

# Good News

## WordBytes

A new evangelization for a new millennium



## Keys for Living Well in Today's High Stress Crises

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**We have been living through a number of stressors:** hurricanes, news of storm-related suffering, reports on the dangers of climate change and environmental pollution, the impacts of ongoing wars, and scary economic events involving basics such as fuel, housing, and the banking system.

We also are experiencing in our parishes and families the stressors of major illnesses and deaths, separations and divorces, addictions, job changes, the pressures of pop and peer cultures on our children, and other troubling life challenges.

For many of us, these stressors accumulate on top of a load of unresolved traumas and suffering from earlier in our lives. Different people have different carrying capacities: Some seem able to manage a huge reservoir of built-up stress; others are overwhelmed with only a few stressors. Everyone may at times, with a big enough load, experience a kind of "spill-over" into symptoms of anxiety or depression or excessive anger.

***Extending compassion to ourselves and to each other, following the model of Jesus, is one of the most valuable keys to living well during multiple stressors.***

There are specific practices we can cultivate that will help to prevent or lessen stress overload.

### Prayer and meditation:

- ✓ If you have a regular prayer discipline, continue it or get back to it as soon as possible.

- ✓ If you don't have a regular rhythm of prayer, experiment with this one:

1. Start each morning with your version of this prayer:

"Loving God, thank you for this new day, help me live One Day at a Time, drawing upon your strength, love, and peace. Help me to follow your guidance in all I think and do today."

2. One or two times a day, take a prayer break: For 10-20 minutes, sit in a quiet place, close your eyes, and follow your breathing. As you breathe out, breathe out all anxiety, worries, fatigue, etc., into God's care. As you breathe in, breathe in whatever you need from God (peace, strength, love, light, calm, patience, wisdom, etc.). Or simply breathe and let go; Be Here Now. When distractions come (and they will) gently let them go into God's care, and breathe in God's love.
3. Frequently throughout the day, practice that mindful breathing for a few moments at a time.
4. Before sleep, breathe out all the struggles and worries of the day into God's care; breathe in the gifts of the day with gratitude.

### Dealing with reports of pain and suffering:

- ✓ Limit exposure to news reports, especially to visual images.
- ✓ When you are taking in news reports (e.g. of natural disasters, environmental destruction, war, economic recession, homelessness, etc), pray for all who are involved, seeing them surrounded by God's light and love. If God nudges you to take a specific action (e.g. making a donation, offering other concrete help, participating in a prayer vigil, joining in a Green Team or Partners with Haiti event), do that one thing, then "let go and let God".

- ✓ Intentionally seek out news, stories, and personal encounters that help you cultivate "an attitude of gratitude". Remember that our faith assures us that while half of life is suffering and dying, the other half of life is resurrection and new life.

### **Exercise and Nature:**

- ✓ If you have a regular exercise program, get back to it as soon as possible.
- ✓ If you don't have a regular program, start by walking 10 minutes a day and doing some gentle stretching (yoga, or Classical Stretch on PBS-TV, or just simple movement). Build up a bit more each day. According to The Harvard School of Public Health's website ([www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/staying-active/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/staying-active/)), "A 30-minute brisk walk on five days of the week is all most people need. And getting any amount of exercise is better than none."
- ✓ Get out into the sun for 10-15 minutes a day (if you normally are inside for work or school) to help lift your mood. Reconnecting with God's Creation is restorative. Re-create outdoors regularly (walk, garden, bike, or just sit and breathe!). If getting outdoors regularly is difficult, take time to be with pets and plants.

### **Nutrition:**

- ✓ If you usually have a healthy plan of nutrition, get back to it today. If you don't have a healthy plan of nutrition, start by cutting back on sugar, salt, meat, and fats. Add vegetables, fruits, beans and whole grains, preferably organic, and a multi-vitamin/mineral supplement. Drink lots of water (not bottled; carry your travel mug and thermos with you). Limit intake of alcoholic beverages. For more specifics, see The Harvard School of Public Health web-site: [www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/)

### **V) Rest:**

- ✓ Get back to your regular sleep schedule as soon as possible; in the meantime, when sleeping through the night is difficult because of stress overload, naps of 30-45 minutes can sometimes be helpful.

- ✓ As soon as you are able, cultivate a regular sleep schedule. Check into websites that offer guidance for good sleep hygiene. The University of Maryland Medical Center offers help at [www.umm.edu/sleep/sleep\\_hyg.htm](http://www.umm.edu/sleep/sleep_hyg.htm)

### **Social connections:**

- ✓ Reach out to connect/re-connect with family, friends, and church groups. Make time to hang out together, play, pray, and relax, even if only for short periods of time.
- ✓ Volunteering to assist others has also been found to help lift folks out of depression and anxiety. (Makes sense, since we were created to give and receive love!!)

### **Schedules:**

- ✓ Make your To-Do lists realistic; take it One Day at a Time, scheduling only the truly essentials until stress levels decrease somewhat. Celebrate the little accomplishments of each day.

### **Professional help:**

- ✓ If you find it difficult to develop the practices listed above, consider seeking some professional help. It may be wise to schedule an appointment with your physician for a physical exam. You might also look up the number of your local Catholic Charities counseling agency or ask your pastor for a recommendation of a local Christian counselor or psychotherapist.

***May you receive God's grace  
and peace today.***

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