



ARTICLE

3 suggestions for keeping your mental health in check during COVID-19

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March 30, 2020

COVID-19 has brought on an uncertain, unprecedented season that will likely spur a mental health crisis. Multiple factors are involved:

- Anxiety from the 24-hour news cycle;
- The inability to meet with people for gatherings like church and events;
- Stress from adapting to ever-changing working environments, suddenly homeschooling, learning new technology, and not being able to afford childcare or find toilet paper;

- Bank tellers, grocery store clerks, pharmacy workers, gas station attendants, truck drivers working to keep things rolling;
- Healthcare workers risking their health and the health of their families to help others;
- People in authority having to make tough decisions;
- Relatives unable to visit sick family members or nursing home residents;
- People closing their businesses and losing their jobs, wondering when and if they will receive a paycheck again and if the job will be waiting for them when this passes.

As someone who has dealt with clinical anxiety and depression for most of my life, I can offer a few tips to those who are discovering this feeling for the first time.

1. Talk to someone

We need community because we weren't made to be alone (Gen. 2:18). Now that we are unable to gather together physically, we need to adapt and build virtual community. Thankfully, technology is advanced enough to keep everyone connected. Churches can stream services. Small groups can video chat. You can send messages across a multitude of apps. Regular phones still work, too.

If you are struggling, talk to someone with whom you feel comfortable. Don't feel ashamed. You are not alone and don't have to bear the burden by yourself. If you can't think of anyone, reach out to a mental health professional. Many clinics are doing telehealth visits and can help you over the phone.

If you aren't struggling at the moment, be intentional about checking in on those close to you. Make sure they are doing well and have what they need. Send them an encouraging word or Scripture. Try to help direct their attention away from a constant influx of COVID-19 information.

2. Cling to God's promises

God's people have always needed reminders of what God has done for them and what he has promised to do. The Jews in the wilderness were worried about food but needed to remember that they had witnessed God part the Red Sea in order to save them (Ex. 16). God's people who cried out for judges to deliver them quickly forgot their desperation for him and reverted back to their sinful ways (Judges). And there are many other examples throughout the Bible. James reminded suffering Christians of this beautiful truth:

“As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful” (James 5:10-11).

If you are in a dark place mentally, I recommend grabbing a journal, notebook, or piece of paper and writing down the lies that you are believing, anxieties you are feeling, or negative thoughts that are on repeat in your mind. Then, write three biblical truths that combat what you wrote. Try to do this at every occurrence. Over time, this will come easier, and you won't need to write it down. You'll be conditioned to speak truth to yourself and will then be able to speak truth into others' lives.

God keeps his Word. He will provide. It may not be what you want or are used to, but it will be what you need. God feeds and clothes the birds and the flowers; will he not do the same for his sons and daughters (Matt. 6:25-34)? If earthly parents give good gifts to their children, how much more will our Father in heaven give his children who ask (Matt. 7:9-11)? The Old Testament prophets held fast to the promises of a Messiah even though they didn't see them fulfilled in their lifetimes. But we have more—we have the Christ—the promise fulfilled—and live for his return, when all will be restored.

3. Keep (or develop) an eternal perspective

Suffering is part of the Christian life. It will purify our faith and will result in glory and honor (1 Pet. 1:3-9). But it won't last. When my fleeting time on this earth comes to an end, I will be in a place with no pain or suffering or anxiety. I will be where I belong—a home that has been prepared for me (John 14:3).

That's why I'm not afraid of a novel, widespread virus. It may make me ill or take my life, but I will gain the end goal, and that can never be taken from me (John 6:37-40). My inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, and kept in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4). Christian, this is the hope that we have. And hope does not put us to shame (Rom. 5:3-5).

I pray that this hope brings you peace (John 14:27) and shines brightly to the rest of the dark world. Our living hope is the greatest witness to others in these times. Remain steadfast. I can't tell you how long this season will last, but I can tell you that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He doesn't guarantee tomorrow on earth, but he guarantees an eternity with him for those who believe that he sent his son to die for us (John 3:16). May peace be with you in these troubled times, and may these words from Peter be a balm to your soul:

“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet.5:8-11).

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