

Weathering the Storm

If we are honest, it has been a painfully challenging year. For some of us, our lives will be forever changed because of losses we have experienced. Medi-Share's spiritual development team shares personal stories and practical tips on dealing with stress, grief and trials.

1. How is the world handling emotional challenges?

We're reacting to grief/loss with frustration, aggressive behaviors and even tribalism, which is dividing and polarizing society; this is only magnifying the problem and generating even greater amounts of stress.

Grief of various kinds being experienced include, but are not limited to:

- Loss of loved one or relationship suffered
- Emotional burdens
- Lasting sadness or depression
- Abandonment
- Health, security fears driving anger and loneliness

Holiday stressors alone add to the frustration. Within families, expectations to please are high; fear of disappointing or letting someone down; fear of disapproval, whether stated, implied, or imagined from those we esteem most.

The Mayo Clinic suggests ways to manage stress during the holidays (with our additional comments through a biblical lens):

- **Acknowledge your feelings:** It's normal to feel sadness and grief over loss, etc.; no need to say everything is fine when

it isn't.

- **Reach out:** Gather in community, such as church and home group; volunteer your time to help those who have greater need than you.
- **Be realistic:** Hold on to some traditions; let others go if it's too much to manage.
- **Set aside differences:** Lower your short-term expectations of friends/family.
- **Stick to a budget:** Avoid the stress of overspending; give to worthy causes instead.
- **Plan ahead:** Schedule what's important/priority on the calendar.
- **Learn to Say No:** You can't do it all so there's no guilt for turning things down.
- **Don't abandon healthy habits:** Overindulgence only adds to the guilt and stress; filter out the information culture/social media, which is a gnawing stress-producer.
- **Take a breather:** Get some quiet time, like listening to peaceful music under the stars; breathe deeply and slow your breathing.
- **Seek professional help if you need it:** Pastor, counselor, doctor

2. What is different for believers in dealing with stress?

Jesus gives something the world simply doesn't have to give: PEACE (cf. Philippians 4:6-7, Ephesians 2:14-18).

Run to the body of Christ! Let us realize that strength comes in unity! Too many are slipping away from the very fellowship (with relational accountability) God has given for our spiritual/emotional health and well-being. The body of Christ

is God's idea—not man's idea. Together, we can experience God's Holy Spirit in one another.

It's the enemy's plan to divide and isolate the believers to weaken our resistance and undermine our mission together of making disciples in unity and power of the Holy Spirit.

Practice His presence: Time with God in prayer and reading the Scriptures; lean into the “ministry of presence” with the people of God who are loving Him and each other; it's His eternal idea to be gathered, not isolated; to come together to hear each other sing to Him, share in communion and bear witness to His goodness.

It's easy to be conformed to the pattern of this world—through social media, for one! While social media has its place, it can also be a counterfeit of the Word of God, leading to incorrect thinking, unhealthy and inaccurate comparison and a captive mind. Back off the media overload and turn to edifying teachings, sermons, worship: be transformed by the renewing of your mind (cf. Romans 12:2).

3. What is God showing you about overcoming stress?

Chaplain Bill: My wife, Lizzie, and my story right now: Mold !

This has been highly stress-inducing, causing costly unplanned home renovations, furniture purchases and late-night home labors. And, all seven kids and their families are gathering in for Christmas. Talk about holiday stress!

It helps to practice all of the above—being thankful throughout for having a home and finding the means to make it healthy and safe for family.

Lizzie says she does best under the stress when she remembers God's sovereignty and that our times are in His capable hands—then tells Him she'll accept matters in His timing—that He can make it the way He wants it to be.

Psalm 35:27 (CSB): "The Lord be exalted. He takes pleasure in His servant's well-being."

Chaplain Cindi: There is no roadmap telling us how to grieve. We don't know what our triggers will be or how passing time will affect us. The Bible does speak of stones of remembrance, or a memorial commemorating an event such as crossing the Jordan River in Joshua 4. It can be therapeutic to create a memorial or participate in an act that remembers a loved one who died or something that has passed and won't happen again.

My grandson was murdered at a young 23 years of age. A couple of years later, I was sorely missing him on his birthday. I bought a balloon with a BIG Happy Birthday message. I took it outside that evening and released it to the moonlit clouds saying "Happy Birthday Caleb" out loud as I watched the wind gently sweep it away. It surprised me that such a simple act was so cathartic.

Psalm 121:1-2, 8: "I lift my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this day forevermore."

Pastor Jerry: Sometimes we watch others grieve. I watched my mother grieve over a second loss of another son. We think, "It's not supposed to be this way—a child dying before their parent." I watched how she trusted in the Lord and witnessed how the Holy Spirit was with her and comforted her. In her advanced age, she modeled that journey and showed there was a difference in the way we grieve from the way the world does.

Lamentations 3:20-25: "I will call this to mind and have hope. Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail."

Chaplain Craig: Losing a baby during pregnancy is so personal. The loss is so real but it seems that no one else can share it because the baby hasn't been seen. You, however, already began

to love and have dreams for the future. It hit me hard when my wife and I had a miscarriage after the first trimester. In pain, I opened my Bible and verse after verse, the Lord said "I see you." He clearly used His written word to say, "I see you and I see you where you are." God sees us; He sees what we're going through. I may never understand the mind of God but He sees me; He knows how I'm feeling. There is so much hope and peace in that.

Psalm 34:18: "The Lord is near the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."

Finding the peace that God offers, knowing that God is with us through trials and finding ways to remember have helped our chaplains in this challenging year. We pray that you too will open up to the peace that only God can offer during emotionally challenging times. We encourage you to run to the body of Christ for help when needed but ultimately run to Jesus Himself.

Two Corinthians 1:3 (NIV): "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

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The Spiritual Development team's mission is to provide spiritual growth opportunities to encourage Medi-Share employees to be strengthened in the faith and to continue to live their lives in Christ Jesus as Lord. The team of chaplains teach, write, train and coordinate spiritual growth activities as well as provide confidential one-on-one opportunities. {eo}

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