

COVID-19 Invites Us To Heal Ourselves and the World

This time of COVID-19 calls each of us to healing and health, for ourselves, for our neighbors, and for the whole biosphere.

The CDC website on prevention and treatment shows us ways to keep the virus away. With community transmission, we don't know where the virus is, so we need a second line of defense, namely the immune system in every one of us. When each of us is healthier, the viral transmission will be reduced for everyone.

People are easily fascinated by miraculous healings which sciences can hardly explain. God also gives all of us the health and healing which the sciences can help us understand and use. We'll focus on the latter here.

Anxiety weakens us. COVID-19 provokes anxiety in various ways. Anxiety is a diffused fear, particularly of the unknown. We don't know who might be infected and thus may transmit the virus, because for many cases there are only mild symptoms or no symptoms showing yet. Following the news every hour may feed further anxiety. The situation may tap into our various anxieties—of death, of our projects, our finance, even our supplies of water and toilet paper, as indicated by people rushing to buy at Costco.

There is a continuous bio-psycho-social-spiritual-ecological feedback loop that amplifies our anxieties. Anxiety makes it difficult for us to fall asleep and to sleep well. Appropriate social distancing to avoid virus transmission may enhance social isolation and self-centeredness. Animosity further weakens us. We need all the diverse ideas to build a healthy community, not pointing fingers at certain groups or focusing on past mistakes.

We can use the bio-psycho-social-spiritual-ecological feedback loop to thrive together toward our optimal health. The Judeo-Christian Scripture keeps telling us, "Be not afraid." We are called to become like Buddha—"the awakened." We can wake up and learn ways to sleep well. Matthew Walker's research has shown us how to get a restful sleep. Some of what we can do is quite enticing, like taking a warm bath before getting into bed, and then giving thanks for three people I am grateful for when I drift into my slumber. These are only a sample. People know many wonderful ways. We can learn from one another. More methods will be described below.

The idea of taking care of our health is so simple. Yet, it's hard to do, as I learn from one of the best spiritual guides. Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, OIM, only did it after a near-fatal illness—he humbly admitted, <https://ronrolheiser.com/a-new-challenge/#.XmaBCpNKiL5>

So many times in the past years, in a trance of overwork, I promised God that I would slow my life down, just as soon as this particular task was finished... Like the young Augustine, I was praying: "Slow me down, but not yet!" My cancer diagnosis is finally doing for me what I couldn't do for myself.

This pandemic viral infection is like a cancer that should awaken us to live a healthier life. Maybe we can all reread Pope Francis' plea in *Laudato Si'* to collaborate toward healing our whole biosphere. Following are some Christian ways to help healing ourselves and the world.

Practices for Healthy Living

A bedtime ritual

Give yourself a set amount of time to prepare for bed, let's say half an hour, with the following preparations:

- Shut down or turn down the lights everywhere you can—turn off the TV, charge the cell phone in the kitchen, reduce the light on the electronic clock or turn it against the wall. The reduction of light three hours before bedtime helps our bodies secrete more melatonin, which is the hormone that helps us to sleep. The blue light in electronic devices resembles sunlight and, therefore, disrupts our biological clock.
- Turn down the temperature in the room to about 65°. The lower temperature helps us sleep and may help the environment.
- Take a warm bath or shower. The warm water pumps our blood to our skin, thus reducing our core temperature, which helps us to sleep.
- While soaking in the warm water, contemplate any combination of the following:
 - Mentally connect the water used in your bath to the whole universe: the engineers who design the water systems, the workers who laid the pipes, the cycle of water and where these water molecules have been and what functions they have performed.
 - One of the “more practices” listed below.
- After the bath, get into bed, and continue to imbue yourself in one of the practices above. Love is a helpful theme.
- Have a pen and paper next to the bed. If there are any concerns, such as something you need to remember to do the next day, write them down and “park” them on the paper, so that the concerns are not carried into sleep.
- If you wake in the night and find it difficult to drift back to sleep, try using one of the meditations again. If that does not work, you may want to get out of bed and read or write until you are ready to sleep again.
- As you wake up, return to meditation. Avoid any source of anxiety, including reading news or email or checking other things on the phone, until after breakfast.

More practices for healthy living in a time of fear

- Practice Christian mindfulness meditation in 4 steps: mindful breathing, mindful body scan, holding it all with God, discover the present moment. Also in Oden, *Right Here, Right Now: The Practice of Christian Mindfulness* (Abingdon Press, 2017).

- Do a body scan, gently noticing any sensations, attitudes or feelings in your body without judgment. Invite God to hold with you whatever you notice from your body scan. Rest in God's presence for a full minute. From Oden, *Right Here, Right Now*.
- Recall three things that you are grateful for that day. At least one of the three should be about a person.
- If you intuitively feel somewhat disturbed, you may want to get clarity on it, bring the concern to God in order to experience God's acceptance. If we only ruminate on our weaknesses, we can get more anxious.
- Send a wish of love to a particular person, or a group.
- Prepare a Scripture passage or another way to pray as you wake up the next morning, perhaps on experiencing the love of God.
- Practice Andrew Weil's 4-7-8 breathing 4 times.

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