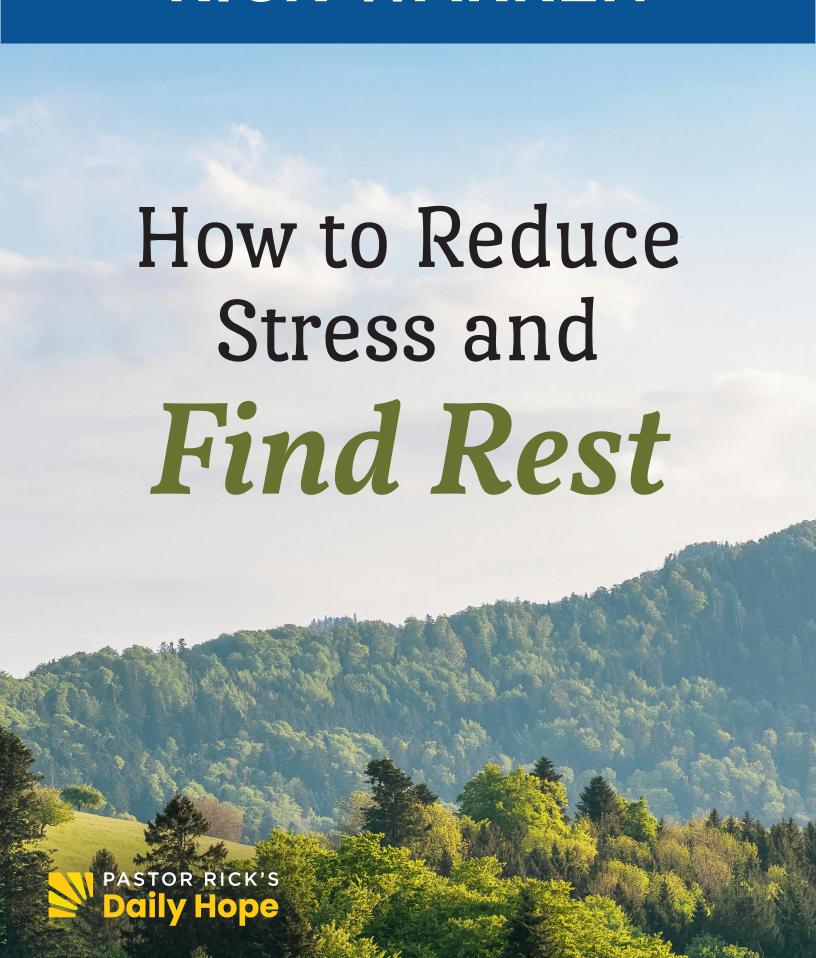
RICK WARREN



Seven Spiritual Habits that Reduce Stress

One of the most beloved psalms in the Bible is Psalm 23:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (NIV).

Psalm 23 has comforted people for thousands of years, and for us in the modern world, it can serve as a model for stress management. Here are seven ways Psalm 23 can guide you toward less stress and more peace of mind.

1. Look to God to meet all your needs.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing."

Instead of putting your security in things you can lose—like your job, your spouse, your reputation, or your health—put your security in something that can never be taken away: your relationship with God.

2. Obey God's instruction about rest.

"He makes me lie down in green pastures."

The Bible is filled with instructions about rest and recreation and relaxation. God modeled our need for rest when he rested on the seventh day after creating the world. He also included rest—the Sabbath—in the Ten Commandments. And Jesus made a point of resting when he was here on earth. Resting may seem out of sync with our hurried world, but God knows that giving your best requires rest.

3. Recharge your soul with God's beauty.

"He leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul."

When God created Adam, he put him in the Garden of Eden; God made us to live in beautiful, natural places. Not many of us live in gardens anymore, but when you take time to enjoy God's creation—whether that's spending a day in the woods or just taking a few moments to look up at the sky—your stress is reduced because beauty inspires, encourages, motivates, and stirs up positive emotions.

4. Go to God for guidance.

"He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake."

Today's world is full of choices—and indecision is a common source of stress. There are many places you might turn for guidance—friends, family, self-help books, or even social media influencers—but God is the ultimate source for guidance because he always tells the truth. You can trust him to guide you at the right time and in the right way.

5. Trust God in the dark valleys.

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

We all go through dark valleys of loss, stress, grief, fear, and pain. And it can be easy to become lost in those valleys. But no matter how dark your valley gets, you can trust that your Good Shepherd is there to protect and defend you. Jesus says he's the Light of the World, so keep looking to that light and walking forward, even through darkness.

6. Let God be your defender.

"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows."

Conflict is a common source of stress. People sometimes criticize you, are rude to you, and can even be downright mean. Your natural response might be to fight back—but God offers a different way: Let him be your defender. Trust him to be good to you and take care of you, despite what's going on around you.

7. Expect God to finish what he starts in you.

"Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Do you fear the future? When you're tempted to ask, "What if *this* happens?" you have a choice to make. You can continue to view life through the lens of fear and anxiety, or you can choose to see it from God's perspective. And God's perspective says that "goodness and love" will be your companions throughout your whole life—and that, when this life is over, you will dwell in his house forever.

When you feel the pressure of today's world creeping in on you, find comfort in God's plan for stress management.

Praying through Psalm 23

When you're not sure what to say to God, praying his Word back to him is a great place to start. Here's one way to pray through Psalm 23:

Dear God,

I know that no person could possibly meet all my emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical needs. So I want to look to you to meet all my needs. You are my Shepherd; I lack nothing.

Starting today, I'm going to obey your instructions about rest. Thank you for the picture of you making me lie down in green pastures and leading me beside quiet waters. *Help me to refresh my soul* with the beauty of the natural world you've created. Let me look to things like art and music that you've given me to express my emotions.

Heavenly Father, sometimes I don't know what to do; I'm confused, and I lack wisdom. *Help me go to you for guidance*. When I go through dark valleys, help me not to be afraid of the shadows but to turn to you for comfort. When I'm ready to give up, help me to trust that you know what I should do.

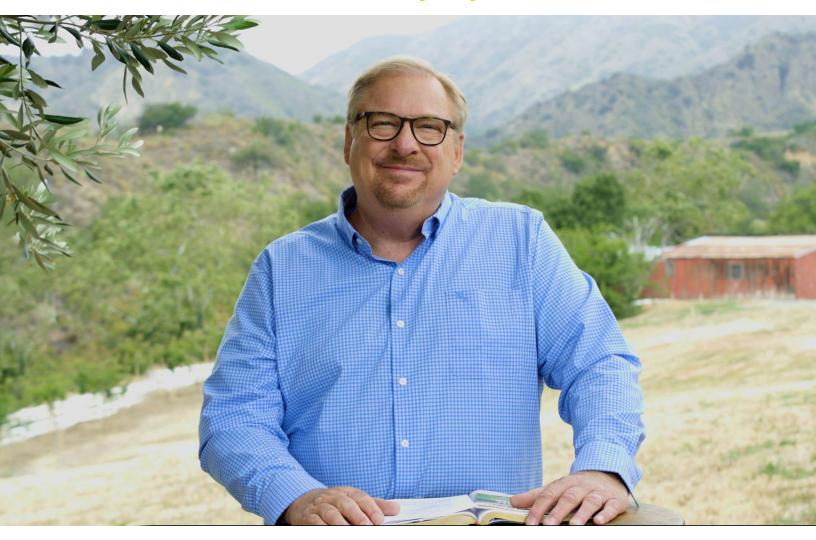
When I feel like I'm under attack and others are against me, would you be my protector and defender? Help me to speak words of kindess and to return good for evil—to pray for those who persecute and stand against me. Thank you for comforting me when I walk through hard seasons.

And, God, I'm going to expect you to finish what you've started in me. Rather than feeling anxious about the future, I'm going to believe that your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life—and that one day I will dwell in your house forever.

Jesus, *I invite you to take over* every area of my life and my mind. Slow me down so that I may see your plan for my life. Replace my stress with your peace.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.





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