

# Are You Experiencing Spiritual Stress?

*Various situations like a traumatic loss or sudden change can cause spiritual stress, even in people of faith who pray and attend church regularly.*

Rate your own experience using the following scale:

**0=Never   1=Rarely   2=Once in a while   3=Fairly often   4=Very often   5=Most of the time**

1. I feel angry at God because of what has happened ..... \_\_\_\_\_
2. I can't pray..... \_\_\_\_\_
3. When I pray, I pray for miracles or things I know are impossible ..... \_\_\_\_\_
4. I don't feel like going to church..... \_\_\_\_\_
5. When I do go to church I feel detached, uninterested, and out of place..... \_\_\_\_\_
6. I feel like God has abandoned me..... \_\_\_\_\_
7. I feel like God is punishing me..... \_\_\_\_\_
8. I blame people for my situation, even though I know it isn't their fault..... \_\_\_\_\_
9. I get angry and impatient with people even though I know they don't deserve it..... \_\_\_\_\_
10. I feel resentful for having to bear this burden ..... \_\_\_\_\_
11. I feel angry about what has happened and how it has changed my life..... \_\_\_\_\_
12. I feel like this situation is draining the life out of me..... \_\_\_\_\_
13. I feel like my thoughts and feelings about my situation are sinful..... \_\_\_\_\_
14. I have doubts about the strength and sincerity of my faith..... \_\_\_\_\_
15. I feel like I don't have the strength to endure this..... \_\_\_\_\_
16. I try to distract myself by staying busy and doing things that are not important..... \_\_\_\_\_
17. I don't have the energy or desire to do even the basic normal things of daily life..... \_\_\_\_\_

## Spiritual Stress Test

18. My eating habits have changed—I don't have an appetite or I am eating a lot more..... \_\_\_\_\_
19. My sleeping habits have changed—I can't sleep, or sleep at odd times..... \_\_\_\_\_
20. I avoid family members, friends and social activities..... \_\_\_\_\_
21. I am afraid to share my doubts and fears with family members or friends ..... \_\_\_\_\_
22. I feel trapped in a situation I did not choose and cannot change..... \_\_\_\_\_
23. I have had thoughts about harming myself or committing suicide..... \_\_\_\_\_
- Your total score** (add your numbers together)..... \_\_\_\_\_

### How to Evaluate Your Spiritual Stress

If your total score was 0 you are experiencing no spiritual stress.

If your total score was between 1 and 23 you are experiencing very little spiritual stress.

If your total score was between 24 and 46 you are experiencing some spiritual stress.

If your total score was between 47 and 69 you are experiencing a considerable amount of stress.

If your total score was between 70 and 92 you are experiencing a serious amount of spiritual stress.

If your total score was over 92 you are experiencing a very serious amount of spiritual stress.

*The higher your score is, the more spiritual stress you are experiencing. While a certain amount of spiritual stress is normal after a traumatic loss or sudden change in life, if you are concerned about how much spiritual stress you are experiencing you should visit with your pastor, a confessor, spiritual guide or counselor.*

# Responding to Spiritual Stress

*Even a person of faith who prays regularly and is active in their church may experience spiritual stress after a traumatic loss or sudden change in their life. If you are a person of faith who is experiencing spiritual stress, here are some things you can do:*

## **Make some changes in how you pray**

- If you find traditional prayers more difficult, try a more reflective prayer which shifts prayer from doing to listening. Here's one method:

*Sit quietly and imagine you are in a room with Jesus ... Explain your worries, fears and problems to him ... Then sit quietly and listen ... To avoid distraction, focus on your breathing and pray this simple prayer:*

*"My Lord and my God" (as you breathe in), "Have mercy on me" (as you breathe out) ... Do this for About five minutes or longer ... In time you will hear the Lord's reassurance, "I love you" and perhaps other insights which will be helpful and reassuring.*

- If it is difficult to pray the rosary on a regular basis, try to pray just one decade of the rosary regularly. Reflect on one Mystery of the Rosary each time you pray and ask yourself in what way you experience this mystery in your daily life.
- If you have not done so before, try using a Prayer Journal. Each day write your concerns, fears, disappointments, hopes and dreams in your journal. Reflect for a few moments on what you have written, then write or say a short prayer.

## **Spend more time with the Bible**

- During difficult times, some people find it helpful to gradually read one of the Gospels from beginning to end. In most Bibles, the chapters are divided into short sections so you can read and reflect on just one section each day. Many people find the Gospel of John particularly helpful during difficult times because it contains so many reassuring words from Jesus himself.
- The Psalms express the hopes and dreams and problems of real people living in difficult times. Read and reflect on one psalm each day. Over time, make a list of your favorite psalms and use them for daily prayer.
- The short book of Lamentations expresses the mood of people living in difficult situations, and many people experiencing spiritual stress find its combination of grief and hope a helpful source of reflection and prayer.
- The Old Testament prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are timeless reminders that no matter how bad things get, God is faithful to his promises and to his people. Reading the Prophets can also be a source of encouragement during times when we are tempted to give up hope.

## **Practice Living One Day at a Time**

- The genius of the Twelve Steps used by alcoholics and other people addicted to self-destructive attitudes or behaviors is that it helps people realize that there are some things in our lives which we are powerless to change on our own, without God's help. A book or tapes like *Breathing Under Water* by Fr. Richard Rohr OFM can help you appreciate the power of the Twelve Steps in your own life.
- Practice learning to "let go and let God" by praying the Serenity Prayer each day:

*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change ... Courage to change the things I can ... And wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time ... Enjoying one moment at a time ... Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace. Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it ... Trusting that he will make all things right if I surrender to his will ... So that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.*