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When I was a child we played a game called tetherball, in which a tether, or length of rope, is connected to the top of a pole, and a ball is attached at the end of the rope. We would stand on either side of the pole and hit the ball in opposite directions. Seeing the force with which this ball was flying at times, you might expect it to go soaring off into the atmosphere. But the opposite happened—the greater the speed and energy of the ball, the sooner it found itself wound around the pole and immobilized.

At times in our lives, we can feel like that tetherball, going round and round in circles and getting nowhere fast. Many people think that reaching spiritual heights in life requires stress and strain and struggle. But just the opposite is true—the more we stress and strain, the more we tie ourselves into knots. It is believing and acting on the Word, not stress and strain, which helps us achieve true freedom and the results we desire in life. By believing and acting on God’s Word, we can live a life free of stress and strain, filled with peace and confidence.

James 1:21 shows us two steps involved in believing the Word.

James 1:21:

Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

One step is that we lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. We can choose to lay apart things that are not in alignment with God’s Word, which is His will. It is not God’s will for us to be mentally bound and weighted down. Anxieties, fears, regret, and condemnation are contrary to God’s Word. So we are to lay apart, or put off, those thoughts which tie us up and bind us. We can put off these negatives because Jesus Christ has set us free from them.

John 8:36:

If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

Some of the most tormenting prisons in our lives are those that bind our minds, such as thoughts of self-condemnation, inadequacy, fear, and worry. We may feel that we need to strain and struggle to lift ourselves out of these prisons, but stress and strain only dig us in deeper. God's Word can not only free us from our prisons, but it can also give us rest and peace from the stress and strain of trying to get ourselves out of them. So we lay apart, put off, thoughts that bind us.

Another step to believing the Word that we saw in James 1:21 is to receive with meekness the engrafted Word. In contrast to stress and strain, we put off thoughts that bind us and we receive God's promises with meekness. We walk out of our prisons through the door Jesus Christ opened for us into light and liberty as God's children. There is no need for us to struggle; we simply rest on all Jesus Christ has accomplished for us by putting off those thoughts that weigh us down and receiving with meekness God's promises written to us.

The purpose of putting off the negatives in our mind and receiving the Word with meekness is to act on the Word—to do that Word.

James 1:22:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

I like to think of this concept as the way team athletes respond to their coach. Because they respect their coach's expertise, when he instructs them on how to improve their technique, they receive his instruction with meekness and immediately put it into practice. They receive the benefit of his coaching by acting upon it. With expert coaching and continued practice, athletes often cut out wasted motion and unnecessary stress and strain to become smooth, confident masters of their sport. We too can achieve freedom from stress and strain and live with confidence and peace by receiving God's Word with meekness and practicing it, living it, doing it.

Have you ever watched an eagle soaring beside a mountain peak? It seems to exert a minimum amount of energy as it glides effortlessly on the thermal air currents. I have seen eagles float and circle for hours, barely moving their wings. We can either choose to be like that tetherball, going nowhere fast and getting tied up in knots with stress and strain, or we can decide to be like the eagle, catching the currents of God's promises and riding them to reach the spiritual heights in life.

Believing and acting on God's Word brings us the freedom in life that we could never achieve through our own stress and strain. To help us believe and act on God's Word, we can put off those thoughts which imprison and bind us and receive with meekness the engrafted Word. Then as we hold God's Word in our minds with believing, we take action on it and thoughts of stress and strain are replaced by serenity and assurance.

What a magnificent life we have before us, set free from stress and strain, and soaring to even greater spiritual heights as we believe and act upon God's Word.

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