

wish to do so from a Christian perspective--would do well to carefully study this delightful and useful volume.

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Kath Donovan. *Growing through stress*. 2002. 2nd edition. Berrien Springs, MI: Institute of World Mission, Andrews University. 211 p. Price: \$15.95.

In our fast-moving world stress is one of the major factors contributing to the breakdown of organizational effectiveness, interpersonal relationships, and personal well-being. Stress comes also in other ways that are not less powerful: the death of a close companion, an unsettling misunderstanding, or the struggle with an undeserved hurt that keeps you locked in the darkened halls of low-grade depression or discouragement. The pervasiveness of stress in our lives is generating an astonishing number of news reports and research studies. Enter the word "stress" on the Google News Search site and you will get millions of citations. Amazon.com lists over 150,000 items related to stress in its online bookstore. Then why another book on stress?

For starters, *Growing through stress* is not a new book on stress. Published originally in 1991, and reprinted in 1996, the book had actually been out of print for some time. The reason for its republi-

cation and adaptation to the North-American market by the Institute of World Mission at Andrews University is to be found in Donovan's unique focus and her ability to speak to the missionary community. As the title indicates, *Growing through stress* views stress not as an enemy but as an opportunity to grow. Not always an opportunity you might chose for yourself, but nevertheless a context you can develop into an opportunity for becoming more the person God wants you to be. This focus sets the book apart from the host of books on stress management on the market today.

In the first part of the book, Donovan focuses on the nature of stress and its purpose in human experience. The value of the book begins to unfold in chapter four. Here Donovan invites the reader on a journey of discovering the deeper purposes of stress as an inevitable part of the life of a Christian: (1) preparing a person for deeper dimensions of ministry, (2) developing a wider perspective of life, and (3) deepening a person's understanding of the meaning of joy. Missionaries will be able to relate well to Donovan's arguments and experiences because they often have to be willing to bond with people of other cultures in the face of overwhelming feelings of inadequacy and challenge.

In part two, Donovan systematically walks the reader through multiple levels of coping with stress. She starts with managing the harmful effects of stress. Many good books on stress don't go

much further than that. Donovan helps readers understand and deal with the causes of stress (stressors) and teaches them how to improve their own reactions to stress (personal filter management). But the added value of the book unfolds in the last five chapters that invite the reader to deal with stress in a spiritual way which she calls simply "creative coping." In these chapters Donovan considers the importance of social support (chapter 10), the long-term improvement of a person's capacity to cope with stress by dealing with unresolved issues like conflict (chapter 11), and ways to cope with life-threatening illness and major life transitions (chapter 12). The last chapter, "The Ultimate in Coping," considers the life of some of the Biblical heroes and shows how their trust in God developed in the face of impossible circumstances.

The power of *Growing through stress* comes from the author's willingness to share her own personal struggles to see God's hand in the ups and downs of her life and of those she has worked with in her long journey as a missionary and educator-counselor. As a medical doctor who spent seventeen years as a medical missionary in Papua New Guinea, Donovan is well qualified to talk about the physical and psychological aspects of stress. Today she is a director of the Christian Synergy Centre in New South Wales, Australia, which offers psychological assessment and counseling to people in Christian ministry, espe-

cially in missionary work.

Donovan is very much aware of the research on stress and uses it to illustrate her chapters. While Donovan does not attempt to feature the latest theories or discoveries on stress, her book shines where few books dare to go: the spiritual dimensions of coping with stress. For this reason it will be a very helpful resource for Christian leaders called to work with people in various life circumstances. For Skip MacCarty, an author and respected expert on stress, the book is simply "one of the best I've ever read on the subject."

If you had only one book about the subject of stress, I would wholeheartedly recommend *Growing through stress*. Its theoretical soundness, the practical outlook and advice, and the sensitivity to the most painful moments in human life in times of loss or suffering make it an extremely helpful work. This book should be on the nightstands of hospital rooms or Christian guesthouses. It would be an excellent resource for self-help groups or classes on stress with a holistic focus. But above all it should be required reading for any missionary family called to venture out across cultural borders in the name of the Almighty Lord of mission. I would not be surprised if it ends up on your top ten favorite books to give away as a meaningful present to friends and relatives.

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