

## **“Echoes of the Heart”**

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**Too much stress?** In reflecting on our lives and the daily attestations of *how we are doing*, much of our answer is determined by our *level of stress* at the time. I know I get stressed out, personally, when the *to do* list is long and, every day, the free-time slots are shrinking.

Often times, in the fast pace of our culture, we’re left unaware of the extent to which stress builds up in our mind and spirit. We think we’re okay or better, when in truth any number of anxieties are simmering beneath the surface of our placid exterior, draining energy and serenity from our spirit.

Too much stress?

For most us, my guess is, *yes!* But what are we to do?

For starters, can we talk about it? Can we have adult conversation about any burdens or sadness in our spirit?

In the *Peanuts* comic strip, cartoonist Charles Schultz was known for being a little preachy now and then. Check out this interaction between Charlie Brown and Lucy:

*You know what the trouble with you is, Charlie Brown?* Asks Lucy.

Charlie replies, *No, and I don’t want to know! Leave me alone!* And then he walks off disgustedly and frowning.

But as usual, Lucy has the last word. Yelling at him, she says, *The whole trouble with you is that you won’t listen to what the whole trouble with you is.*

What this simple insight suggests is that we all have stuff we need to talk about; stuff we need to work through, sort out, and gain some reflection on. After all, life *is* hard ... and complex; and try as we do, we can’t see the big picture in all of its aspects.

Sometimes, desperately, we need discernment from outside in order to find healing and redirection from within.

**Sin and overloading the spirit.** For some people, the mere mention of the word *sin* sends them running for the hills. Too easily, we associate it with guilt or being a *bad* person. However, in the larger sense, sin is a *poisoning* or *overloading of the spirit*; it’s a *distancing from God*.

Viewed from this vantage point, sin can be equated with stress and the choices we make, daily, to overburden our lives and burn out our souls.

From this *overload*, we need release; we need to be freed and redirected. To use a theological term, we need forgiveness. Again, not because we are *bad* in any way, but because—to tell the truth about ourselves—we've all got stuff in our spirit that's weighting us down.

Lucy may have it right: *The trouble with us is that we don't want to listen to what the trouble with us is.*

Even the strongest, most secure and well-settled among us, has stress in today's world. The sheer pace and busyness of life decides this for us. The challenge for us is how we manage it and what tough decisions we're willing to make to take better care of our spirit.

Perhaps we'd all do better and be more contented in life if we would be more forthright in owning up to our *overload*. And once we've *owned up*, perhaps it would be easier for us to make future decisions based on the larger picture of our spiritual health, and not the short-term of what our ego or the market tells us we need to do.

Stress can be a positive in our lives if it becomes for us a signal of our need to make fundamental changes in priorities and life style. But first, we have to be dialed in. We have to do what Charlie Brown was resistant to doing, but what our spirit yearns for us to do every day.