



Chaplain Chat

Education and inspiration from the Hamilton Hospice chaplain -- March 2026

Coping With Spiritual Distress

What is Spiritual Distress?

Spiritual distress can be understood as a loss of meaning in your life and/or a breakdown in relationships with yourself, others, your faith, or the world. Spiritual distress is common for people suffering serious illness. It can also be triggered by a traumatic experience, a sudden change in circumstances, or the death of a loved one. Even very devout religious people can face spiritual distress.

What Are Signs and Symptoms of Spiritual Distress?

- Asking questions like “Why me?” “What did I do to deserve this?” or “Why am I still here?”
- Feeling like your life has no meaning or purpose
- Questioning your belief system or suddenly losing your spiritual or religious beliefs
- Feeling angry at yourself
- Feeling anger towards God or feeling punished by God
- Feeling of being isolated or abandoned by your community or by God
- Feelings of sadness, anger, despair, depression, or anxiety
- Expressing fear of what is to come
- Seeking religious or spiritual guidance

"In the midst of winter, I discovered that there was in me an invincible summer."

—Albert Camus

What May Help You Cope With Spiritual Distress?

- Share your concerns with a trusted friend or counselor
- Engage in spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, reading uplifting stories, scripture, or devotionals, listening to soothing or spiritual music, or spending time in nature.
- Keep a journal of your feelings, thoughts, and questions. Journaling can help you manage anxiety, reduce stress, and cope with depression.
- Keep a gratitude journal.
- Participate in creating art, woodworking, or other hands-on activities
- Reconnect with your spiritual and religious beliefs
- Seek spiritual help or guidance by talking with a spiritual leader.

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“Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of the overcoming of it.”

— Helen Keller

“He who has a why to live for can bear almost any how.”

— Friedrich Nietzsche

Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pasture,
He leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.
Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

“There is meaning in every journey that is unknown to the traveler.”

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tunes without the words –
And never stops at all.”

— Emily Dickinson