



Season 2 | Episode 40

## How to Manage Stress and Avoid Burnout

### Jay Fine

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Crystal Keating:

I'm Crystal Keating. And this is the Joni and Friends Ministry Podcast. Each week, we're bringing you real conversations about disability and finding hope through hardship and sharing practical ways that you can welcome and include people living with disability in your community. Be sure to subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts, so you don't miss any of our encouraging conversations. You can also find all of the helpful resources that we've talked about at [joniandfriends.org/podcast](http://joniandfriends.org/podcast). Dr. Jay Fine. It's so great to have you back on the podcast. Welcome again.

Dr Jay Fine:

Hey Crystal. It's my pleasure to be here. Praise God for that.

Crystal Keating:

Amen. Well, we had such a great conversation talking about how families can adjust to a new normal. We learned a little bit about your story, and we know you are a follower of Christ, your heart beats for the gospel. You're a doctoral level licensed psychologist who has worked with people from all walks of life, regardless of their faith or background, for the past 38 years. And I love learning about this. You have been part of the rapid response team for The Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. We love them. You also have a specialization in working with children and adults with disabilities in their families to help with behavior management. And right now, we alluded to it last conversations, but many families are still struggling with isolation due to COVID-19 restrictions. So, Dr. Jay, as a counselor, what are some of the most common challenges being faced by those you've seen over this last year?

Dr Jay Fine:

Sure. Great question, Crystal. My wife and I are both chaplains with the BGEA. She's just signing onto her training and even on her first deployment, some of what we're talking about, she has seen, depression and anxiety. People are cut off from their social support networks, from isolation, from their ability to go out and do things socially. And we were created by God to be in fellowship, to be in unity, to be in church. And that separation has been devastating across the board, both in the believing and non-believing population, but also in the disability world, even more so because people can't get out and do things.



Dr Jay Fine:

One thing that's really unique we have here for our son is it's called CrossFit. It's adaptive CrossFit, and the local folks have been great, but they've been doing it over zoom. And they actually just received an award for being one of two in the country that's doing something for disability ministry and particularly with being physically active. So, these times are unique times, indeed, not just because of COVID, but because of the division in the country and the isolation and all the anger that's going on. That for people to be physically active and to be physically connected is absolutely critical.

Crystal Keating:

That is so true. And you said it, we are hungry and desperate for connections, especially with the body of Christ. Moving is so important. Being physically active has an effect on our mental health, right?

Dr Jay Fine:

Absolutely. It's absolute direct physical connection.

Crystal Keating:

Right? And so, this conversation, we're really going to be focusing on how to help in times of stress and avoiding burnout. And so, this is a timely conversation. Too many times, families and individuals facing the hardship of a disability. I feel are unable to, I don't know how else to say it, but tune into their own levels of stress. What's going on with me? How do I feel? And I feel like it really creates a risk of burnout, especially when isolation is a factor. Support services are limited. We're not seeing the same kind of people that we used to. It seems like circumstances don't allow for the needed rest and recuperation. So, Dr. Jay, what are some of the symptoms of stress and how do you help families identify the main stressors in their lives?

Dr Jay Fine:

Sure. I would say that there're main areas for people to look at, your physical, your cognitive, your emotional, your behavior, and your spiritual life. A lot of people are not sleeping well, but a lot of people, Crystal are also sleeping way too much. I know that we've had the opportunity to coming home from church. It's like, it's just easier because you can't go to a restaurant. "Let's just pick up some fried chicken, and some mashed potatoes, and some Gouda, macaroni and cheese, some comfort food. And because we don't have that physical activity, a lot of people's biochemistry is changing. So, some people are getting too much sleep. They're carb head heavy. They're not hydrating enough. A lot of people, I experienced every day, personally and professionally, folks who are struggling with the isolation.



Dr Jay Fine:

So, in terms of stress and grief, what are some of the physical symptoms? Are you sleeping more or you're sleeping less? Because you're not working or you're not as active, are you feeling the aches and pains more? People with cerebral palsy are experiencing much more muscle tightness and atrophy because they're not getting out. And there's more aches and there's more pains. So, paying attention to your body. Your body is fearfully and wonderfully made. God created our bodies in an amazing way. And our body will speak to us through its groaning, through its aching. It's really critically important to start off with a good foundation of eating right and hydrating. I tell people that all the time and it's really common sense. But a lot of people are becoming the word is anhedonic, it's a lack of interest in pleasurable activities. People eating, but they're not enjoying it. They're going to sleep, but it's not the thrill it's as if people are just going through the motions, not necessarily like robots, but people are really getting COVID-weary. It's a phrase that I came up with the very beginning of COVID.

Dr Jay Fine:

Because people are wondering what happened to the summertime. They've gotten into a phase of malaise, of lethargy, of almost learned helplessness. It's a concept that came out by Han Seligman in an experiment. And what they did is they put a dog in a cage, and they shocked the cage at a consistent interval. And when a dog could predict the shock, the dog would just tighten up and was fine. But when the shock was random and intermittent and the dog couldn't predict it, it would just lay down and give up. And that's what I'm seeing to the majority of people right now. And they're not excited about church. They're not excited about worship. They're just exhausted physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Dr Jay Fine:

So, the foundation of everything we do, we've got to get out and walk. We've got to... And I'm preaching to my own choir here, eating better, hydrating well, taking your medication is important. I've got a buddy who has had a whole bunch of medical issues because he and his wife have had COVID. They haven't been able to get out to a pharmacy. Where they live, nobody delivers. So, I just found out last week, he's taking half of his medication that he should be taking because he hasn't asked somebody else for help. And this is a guy who's very bright. He's a retired pastor, but for him to ask for help, there's never been anybody to ask for help. So that's an example of how the COVID weariness is affecting.

Dr Jay Fine:

The next one is cognitive. People don't have the cognitive stimulation that they had before.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah, that's true.



Dr Jay Fine:

Not going to church, not reading, not engaging, not having conversation. Keeping your mind active is hugely important. Crossword puzzles, there's some brain training games on the computer. I encourage people who don't have a household like ours, where there's animals and noise and people talking. If you don't have a lot of stimulation, you got to get it for your brain's activity.

Dr Jay Fine:

The next is emotional. One thing I see one of the primary grief and stress symptoms of emotional is just the flatness. I'd love to cook. I'd love to eat. And what I've tried to do is, I'm adding different and new spices. I'm adding new recipes and trying to keep things new and exciting, and stimulating. It's really important. Even things like aroma with therapy, cooking cookies, giving things that are comforting, get you out of the doldrums, getting out of the winter. I'm very concerned, Crystal, for a majority of people who have disabilities going into the wintertime, because it's for us not blessed to be in California or Florida, it's cold, and it's dreary. And that isolation really has a toll on people's emotional wellbeing. So, I tell people, "Use your giftedness and connect with other people on zoom at least once a week, do an art class, do a Bible study, do something to keep you connected with the face to face."

Dr Jay Fine:

Behavioral. A lot of people have gained 20 or more pounds during COVID or walking a whole lot less are more irritable or more moody or more depressed and are more anxious period. The suicide rate is significantly up for all populations, especially first responders and people with disabilities. It's across the board. There's a pandemic within the pandemic right now.

Crystal Keating:

Yes. I see that.

Dr Jay Fine:

And people who feel like there's no hope, that there's not going to be an end. When is COVID going to end? I've heard people concerned that we're going from COVID season into flu season into winter, and it's our job to do something to help stimulate other people's connections. One thing that I like to do is I like to write, but I like to write short things, and I like to do things that are helpful. So, for the first 45 days of COVID, I did what was called shrink-wrap. A mental health minute with Dr. Jay. And it was really funny. It was a goofy thought. But I posted it on Facebook, and it literally was just a paragraph. Well, I got feedback from people in Africa, in Israel, all over the country that I never even knew commenting on how that thought of the day, or the task of the day made a difference for them.



Dr Jay Fine:

Crystal. There's nothing special in me except Christ. Everybody has a gift skill, talent or ability. And I tell people, use that, do something behaviorally with your gifts, skills, talents, or abilities. And a great example is Emily Colson's son, Max. He's doing these hard pictures, and he's given out, he's painted them, and he's putting it all over the place. It's goofy. It's great. He's selling cards now. And people are commenting. Max has pretty significant autism, but he likes to paint, and he's got a heart for people. That's an example of a behavioral effort that's got somebody and other people. They're the funk that they're in.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah, I like that. It doesn't have to be something big, but just something different and small.

Dr Jay Fine:

Yeah. Just do something. The next is social. And that kind of speaks for itself. We're social people. People need people. Females typically need connectedness more than males. And in the disability community, that isolation is devastating because it's a 24/7 job. A friend of ours has quadriplegia, and her depression and her anxiety has skyrocketed. And if it wasn't for [inaudible 00:12:12] and Facebook and those things like that, I think they would be in drastically different condition. People need people, and God has created to be in that. And the folks at Joni and Friends, you guys are absolutely wonderful. You're connecting managers, you're connecting people and normalizing the devastation of a disability. I mean, life does continue beyond disability.

Dr Jay Fine:

And the last would be spiritual. Apart from Christ, there's really no hope for any of us. I like the concept that I'm just a visitor here. This is not my home. I'm so excited about the end of times. And I know it's kind of freaking some people out, but we as believers, particularly those of us who have a family member with a disability, we have a unique opportunity to show the message to the world by living life differently. And when we're excited and we're passionate and we're goofy, they want to know what we have. And that just opens up the door to share Christ.

Crystal Keating:

Yeah, this is not our home we're passing through. And God has entrusted us with His Spirit. And we got to let that shine. I know that we battle our own hopelessness. And what you're saying just made me think of the scripture that says, "Encourage one another daily, so that we're not hardened by the seat fullness of sin." Your main focus is helping others manage stress in a God honoring biblical way. You gave us so many practical ideas. I love that. What does the Bible say about handling stress, managing anxiety, and trusting God to get us through?



Dr Jay Fine:

Well, the first one I would probably, I hold onto the [inaudible 00:13:50] Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." It's frees me of having to do anything because it's His world. My job is simply to be obedient. You can read Philippians 4:6-9, "Worry not, but with prayer and petition with thanksgiving, all things are possible." So, our job is simply to be obedient. I had an opportunity to do some ministry in Ethiopia, and I looked for every single opportunity not to go. I really put obstacles up there to my obedience and long story short, I'm in Ethiopia in this small little area. And I heard the song, the never-ending reckless love of God, but I heard it with my heart and now my ears. And what I've told people since that quiet time in Ethiopia, I had to go to have 12 hours of quiet time with God.

Dr Jay Fine:

And I realized he left the 99 for me, that one sheep. And I tell people that if you're the only reason that Christ died on the cross, that would be sufficient. If God has your picture on his refrigerator, and God's desire is that none should perish. And what I challenge and exhort and encourage people in our Sunday school. And frankly, everybody I see, is that when you arrive in heaven and when you arrive for judgment, and you will arrive in judgment, it doesn't matter whether you believe it or not. There is a judgment. I don't want to have any opportunity where God says, "Why didn't you share the gospel? Why didn't you display the gospel to this person?" I'm so excited about the opportunity of opening up the flood Gates of heaven and sharing the good news. I got to give a gospel message first at my mom's funeral, with 300 Jewish people who couldn't eat or leave. So, I was done in the end, my dad's.

Dr Jay Fine:

And for me, the resentment and the scathing letters that I've gotten from family members. When I've gone to Africa, when I've gone to Israel, I'm going to share the gospel. I can't save anybody, but my Abba father can. And as a born again, first-generation believer, my task is simply to be obedient so that none should perish. The only news we need to share is the hope that we have in Christ. The Holy Spirit has the ability to do what the Holy Spirit wants to do. If we don't connect with people, they're never going to hear a message. And that's the only job that we have here as believers.

Crystal Keating:

Amen. Well, and I can see how you having the priority of eternity in your heart can actually manage and minimize some of the stress that we feel when we take our eyes off the here and now and think about what's ahead. Well, Dr. Jay, I'm also curious to know about some of the techniques you use to minimize acute stress. Some of the techniques I know you use are breathing and imagery. Can you explain what these are and how they help? I mean, how our stress and burnout related and how are some of these practices really helpful to people?



Dr Jay Fine:

I would say stress and burnout are intimately connected. Kind of like your brake and your gas pedal. They both are necessary to operate a car. There's a life stress scale. And if you look at it, the death of a child is one of the highest stresses that you can have. But a birth of a child is right below it. Buying a house is a good thing for most people, but right below that is for closing on a house. So, stress is inevitable. If we did not have stress in our lives, we would be boneless chicken sitting in the corner. So, stress is both positive and negatives. It doesn't matter if you have a whole lot of positive stress or a whole lot of negative stress, it's a way that breaks down your body, and it breaks down your mind, and can eventually break down your soul with enough stress.

Dr Jay Fine:

Ways to combat it. There's some really easy significant ways. The first one is breathing. Most of us are pretty good at breathing, but we're not conscious about how you breathe. So, what I tell people is get in a comfortable chair, put your feet on the floor, breathe in through your nose, hold your breath for three or four seconds, and then breathe out mouth. What we're trying do is to get people to do this consciously. Getting people to be conscious about your breathing. When you can slow down your breathing and your heart rate, your body has to adapt. When we're under stress, the fight or flight mechanism kicks in, and you're ready to either run or to fight. And you're breathing heavier. So, when we're under stress or when we're under anxiety, our blood pressure goes up, our breathing goes up. And that's natural and normal. That's the body operating.

Dr Jay Fine:

What I teach people is you can put a blood pressure cuff on and do these breathing exercises, and you can physically hear and see your blood pressure and your pulse drop down. It's a conscious effort to breathe in through your nose, hold it just briefly and out through your mouth. And when you're at a place where you're breathing pretty calm and pretty regularly, I take people on what's called a guided imagery walk. Because we're here in the mountains of North Carolina. I take people on mountain walks. Some people are [inaudible 00:19:30] about snakes, so we go down to the beach. People are afraid of drowning, so we go to the mountains. Whatever suits your need, somewhat that's peaceful for you.

Dr Jay Fine:

And what I have them do is just to imagine why they're breathing, and I call it their mind's eye. There's not a mind's eye. It's just a way to focus. And to imagine you're walking slowly in the woods or down on the beach, focusing on the leaves under your feet or the sand on your feet. The wind and the trees, or the waves in the ocean. And then with your eyes closed, you imagine you can see leaves falling. Or you can see the Sandpiper run along the water. And by breathing, in controlling your thoughts, that helps your body to be centered. It's the best way to kick in your body's natural endorphins. It's a form of morphine. It calms your body down. It calms your joints down. It's great to relieve stress, but also the physical elements.





Dr Jay Fine:

And the third thing is progressive muscle relaxation. As you're breathing and you're calm, and you have this guided imagery, where it puts you in a state of rest. You just simply at one side of your arm, you say your left arm, you make a fist, and you hold it for five seconds, and then you stretch it out. You make a fist, you bend your elbow to your to shoulder and then you stretch it out. You put your arms straight out, and you do a circle forward for five seconds and then backwards. And then you do that with your other arm. And then you do your left leg and your right leg. And what that does, is it reconnects your brain and your body.

Dr Jay Fine:

When we're burned out, when we're fatigued, when we're tired, when we're isolated, when we're depressed, when we're lonely, when we're stressed out, we're just running on automatic pilot. And what this does is it kind of throws a stick into the front wheel of your bicycle, going down the hill. It just train-wrecks the train wreck. It allows you in a matter of five to 10 minutes to take control of your breathing, which controls your body. It takes control of your mind, and it connects your body to your brain. If there's spastic quadriplegia, like there is for our son, we help him do it. We move his joints slowly for him, but he's still doing the movements.

Dr Jay Fine:

So, it's okay way to center yourself in prayer. It's a way to center yourself in focus. And if I have enough time when I'm working with people, I really talk to them about, look at your fingertips, how God created your hand. How you could just think about moving your pinky and God allows that to happen. Now God has you make a fist, and you open up your hand. When you open up your hand, I want you to imagine somebody in your hand that has abused you or betrayed you. And you're releasing them from your hand. You're letting that person off of your hook, but not off of God.

Dr Jay Fine:

And when we can physically control our body, and we can release people through grace and forgiveness, R.T Kendall has a wonderful book called Total Forgiveness. When we can allow our body to heal and we allow our spirit to heal by releasing those people who've been toxic, it's a great way to just sleep better, eat better. I have never, in 38 years, Crystal, ever taught somebody this exercise and they haven't been able to be successful at doing it. It's just, it's absolutely amazing. It's free, it's easy, it's simple. But because we're running on automatic pilot, or really, I mean, the reality is almost everybody in the world is doing the best they can right now. And selfishness is a bad thing.





Dr Jay Fine:

Christ didn't heal everybody. He didn't cure everybody. He didn't save everybody. And we have to learn to do is do what he did like the Sermon on the Mount. People were still coming, but he got away to be with His Father. That's what we're supposed to do. When we're breathing, we're breathing in the air that God gave us. When we're making a fist [inaudible 00:23:49], we're controlling the body that he gave us. And when we're focusing on walking in the mountains, or around the beach, we're focusing on the mind that God created for us. And when you can center on who God is, and what God created us to do, that is probably the most empowering and intoxicating event that we can do in our lives.

Crystal Keating:

Well, and I love how you're connecting every action with the Lord. I mean, that's very grounding. It's very settling, and He actually wants us to remain in peace at all times. I mean, do not fear is one of the most common commands throughout scripture. I actually feel way more relaxed just by you going through those steps. I was thinking, "I feel like I was just at the beach watching the Sandpiper." I mean, it really, it really helps. I feel actually less stressed. And I know that in the midst of stressful situations, it's easy to forget that we're in a spiritual battle. We live in a spiritual and physical world. So, turning the conversation a little bit, what are some of Satan's tactics for getting us off track? When we go through suffering and unexpected hardships. 2 Corinthians 2:11, You know this, it warns us about the schemes of the enemy. And it says, "Don't be ignorant to the way that he works." We're supposed to kind of know and spot his ways.

Dr Jay Fine:

Absolutely. Jesus was tested in the wilderness. We're going to be tested as well. Scriptures [inaudible 00:25:22], "You will have struggles." It doesn't matter if it's Old Testament and New Testament. There is going to be a struggle. We are in a spiritual battle. And what I tell people is that you're not having a spiritual battle. You're not a threat to Satan. And if you're not a threat to Satan, then are you really doing ministry? And are you really doing what God calls you to do? Because you can only serve one master. We are led by the Spirit. We will be tempted. Scripture says, "You will have struggles." It's not, "If," it's, "You will have struggles." The first [inaudible 00:25:55] give you is, busy, B-U-S-Y. And that's Being Under Satan's Yolk. Our world is a very busy world, we go from task to task. And I learned a couple of decades ago that if I say yes to something, I got to say no to something else.

Dr Jay Fine:

I refuse to allow my work, my church, anything, but what God calls me to do to interfere with my first job. My first responsibility is to my family, and then anybody else in need, period. So, our challenge is not to be busy because Satan will allow you to do good to avoid great. And that's really important. And everything we say, and everything we do is ministry. Loving unconditionally, loving God and loving others is contagious, it's infectious. When you show people that you care, especially these days, that makes a difference. When somebody catches me doing something for another person, that's them seeing God.



Crystal Keating:

Yeah, Jay, that's so good. We don't have to think about the grand evangelistic outreaches, but every opportunity is an opportunity for us to show the love of Christ, to demonstrate the grace of God. Well, Dr. Jay, as we close our time together, when we go through troubling and stress-provoking seasons, what are some of God's greater good purposes?

Dr Jay Fine:

I'd wrap it up really simple with love God and love others. To share the hope that we have, that especially in the disability community, life is hard. And when we're honest with ourselves, and we're honest with others, then we've earned that right to be authentic and share the gospel with them. I think we're all ministers of the gospel. We have a unique ability in the disability community to share with typically developing people where we have our hope and our passion and our purpose. And frankly, I think it's a sin to not be excited about the gospel and what Christ has done for us. So, I just tell people, love God, love others and get excited about our forever home.

Crystal Keating:

Dr. Jay is so great to just spend this time with you. I just want to close on something you said, you said it's so well, for God's great purposes in the midst of stressful seasons, you wrote, "Troubled times cause great anxiety in our hearts, don't they? About the present and the future. It returns us to the basic and the necessary comes into focus. It also reveals our weakness and our false hopes. We don't like that, but it can lead us to desperation, turning us toward God, restoring solid hope and teaching us to rely on God's mercy. It teaches us to daily rely on God. And teaches us where to find real food for our souls and cause God's people to shine." So, that is a good word. So great to have you back on the podcast. Thank you so much for your time. God bless you.

Dr Jay Fine:

It's my pleasure. We praise God for all you guys do. Amen. Amen.

Crystal Keating:

Amen. Thank you for listening today. If you've been inspired by our conversation or have a comment about something you heard, please drop me at [podcast@joniandfriends.org](mailto:podcast@joniandfriends.org). I would love to hear from you. To get our next conversation automatically. Please subscribe wherever you listen to podcasts. And if you enjoy today's episode, leave us a five-star review. This helps other people find our podcast so that they can be encouraged too. I'm Crystal Keating. And thank you for listening to the Joni and Friends Ministry podcast.

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