

Life IS HARD,

People

CAN BE ANNOYING, AND

God IS MYSTERIOUS

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FOR YEARS IF YOU WANTED TO SEE ME SWEAT, you only had to say one word: AIRPORT.

Let's agree that it's impossible to say which part of the ordeal is worse.

- Getting to the airport on time, through traffic, and road delays, gets my heart pumping.
- Wading through crowds of people and going through security causes my blood to percolate to even think about it. *(And am I the only one who thinks they are going to find something illegal in my bags even though I used measuring spoons to make sure I wasn't bringing too much toothpaste?)*
- Boarding the plane? Forget it. Either you sit in the wrong place, or someone sits where you belong. Whichever happens, there's sure to be an argument with other passengers, the stewardess, or both.
- If all that wasn't bad enough, you still have the whole flying part. I don't like being in buildings more than two stories tall, let alone squeezing my size 8 body into a size 4 seat.

My anxiety kept growing. A cloud in the sky meant a dangerous storm. An unexplained glance from someone meant they despised me. A simple rash meant a deadly disease.

I know, it's making you sweat too, isn't it?

Believe me, I've been dealing with this kind of everyday stress since as a kid I was constantly uprooted. My mom loved buying and selling our homes. Fun for her. Traumatic for me. Different neighbors. Different school. Different house. All that different felt threatening. What if I couldn't make new friends? What if I couldn't find my way home? I started to have nightmares that I was lost.

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There was no end to how I could take almost any life experience and dip it into nerve-racking scrutiny, which eventually painted me into the corner of agoraphobia.

I feared any situation that could bring on a panic attack. Fear beget fear. You see how that can build right on top of itself.

That's what you want to avoid: the Stress Snowball.

It got so bad for me that even good things hid some dark secrets behind it. The innocent beauty of a March day would bat her eyelashes at me then give me a whiplash of worry. Just about the time I would feel giddy about Spring, thunderous winds traversed over the horizon, squalls formed, trees bent, and temperatures dipped.

Even if it wasn't so, it was real in my mind.

You might be experiencing that kind of stress right now. You don't want it to take over your daily life, but it's already tangling like a mass of yarn that's been thrown into a drawer.

Something as simple as getting your hair done brings a few skips in your heartbeat. Stuck in that chair while the lady doing your hair can't help but brandish her scissors around as she rants about her boyfriend.

No, thank you.

Maybe it's your morning conversation with your husband. Is he tired, you ask yourself or is he not interested in what I'm saying? Maybe he's not in love with me anymore? Those mind games start to hit close to home when the people you love are caught up in them. And suspicious surmising is a game, a bad one, we can't afford.

It seems like we put ourselves in stressful situations every single day. There's always someone else that ratchets the tension. And where's God in all of this, you might be wondering. He can be complicated, to say the least—which, on the surface, doesn't seem to help.

It's *turbulence*. Why can't life be easier? All you want is a smooth flight to get to the many destinations you have in your life. Maybe it's visiting your kids across the country, or perhaps it's something as simple as picking up a few things at the store. Turbulence is there to make things rough.

The last thing you want is all of those stressors to get you to a point where you do all the work to get on the plane (literally and figuratively speaking), but you end up

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dashing down the jetway at the last minute, throwing your own plans into disarray.

Just like riding a plane, you can't control the turbulence. The great thing I came to realize, though, was that I can control me in that turbulence.

You can ride that turbulence too. That might sound impossible now, but you can. Yes. Remember that word. Yes. It's powerful, it's key, and you too can learn to say YES to yourself.

I once believed outside environments and people created my feelings of panic and flooded me with frightening physical symptoms. When actually, it was my belief that I wasn't safe that incited and fired up my emotions.

I had a breakthrough with the realization that I stirred *my own* anxiety by believing the lies that I would die or lose my mind. When I admitted to myself that I had suffered through hundreds of anxiety attacks, and yet I was still alive and of a somewhat sound mind, the entrenched, scary thoughts began to lose their power over me.

My journey wasn't easy, but with the hourly choice to move forward, things began to shift. With much prayer and strenuous effort, I gradually replaced negative life patterns. At first, it's a wrestling match, but with time it becomes more of a natural response. I promise.

You want things to be better right now, and I'm right there with you. We all want that instant comfort and stability. It takes time, but you will get better and better at dealing with your anxiety. You will be like a master craftsman honing the masterpiece of yourself. (And remember, you are masterfully created!)

Rest assured, though, this journey can start right now. You don't need to put in any investment before starting these techniques I'm sharing with you. These are all things you can begin today.

When the stress starts, you find yourself in a situation that is causing you to implode in on yourself like the last log in a hot fire. It can be hard to remember some complicated list of things that are supposed to be physiologically effective at deactivating your stress. But a long list won't do you any good when a panic attack is making it literally hard for you to breathe.

So, let's keep it in three's, shall we? These three points will make it easier when the stress goes up because life is hard, people are annoying, and God is mysterious.

1. Move

Sounds easy enough, doesn't it?

Sadness usually sits, so move. You can command your muscles to obey even if your emotions are trying to drag you to yonder chair. Purpose to stay busy in meaningful ways, but don't try to outrun your stress or you will generate more anxiety. Extremes complicate our plight for balance. Set a sane pace.

No, it's the beginning of a process, but hiding under your covers all day isn't going to solve anything, so you've got to MOVE.

If what you are doing in your life isn't working, today is a good day to Stop It and try something else. To get in the habit of ineffective behavior is to help yourself stay stuck. So let's deliberately move on. Say yes to change.

Don't indulge self-pity, which can be our tendency when sad feelings show up at our doorstep. "Why me?" "Why this?" "Why now?" While these are knee-jerk questions we ask ourselves, they are not beneficial to dwell on, because they fan the flame of our anger, which fuels sadness. The more you let the focus be on your sadness, the less likely you are to move.

But that turbulence is going to come, I can hear you saying it all the way from here! Surely, this point is too simple, and I'm making a fool of myself?

No, it's the beginning of a process, but hiding under your covers all day isn't going to solve anything, so you've got to MOVE.

When I was struggling with this step, I came up with a little exercise that helped when things became overwhelming. The more you practice this, the more helpful it becomes.

{ 10 STEPS }



To Soothe Yourself

1. Breathe deep...release slowly.
2. Relax muscles during exhales.
3. Change thoughts - you are not in danger.
Unguarded thoughts fuel anxiety.
4. Remind yourself: this will pass.
Speak to yourself kindly.
5. Breathe deep - release slowly.
6. Relax muscles.
7. Don't buy into lies - this isn't the worst spell ever.
You will not die, you will not lose your mind,
you are not crazy, you are not the only one.
You are more than you know.
8. The more you relax your muscles,
the shorter your emotional spin will be.
9. Sing/hum music that soothes you.
I hum old hymns my mom sang when I was
young and think on the words.
10. Repeat starting with step one.

From Patsy Clairmont's book, *You Are More Than You Know*

2. Love

Sure, you can control yourself, but what about all those people out there. You know the ones who won't listen.

Whether it's someone who won't cover their mouth while they cough next to you at the movies, or the cashier who can't figure out how to do a return even as you hold the receipt in their face, people can sure add their annoyance to your accumulating stress.

There's something to be said about understanding that there are people of all kinds out there. It really does surprise me, the more people I encounter, the more different they seem to be. They think different. They're choices are different.

Even my own husband Les is about as different from me as a person can be. He can go hours watching some nature documentary about the anatomy of an anteater, while I sit and wonder just what can be so fascinating to that brain of his. But I'm sure he has similar thoughts when I go through my *Downton Abby* collection.

And that's just it. We are different, plain and simple. Sometimes I like to believe he does all those odd things purely to annoy me. But the truth is Les is just Les. That's who he is, and if he were just like me, life would be pretty boring.

We need to remember that about everyone we encounter. People are who they are. They aren't trying to annoy us (most of the time), and they are in process too.

For all we know they might be in the middle of practicing those breathing techniques too. We never know the condition we encounter people, and they might be just as anxious as we are.

Do something sweet for someone (keep it simple) with no expectation of recompense. It is good when we get stuck in the muck of ourselves to think of ways to show love toward others.

Don't forget to love give yourself grace too! Loving people is tricky advice when you might be an incessant people-pleaser. If you find yourself a nervous nelly, concerned with taking care of everyone else, make some time for you. Uninterrupted time to show the love you have for others directed toward yourself can do amazing things to help you feel like you aren't stretching yourself too thin.

Be sure to mentally congratulate yourself for even small steps in the right direction. Be a cheerleader for yourself and others. Extend mercy to yourself as generously as you offer it to those you love best.

3. Celebrate

So don't sit and wait for God to fix you; instead, get up and say yes to the Lord, to the new day, and to yourself.

You might think this is a pretty odd one to include here.

Celebrate what? Your brain going on full attack against you?

No, nothing quite so backward.

Through all of this stress, I've had to remember that God is in control. Yes, He is a big mystery sometimes and seems like He can be pretty quiet, but there's a lot of talking that He has already done.

Your Bible isn't something that should only be opened at church or for your study group. It's there to be a part of the day-to-day. And thank goodness because those anxieties can attack day-to-day, so making your Bible a constant support can really go a long way to stabilize your world.

In the long run, God has made some pretty amazing promises, and we need to remind ourselves of that. Just as important, it's good to remind ourselves that He is just as good at keeping those promises He makes.

I memorized Scripture that I would quote to redirect my thoughts toward God's care of me. I selected portions that mirrored his love and constancy. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Ps 46:1).

I searched the Scriptures and memorized uplifting verses.

For instance, I had a wretched view of my worth, so I began bathing my mind in Psalm 139. It was hard to believe that God was present when I was being knit together in my mother's womb, that I pleased him, and that he loved me. I began rehearsing these truths, especially when I was in another tirade at myself and making scathing judgments like, "You are so stupid," "You are so ugly," "You can't do anything right," "Nobody likes you." It takes effort to change destructive habits, so don't be disheartened when you slip back into an old pattern. Extend grace and mercy to yourself . . . God does. Then begin again choosing life.

Ultimately, my mental health recovery started with a yes to God and to myself. The Lord invites us to be a part of our recovery. So don't sit and wait for God to fix you; instead, get up and say yes to the Lord, to the new day, and to yourself.

Does that sound too simple? Too Pollyanna? Too rah, rah, sis boom bah? Trust me, I know how hard it is to change a lifestyle, a mindset, and a belief system because I have been in a yes-process for almost fifty years. I've never worked harder, and I'm still not done. No one is. None of us outgrows our need for assistance. I understand the toil and time involved in the tempering of a heart and the transforming of a mind, and I can say with a resounding yes! that it's worth the effort. Saying yes to Jesus was the path that led me to personal dignity, integrity, and to believing I had a God-given destiny.

Saying yes doesn't mean nothing bad is going to happen, or there won't be any turbulence. Saying yes does mean knowing how to handle that turbulence. Saying yes to you and God means staying on the plane.

There's life to deal with, people to love, and God to celebrate. Don't let the panic in your life say no.

Fly to new heights in your growth, say YES.

ABOUT PATSY CLAIMONT



Patsy is a bookish woman who loves words and has a penchant for dark chocolate sorbet. Since spelling bees in grade school, childhood Scrabble games, right up to her current addiction with Words with Friends she has been known to spell it out, to say it like it is.

Much to her surprise Patsy has written a stack of books that continues to light her passion for the printed page. And nothing pleases her more than to share her faith through laughter and tears and to encourage others to flourish.

A former agoraphobic Patsy never imagined the expansive plans God had in mind for her. She just wanted to make it to her neighborhood grocery store and safely home again. Instead, for the past 35 years she has been traipsing throughout the U.S. and Canada, interspersed with trips to Israel and Africa and she has even spoken at the Pentagon for the Flag Officers Bible Study. Patsy has spoken to millions of women (and men) offering spiritual and emotional hope.

Patsy has written books in several genres including devotional, fiction, children's, and gift offerings. She is one of the founding speakers at Women of Faith and trains people for the platform.

Patsy's latest passion is helping people shake loose the stories from their own lives to use in communicating more personally, effectively, and memorably, whether from a stage, a board meeting, a Sunday School Class, or over the back fence with a neighbor. We were designed to invest in each other, sharing our stories is one way to do that.

Patsy recently moved from her home state of Michigan to Tennessee and confesses it fits her "like a cozy pair of cowgirl boots." She delights in telling others, "Franklin is like living in Mayberry." Her husband Les, affectionally known as the Porch Mayor, has taken over the wicker rocker where he greets friends and strangers alike with an invitation "to sit a spell." Patsy takes delight in her 2 grown sons and 2 grand boys.

Patsy is the author of the best-selling books "[God Uses Cracked Pots](#)", "[Normal is Just a Setting on Your Dryer](#)", "Under His Wings", "[Sportin a Tude](#)", "[Tea with Patsy Clairmont](#)", "[Its About Home; Creating a Place to Cherish](#)", "I Love Being a Woman" and "[Stepping Stones; A Garden Path](#)", "Mending Your Heart in a Broken World", "The Hat Box", "The Shoe Box", '[I Grew Up Little](#)' and 'Pillow Prayers', '[All Cracked Up](#)', 'Dancing Bones, Living Lively in the Valley', 'I Second that Emotion', 'Catching Fireflies', '[Kalediscope](#)' and 'Stained Glass Hearts'.

She authored 6 children's books, 5 are published under one title of '5 Cheesy Stories', "[Sleep Sweet](#)" and '[TWIRL....a Fresh Spin on Life](#).' Patsy wrote a fiction book of short stories, 'Stardust on My Pillow; Stories to Sleep on'.

Patsy's latest book is '[You Are More Than You Know](#)'.