

Four spiritual ways to reduce stress

Carol Meyer | Dec. 9, 2010 Eco Catholic

I look out my window and see the squirrels bustle and the leaves fall, but I don't see stress in the natural world. The energy there is calm and pure. How did we go so astray? Author Wayne Dyer says stress is just another word for fear. So perhaps the solution to reducing stress lies in less fear and learning from creation. Here are a few suggestions for doing that.

Meditate regularly. I have been meditating for years and I am convinced that it is the key to all of our ills. How does it reduce stress? By allowing us the space to sit quietly in God's presence, focus on our breathing or a word/phrase, and observe and let go of our thoughts. Whatever we focus on, increases, and whatever we don't focus on, decreases. So in meditation, we center on God, trust, peacefulness, openness, and the moment. We let go of obsessive thoughts and worry, the imperfect past, and the fearful future. We make room for the innate peace and perfection of the Holy Spirit within to emerge.

Get out in nature every day. How is that a spiritual suggestion, you might ask. My answer: What can be more spiritual than God's handiwork, infused with divine grace and wisdom? Every time I connect with nature in even the smallest way, I feel its healing and love, and my stress flows out of me. My 13-year-old granddaughter Taylor just commented after returning from a cold walk to and from the library, "That felt good. It was so peaceful looking at the blue sky and trees." It's great if we, like Taylor, can take a walk or play tennis outdoors or something similar. But even if we can't, we can all step outside at night and look at the moon, take some deep breaths as we walk to our car in the morning, or simply see and be grateful for the natural world as we are driving.

Build your trust in God. This is the antidote to stress/fear. You can build this trust by reading inspirational books, repeating affirming biblical passages, noticing and being grateful for all God's blessings, or listening to spiritual music. I highly recommend a CD called *Come, Holy Mother* by Kathryn Christian. It contains beautiful songs, based on themes of trust in God from scripture and the mystics. Every time I listen to them or sing along (which I do often), I feel God saying, "Carol, I am with you. Calm down. All is well."

Simplify your life. I'll write more on this later, but for now, my suggestion is simply to begin noticing what in your life bogs you down and increases your stress. One of my rules in buying something or taking on something new is, "Will this complicate my life?" If so, I don't do it. Dispossessing yourself of material possessions/activities is certainly a spiritual practice recommended by scripture. Jesus had little and still lived peacefully and joyfully in God. And we can do the same.

This poem by Wendell Berry sums up much of what I am trying to say.

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

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