his cave and stand on the mountain. A strong wind comes by, breaking up the rocks. But God isn’t in the wind. Then an earthquake—but still no God. Then a fire—but still no God. After the fire, in the silence that remains, comes a gentle voice. A whisper. That’s when Elijah comes out of the cave, still hiding from God, masking his face with his cloak. As Elijah stands there, God asks him again, “What are you doing here?” And Elijah repeats his tale of woe and desperation.

God asks you to have a heart for His message. To stand before Him with boldness. To calmly listen. When you do, you will hear His still, small voice in the silence of your days.



*Lord, help me to have a heart for Your message as I boldly
come before You, calmly listening for Your whisper.*



Going Back

“Go back the way you came through the desert.”

1 KINGS 19:15 MSG



God directs Elijah to go back the way he'd come, which would put less and less distance between himself and the threats of Jezebel, the evil queen (and wife of King Ahab of Israel) he'd just run away from. Then, once he got there, Elijah's orders were, among other things, to anoint Jehu to be the new king over Israel!

Sooner or later, we will face circumstances in which we feel threatened. When we give in to our flesh, we may run away in fear and despair, only to find later that, having rediscovered God and heard His instructions, we have to go back and deal with the situation. That's when we must focus on the fact that God has the upper hand in any situation we find ourselves facing, that He will provide for us while we are back in the desert, and that He will help us find the courage to confront what frightened us in the first place.



*I'm focused on Your power, Lord.
Help me to face whatever lies ahead.*



Jesus on Board

Then they were quite willing and glad for Him to come into the boat. And now the boat went at once to the land they had steered toward.

JOHN 6:21 AMPC



Jesus having gone off to a mountain to pray, His disciples decided to head home across the sea. So they got into a boat and started rowing. As the darkness increased, Jesus was still a no-show. Meanwhile, the going got tough as a violent wind whipped up the waves. After straining against the oars for three or four miles, the disciples suddenly saw someone walking on the water near them. Their imaginations went wild and they became terrified. Jesus then calmed their fears, saying, "It is I; be not afraid!" (verse 20 AMPC).

When you're straining at the oars, be courageous and keep your eyes open for Jesus. When you see Him, invite Him to come aboard. Before you know it, you'll find yourself attaining that for which you were striving.



*Oh mighty Navigator of my life,
bring me toward the shore for which I strive!*



Keep Calm

“When reports come in of wars and rumored wars, keep your head and don’t panic. This is routine history; this is no sign of the end.”

MATTHEW 24:6 MSG



These days, just listening to the news can be a major stressor. For you hear of wars not only between nations but within nations. Then there are the wars on drugs, sex trafficking, opioid addiction, and so on. It’s enough to discourage and dishearten even the most stoic of listeners.

Yet Jesus tells you not to panic. To keep your head. That this is just how it is. Meanwhile, what are you to do to keep calm and carry on?

One solution is to limit your exposure to the news. Find a level you can tolerate and maintain it. Another is to pray for all those involved in wars. Above all, replace those world worries with God’s wisdom. Pray and memorize Bible verses to help you stay above the fray. Here’s one to start you off:



“You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you!” [Isaiah 26:3 NLT].



Trust and Pray

Trust GOD from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for GOD's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track.

PROVERBS 3:5–6 MSG



One surefire way to keep a lot of stress out of your life is to trust God. Do so from the very core of your being—mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Believe His promises, that He means all things for your good. That He loves you more than any other person you know. That He has a plan for your life. That He has got not only your back but also your front.

Don't depend on yourself and your own finite ideas. Instead, depend on the One who is part of infinity itself, who sees a way beyond current appearances and impressions. Who knows your future—and your past.

Pray. Tell God what's happening. Ask Him to speak. Then actually listen to what He says. Do what He tells you to do. Pray more, stress less.



Lord, here I am. Tell me what to do.



Seeking Approval

*I'm not trying to win the approval of people,
but of God. If pleasing people were my goal,
I would not be Christ's servant.*

GALATIANS 1:10 NLT



Abraham Lincoln said, "You can please some of the people all of the time, you can please all of the people some of the time, but you can't please all of the people all of the time." Yet that is exactly what we sometimes try to do. And in the process, we end up getting stressed out, because pleasing everyone is an unattainable goal. We are looking for love and approval in all the wrong places. But what's a girl to do?

Look for God's approval only. Don't worry what other people might say or do. It's Him you're looking to please. It's in Him you feel secure. It's He who loves you beyond measure, who has created you for a specific reason. So make Him number one in your life, seeking to live for Him alone.



*I hope to please You, Lord, in all I say,
think, and do. Show me how to serve You!*



Follow Him

*And rising very early in the morning,
while it was still dark, he departed and went
out to a desolate place, and there he prayed.*

MARK 1:35 ESV



Jesus was up against a lot of different political and religious factions. He was pressed by the crowds that were seeking healing physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. He was teaching and training disciples who just didn't seem to get it right. He was pressured by Satan who was trying to tempt Him away from His mission. He encountered people in His own hometown—even family members—who either didn't believe Him or wanted Him to tip His hand before it was time.

Yet in spite of all the things He was up against, Jesus never panicked but kept His peace. How? He went off alone and sought His Father God. He left the crowds and went to a deserted and desolate place. Somewhere secluded where He could meet with God one-on-one in the quiet of the morning hours.

Follow Him.



Lord, I come to You now, alone, seeking Your face.



Choices

*Then Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel,
“But first, find out what the LORD’s word is in this matter.”*

1 KINGS 22:5 GW



King Ahab wanted to try to reclaim some territory. But Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, wasn’t taking one step until he asked the Lord’s advice.

When we make choices without first consulting the Lord—or even worse, when we do things against His advice—we can end up not only feeling stressed out but also facing ruin. So for less stress in your life, be like the wise Jehoshaphat. Seek God’s advice before you choose. Pray, “Make your ways known to me, O LORD, and teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me because you are God, my savior. I wait all day long for you” (Psalm 25:4–5 GW).

Know that God will give you all the wisdom you need for where you are and will keep you from tripping up on your path (see Psalm 25:14–15).



*Give me light for my path, Lord.
I’m not moving until You speak.*



The Upside

*When troubles of any kind come your way,
consider it an opportunity for great joy.*

JAMES 1:2 NLT



We all sometimes find ourselves going through dark days, groping for a way out. But there is an upside to these times: when we are tested, we come out better and stronger than before.

Consider the Old Testament hero Joseph who was thrown into a pit, sold to traders, and imprisoned unjustly. Yet he went on to become the number two man in Egypt. Why? Because no matter what happened to him, no matter where he landed, he had faith that “the Lord was with him and made whatever he did to prosper” (Genesis 39:23 AMPC; see also 39:2)!

Even though you might not be where you'd like to be, don't stress about it. Just have faith. Know that God is with you. He's building up your resilience, bringing out the best in you, training you up for the next steps as He prospers you right where you are.



*Lord, help me to find joy wherever I land, knowing You're
there, helping me not just to survive but to thrive!*



Look Up

I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

PHILIPPIANS 3:14 NLT



God has given us a vision for our lives. We are reaching for the prize that is awaiting us, that to which Jesus is calling us. We have something to strive for.

Thus we need not get caught up in the cycle of bad news. We need not lose hope. We can choose to see God before us, feel Jesus' warm breath upon us, hear the Spirit's voice within us, giving us guidance, telling us to keep our cool.

Have your eyes been glued to the ground? Are you dragging your feet? Is your chin on your chest? Look up to what God is doing. Keep your eyes on His heavenly prize. Know that God has a purpose for your life and that He will brighten up whatever darkness may come your way.



*My eyes are on You, Jesus. I'm walking in Your light,
feeling Your breath, hearing Your voice.*



Not Knowing

We have no might to stand against this great company that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.

2 CHRONICLES 20:12 AMPC



God is thrilled when we are humble, when we admit we have no idea what to do but are looking to Him for help, wisdom, guidance, and direction. At the same time, admitting to ourselves that we don't know what to do takes all the pressure off us! In fact, much of our strength lies in believing God. What a relief that we don't need to have all the answers! How wonderful to admit—even to our spouses, children, and friends, if we must—that we don't know what to do next but are looking to God.

Know that God will always come through, no matter how bad things may look. He'll take care of all that's coming against you. He'll bring you out of whatever crisis you find yourself in.



Thank You, God, that I don't need to have all the answers—because You have them for me!



Level Ground

Jesus said to those Jews who had believed in Him, If you abide in My word [hold fast to My teachings and live in accordance with them], you are truly My disciples. And you will know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free.

JOHN 8:31–32 AMPC



The quaking of our worlds—inner and outer—can leave us shaken. But God provides us with solutions. He helps us to be resilient, to absorb the shocks that come our way, to hold fast under the pressure.

God's Word repeatedly tells us not to be afraid. He has blessed us with the avenue of prayer. He invites and encourages us to abide in Him, promising that when we walk in His truth, when we believe His Word with our whole heart, mind, body, and soul, we are freed from the sins that snare, the worries that stress. And in so doing, we find His love spread out before us and our feet standing on level ground (see Psalm 26:3, 12).



I find my freedom in You, Lord Jesus.



Enlightened Eyes of Faith

“It wasn’t you who sent me here, but God.”

GENESIS 45:8 GW



The Old Testament Joseph easily could have considered himself a victim of his circumstances and the people in his life. He could have blamed his brothers for throwing him in a pit and selling him to traders. He could have blamed Potiphar and his wife for his imprisonment. He could have blamed the baker and the wine bearer for leaving him to dream in the dark dungeon. But he never did. Instead, he persevered, believing that God, the Ruler of the universe, was with him, would protect him, and would turn his trials into triumphs. And so He did.

How would your outlook change if you realized that all things, people, and situations—both wonderful and awful—are part of God’s plan for your life and that He will be with you through it all? Only through the enlightened eyes of your faith will you see God’s caring hand in the world’s darkness.



*Thank You, God, for working out Your good will
in all things and sticking with me through it all.*



Take a Breath

*[It is] the Spirit of God that made me
[which has stirred me up], and the breath of the
Almighty that gives me life [which inspires me].*

JOB 33:4 AMPC



What do you do when the flight, fight, or freeze button has been pushed and stress has taken over? When you can't seem to get your bearings and just need a way to calm down?

Pause. Become aware of what's going on mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally. Remind yourself that God is with you. Then, through several deep belly breaths, reconnect with the Source of all creation. Link up with the God who breathed life into you, as He did Adam (see Genesis 2:7). Find your way back to Jesus, who breathed the Word of life into His followers (see John 20:22). Recite God's words, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10 NLT). Before you know it, you will feel yourself connected with the Holy Spirit (which, in Hebrew, is *ruakh*, meaning "wind" or "air in motion").



*Lord, in this breath I come to You.
Please bring peace to my soul and spirit.*