
FAITH, WELLBEING AND COVID-19

Rev Dr Judy Redman

The global spread of COVID-19 is causing high levels of anxiety, and people have been responding in a range of ways to what is essentially their lowered levels of wellbeing, an important factor in mental health. While most of us can see that having fights in supermarket queues and stockpiling many months' supply of items like toilet paper is not particularly helpful, we are probably at a bit of a loss about what to do that will make us feel better, especially as quarantine measures become more and more stringent. Here are some suggestions for Christians based on research into wellbeing from the UK government's Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project¹ You can probably think of others.

FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING²

The Mental Capital and Wellbeing project identified five things we can do to improve our levels of wellbeing. Each of them is achievable even in lockdown, and there are traditional Christian practices that link specifically with some of them. Only one is not fairly self-evident.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

Phone friends and family; if you are not self-isolating, chat to neighbours over the fence, keeping appropriate social distances; if you have internet access, use email, software like Skype, Google Hangouts, Zoom and social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc) to communicate with others.

KEEP LEARNING

You may have a particular skill you want to learn or practice that you can do at home; a Bible study book you have been meaning to work through; find a TV program about something that interests you and watch it; if you have internet access, you can Google just about anything and find some kind of training. Or look for TED talks on YouTube. You can combine some of these with connecting by ringing a friend to share what you've learned or agreeing to watch a program at the same time then phone to talk or doing the same Bible study and talk about it.

BE ACTIVE

Walking, jogging and bike-riding are still OK, fitness levels permitting, unless you are self-isolating or unwell. At home you can find fitness programs on TV or watch a fitness DVD, or even walk up and down the hallway or around the back yard. Clean out that cupboard or shed or do the gardening you've been meaning to do. Sweeping, vacuuming and scrubbing the shower recess also count as activity. Again, you can combine some of these with connecting by watching the

¹ For further information go to <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/mental-capital-and-wellbeing>

² Melbourne University has a specific website that provides more information about this <https://5waystowellbeing.org.au/>

same TV fitness session as a friend or family member and ringing to talk afterwards. Or walking with a friend or family member if you are not self-isolating. Or even just smiling and saying 'hello' to anyone you pass on your walk.

BE AWARE/TAKE NOTICE

This is the one that is not self-evident. It is about taking time to be aware of your surroundings and of your thoughts and feelings as they arise, without getting lost in them or judging them as good or bad. It is living mainly in the present. One Christian practice that links with this is being still and looking and listening for God. In particular, take time in your day to appreciate something good in your life. This helps you to recognise that not everything is bad and stops you from getting stuck in the past or the future. You may have heard the phrase 'practicing gratitude' but the Christian practice is giving thanks to God for the good things in life. Make time each day for prayers of thanksgiving. Write down what you're thankful for, so you are reminded of it. Add connection by talking to others about this. Pray with someone else if you're comfortable doing that, or just agree to pray later. A half-way option is to intentionally say to the other person "Let's think about the things we can thank God for today," then talk together about them and finish with "God, hear our prayer. Amen."

HELP OTHERS/GIVE

The most obvious way of doing this if you are still able to get out is by offering to shop for others and drop items off at their place. Connecting with someone else to limit their social isolation is also helping, especially if you help them to 'practice gratitude.' Some people also find it very encouraging to know that someone else is praying for them but **do** check that this is OK before you decide to do it and **don't** share what they have told you with others without their permission.

AND IF THINGS ARE STILL BAD...

Contact a member of the pastoral care team or the minister of your church. Or if you need to talk to someone immediately call

Lifeline on 13 11 14 for 24 hour crisis support and suicide prevention or if you have internet access visit their website <https://www.lifeline.org.au/> for other options (If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact Lifeline through the National Relay Service: TTY (teletypewriter) users phone 133 677 then ask for 13 11 14; Speak and Listen users phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 13 11 14; Internet relay users connect to the NRS then ask for 13 11 14) or

Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636 for 24 hour support, or if you have internet access, visit their website <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/> for other options.

Judy is a Uniting Church minister who until recently has coordinated the chaplaincy services at La Trobe and Charles Sturt University's Albury-Wodonga campuses. She is currently supply minister at Yarrowonga Uniting Church, Victoria. Please feel free to circulate this material provided you acknowledge the author and don't alter the content without contacting her (judy54@tpg.com.au).