

Stressed by COVID-19? Get Grounded

By Heidi Vermeer-Quist, Psy.D.

In recent weeks it's felt like we are all in some bad social psychology experiment. The levels of societal emotional reactivity and grief related to one pandemic concern is something we've not experienced in a long time. For some of us, maybe it's the first time we've experienced this kind of widespread fear. I know it is not a bad social psychology experiment; I'm just concerned about people's mental health as I've witnessed drastic increases in catastrophic group think, learned helpless reactions, and "misery loving company."

COVID-19 is a real virus and we need to follow precautions. It's different from other flu viruses, and we don't really know how it will all work out. I just want to do my part to help folks feel more grounded and at peace.

I offer these Christ-centered psychological skills to get grounded through faith and positive psychology.

Start by breathing deeply. Do it now 😊. Breathe in deeply (through your nose, expand your torso, and breathe out through your mouth). Affirm that you are okay (because most of us are), and keep breathing deeply.

Now, turn your attention to God. Emmanuel (which means "God with us") is right here. He loves us, and provides for us with everything all of the time. Next, practice a simple breath prayer. Breathe in "I thank you, Lord" and breathe out "I trust you, Lord." If you do this for just one minute you WILL feel better and more grounded. It works, so do it now. Allow yourself to Give Thanks for ONE thing at a time, starting with your five senses. Mindfully notice and give thanks for what you touch...see...hear...taste...and smell in this moment. Continue by giving thanks for people, places, things—any blessings that come to mind as you breathe in (again, just give thanks for ONE thing at a time).

As you breathe out, let go of what I call the "O" zone—Others, Outcomes, Old stuff. **About 99% of the time we are stressed out by something going on in the "O" zone of Others, Outcomes, or Old stuff.** Think about the times when you feel stressed. Where is your head? Are you even aware what is going on in the present moment, or are you having negative thoughts about Others, Outcomes, or Old stuff? Are you mindful of your one precious life—the gift of life that God gave YOU and his constant provision for YOU—existing and functioning well in many ways in the precious present? Usually not. We cannot control the "O" zone, and we lose so much of our lives when we obsess about Others, Outcomes or Old stuff.

God invites us to pray about all of those "O" zone concerns, to encourage each other, to fix our eyes on Him as we manage the one life that he gave us, and always to participate in joy. The apostle Paul writes: *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of*

God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:4-9).

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