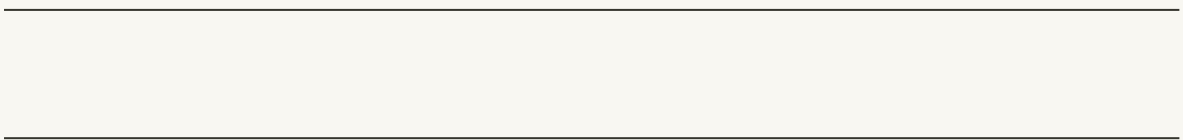




THE CHURCH CARES
CONNECTING PEOPLE WHO NEED HOPE WITH PEOPLE WHO HELP

FEAR, WORRY, AND STRESS

A CHRISTIAN
CURRICULUM

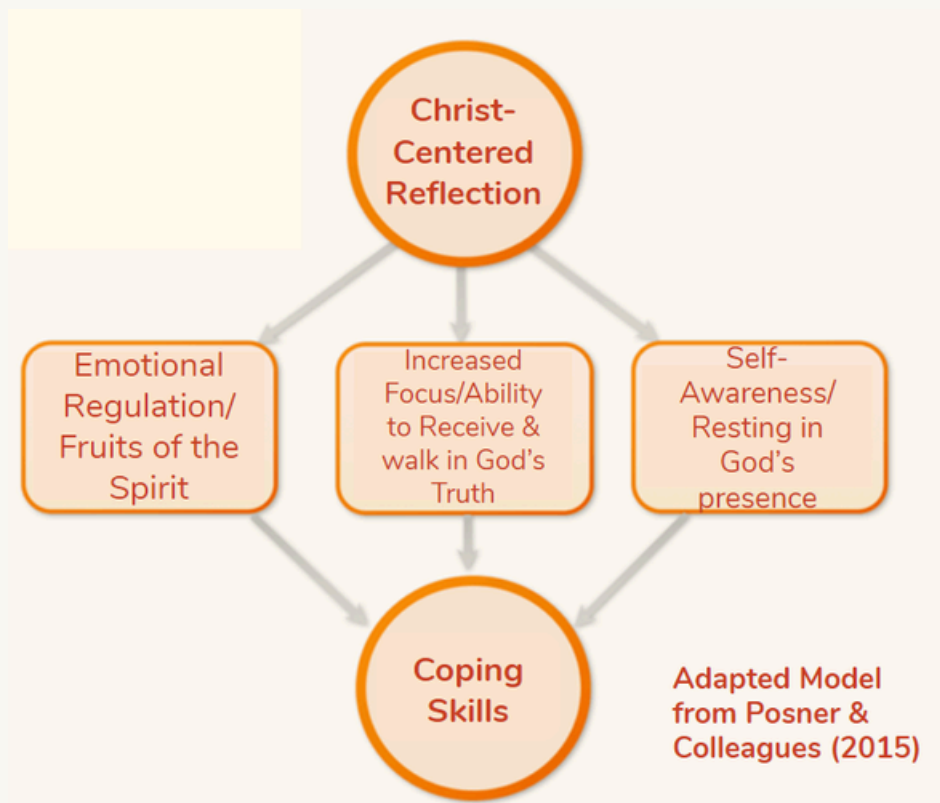


Stress Management & Christ-Centered Reflection

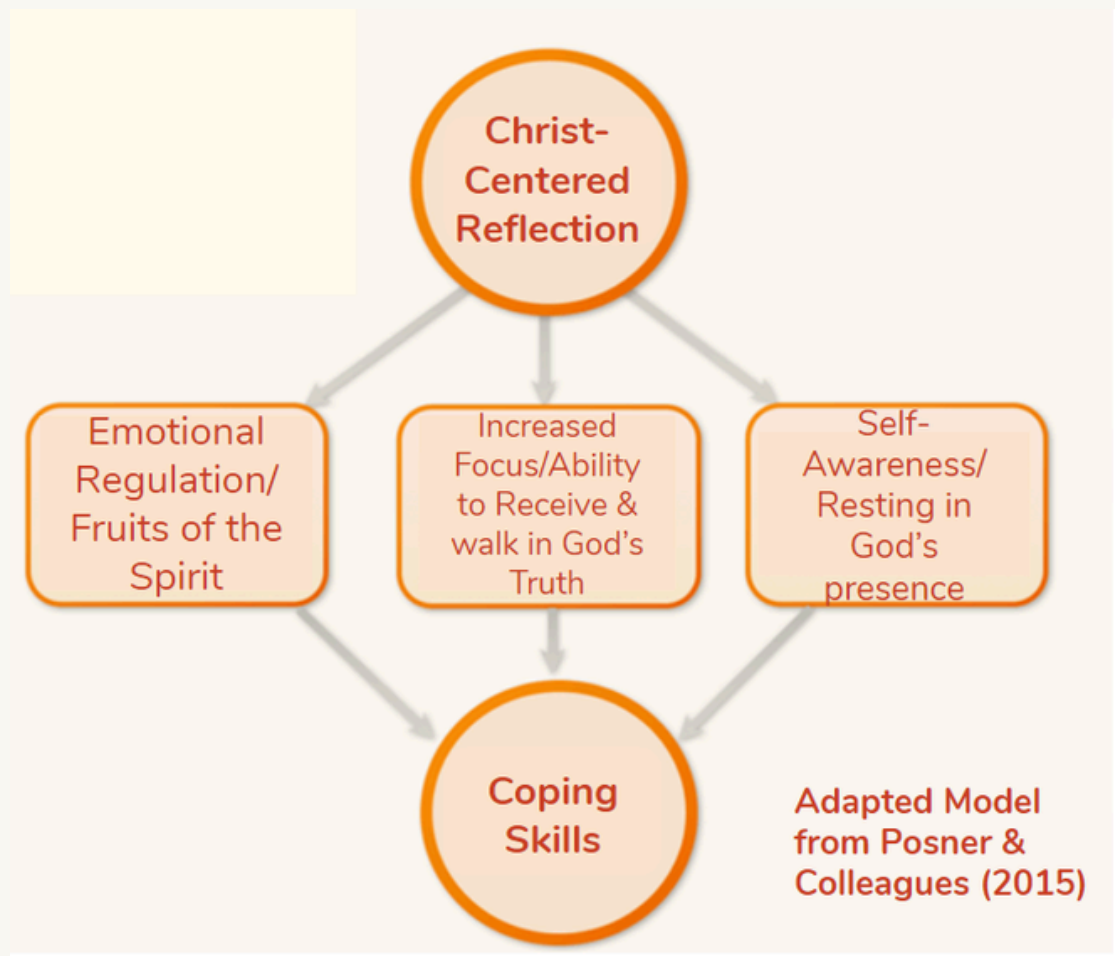
We all have things that help us manage our stress, but engaging in those things can often be difficult for several reasons. What are things that keep you from engaging in stress management skills?

The goal of this group is to teach Christ-centered mental skills to help cope with stress.

Our minds can add a lot of stress to our lives:



OUR GOAL: TO USE THE CHRIST-CENTERED REFLECTIONS TAUGHT IN THIS COURSE TO PROMOTE HEALTHIER COPING SKILLS AND REDUCE EXPERIENCES OF RUMINATION AND WORRY.



What are such Christ-centered reflections and Meditations?

Meditation is a mind and body practice with a long history of increasing calmness and physical relaxation, improving psychological balance, coping with illness, and enhancing overall health and well-being, increasing calmness and physical relaxation, improving psychological balance, coping with illness, and enhancing overall health and well-being.

Mind and body practices focus on the interactions among the brain, mind, body, and behavior.

Christian meditation is a variety of methods designed to enhance focused attention on a member of the Trinity (God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit), Scripture, or one's self for one or more of the following purposes: (a) deepening one's relationship with the Lord, (b) cultivating spiritual growth or emotional healing, or (c) growing in love towards one's neighbor and one's self (Garzon, 2013)

These skills take practice to incorporate into daily living, so it's important to determine when and where you might feel comfortable practicing these reflections.

Write down specific times and places you would feel comfortable practicing this reflection:

Scriptural Truth Mediation (5-10 minutes)

Instructions: Choose a brief Scripture passage that is meaningful and comforting. As you breathe in, be aware of God's presence with you, and as you breathe out, say the Scripture to yourself, pondering its meaning. Your handout has a few samples. Feel free to use other Scriptural passages that you like that are also encouraging.

Psalm 23:1: "The Lord is my shepherd"

Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through him who gives me strength"

Proverbs 3:5a: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart."

1 John 1:9a: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins."

1 John 4:8b "God is love"

Romans 8:1: "Therefore, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus."

Psalm 37:7a: "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him."

Matthew 11:28: "Come unto me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"

I'd like you to make yourself comfortable, sitting in a relaxed position, closing your eyes, or finding a comfortable spot to let your eyes focus on. Allow yourself to switch from the usual mode of doing to simply being, of resting in God's presence. Release any worries or things from the past you're thinking about into God's hands and move your focus toward the Scripture passage... Take a deep breath in... and breathe out... Repeating the verse as you breathe out... If you chose a longer verse, you may want to repeat half the scripture in one breath and the other half in your second breath... Breathe in... Breathe out, quoting the passage... Focus your mind on the scripture. Your mind will eventually wander. This is normal. Exercise a spirit of grace toward yourself and refocus your attention on the verse... Breathe in and breathe out, repeating the verse. Quietly reflect on the passage... Ponder its meaning and what God's saying to you in it... when your mind wanders, gently return your focus to the passage. No need to beat yourself up. Breathe in and breathe out, quoting the Scripture... Just keep doing this rhythm, breathing in and stating the Scripture, pondering it, as you breathe out... In a moment, the scriptural mediation will end. Whatever way you would like to end this time will be fine. As you conclude the meditation, you may want to end with a prayer to God, thanking Him for revealing Himself to you through the verse... when you are ready, bring your awareness back to the room, opening your eyes.

Creation Meditation: Reflecting on the Five Senses

For 20 minutes, find a safe park, the woods, the ocean, basically somewhere outside in nature where you feel comfortable and can relax. Simply be with God and enjoy nature.

Bring a small notepad and a journal with you. Leave your smartphone and other technology behind in your car.

Vision: Look around for a few minutes, observing nature. When your mind wanders, gently bring it back to observing nature.

If you remember something disruptive (like, “Oh! I forgot to do ___!”), instead of jumping up to leave and do it, write it down on the notepad to help you remember to address it afterward. This will help your mind release the item to return to observing nature.

Hearing: Close your eyes for a few minutes and notice what you hear. When your mind wanders, gently bring it back to noticing what you hear.

Sensing in Your Body: Open your eyes and observe how your body feels where you are sitting. Notice any sensations on your skin from the wind, the sun, the chair, etc.

Smelling: Close your eyes again and notice what you can smell in the air.

Tasting: Observe what you can taste in your mouth.

5 Senses: Become aware of your five-sense experience as you sit in nature.

At the end of your time, use the journal to write down any thoughts or ideas you would like. There is no need to feel like you have to write something profound. Simply write whatever you like about the experience. Sometimes, people like to end their entry with a prayer, sometimes some other way, and you will find what works best for you to complete the experience.

A Prayer of Examen

Surrendering to God's providence

Surrendering to God's providence involves recognizing his loving presence in our hopes, dreams, difficulties, challenges, and suffering. We make a choice to trust in his perfect plan, whatever happens, because he is infinitely powerful, wise, and good.

As Jesus revealed in Matthew's gospel, Christians need not worry because God provides for his creation.⁹⁹ In fact, a variety of Christian writers in the last millennia have emphasized the importance of surrendering to God's providential care as a way to cultivate a deeper contentment in life.

In the Jesuit tradition, "finding God in all things" is a common saying. With this phrase, we are learning to "find God" in the midst of life's experiences, the joy and the suffering. In the 1600's, Ignatius of Loyola developed a prayer form to help us do this, the prayer of examen. This prayer might involve reflecting on the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, or other passages. One adaptation of the "Daily Examen" involves focusing on our "fears," "attachments," "need for control," and "entitlements" (*FACE*).¹¹⁰ Today, we can learn to turn our focus more to the Lord, surrendering to his perfect plan. He is infinitely powerful, wise, and loving, and his plan is for our good.

Meditating with the “Daily Examen”

1. Ask God to be with you during this 10-minute practice, recognizing he is active and present in this very moment and thanking him for his perfect, enduring love.
2. Ask for God’s grace, praying that he will reveal himself in today’s hopes and fears.
 - 1.3. Reflect on your thoughts about this day, week, month, or year:
 2.
 - 1.a. **Fears:** What am I afraid of, God? What do I believe I am in danger of? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
 - 1.b. **Attachments:** What am I clinging to, God? What am I afraid of surrendering to you? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
 - 1.c. **Control:** What am I trying to unilaterally control, God? What am I scared of losing power over? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
 - 1.d. **Entitlements:** What do I believe I am entitled to, God? What am I demanding from you? What are you revealing to me in this experience?
 - 1.4. Place these four areas—“fears,” “attachments,” “control,” and “entitlements”—in God’s loving hands, asking him to take control of them. Ask him to do with them what he wishes at this very moment, helping you to accept and trust in his perfect plan for your life.
 - 1.5. Surrender your “fears,” “attachments,” “control,” and “entitlements” to God’s providential care in the days, weeks, and months ahead. This well-known prayer by Ignatius of Loyola may help:
 1. “Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will, All I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.”

Lectio Divina

Engaging with the Holy Spirit around Scripture

***Introduction:** These are four dynamics of prayerful conversation with God around Scripture. Sometimes these will feel like natural steps to be taken in order, at other times, a particular step will predominate or the order will vary. Be led by the Spirit as you interact with God's word using these phases.*

- 1. Prepare (Silencio):** Quiet your heart, placing yourself in God's presence. Offer this time to God.
- 1. Read Slowly (Lectio):** Slowly read the passage out loud. Allow the words to settle and resonate in your heart. After a pause, re-read the passage out loud. Repeat this reading as many times as you feel led, listening for the word or phrase that catches your attention and quickens your heart. When you have a sense of that word or phrase, proceed to #3.
- 1. Reflect (Meditatio):** Take time to sit with the word or phrase that caught your attention. Re-read the passage if it feels right, stopping at that word or phrase again to slowly drink it in. Perhaps repeating the word/phrase quietly feels right. Perhaps entering the passage's biblical scene in your imagination seems appropriate. Ask God to lead you as you explore this phrase at a heart level.
- 1. Pray (Oratio):** Talk to the Lord about the phrase He has highlighted and what's coming up. Journaling here might be useful. How is God addressing you in this Word and inviting you to respond? Allow the Word to guide you into a prayerful response.
- 1. Rest (contemplation):** Rest in God's presence. Receive deeply God's word and rest in His presence and love. Allow yourself time to wait and be still before you re-enter life as usual. Stay with the Lord until you feel prompted to leave. Take God's word with you throughout the day.