

WEBINAR SERIES

MENTAL HEALTH *and* CARE

COPING WITH STRESS DURING THIS SEASON AND BEYOND

presented by  AMPLIFY MEDIA

Episode 1 – The Effects of Prolonged Stress: Taking Care of Yourself

Watch this episode on demand [here](#).

Find out more about Amplify Media [here](#).

Host

Rev. Justin Coleman, Senior Pastor, University United Methodist Church, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Panelists

- Victor Armstrong, Director of the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services at NC DHHS, Raleigh, North Carolina
- Dr. Amy G. Oden, Independent Scholar, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- Juanita Campbell Rasmus, Pastor and Author, Houston, Texas

If you are suffering from mental health concerns, contact your doctor or other health professional.

These hotlines are also available:

The National Alliance on Mental Health Helpline ⇨ (800) 950-6264

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline ⇨ (800) 273-8255

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration National Helpline ⇨ (800) 662-4357

National Domestic Violence Hotline ⇨ (800) 799-7233

Episode Recap

The panelists began by discussing the physical effects of prolonged stress on our bodies such as exhaustion, not feeling passion or interest in activities and ideas, and disrupted sleep. Because this year's pandemic doesn't have a clear ending, we begin to normalize stress, which has the same effects as heightened trauma. The pain scale a doctor asks you is a good example. Pain that would have felt like a "6" last year, you might now identify as a "2" because you are used to stress and pain. This prolonged stress takes a toll on our bodies and spirits. This hyper-vigilant state of prolonged stress can actually change our brain's neuropathways, which has a distorting effect on our ability to identify stress.

Continued on the next page.

Episode 1 – The Effects of Prolonged Stress: Taking Care of Yourself

Watch this episode on demand [here](#).
Find out more about Amplify Media [here](#).

Episode Recap

Continued on the next page.

It might be especially difficult to name stress and mental-health concerns if you grew up in a faith tradition that viewed needing help as a spiritual weakness. Similarly, society puts additional pressure on men, so many feel they cannot show weakness or ask for help. It's important for male pastors to model asking for help and sharing vulnerability.

When we feel different – the things you once enjoyed, you now don't; the things you tolerated, you now can't; you had energy, now you feel low; etc. – that is our body's way to tell us that we need to pay attention and be mindful to what is bothering us. This year has presented multiple and continuous stressors, which we cannot process at once. It's important to approach each stressor separately. If you are overwhelmed by this, it may be time to ask for professional help. You might also need to call on others in your community to help you identify these red flags.

Some of the advice the panelists had for mindfulness included:

- Set an alarm for healthy behavior such as drinking water or being active.
- Self-care is essential, and physical care is also self-care.
- Think about what you miss and be creative about experiencing that in our "new normal." For example, Juanita shared how much she missed in-person worship. So she has been watching movies with church choirs and worshipping with them!
- Stop and think, "what is it about this activity that I need?" For example, Victor missed going to the gym, not just for working out, but also for the routine and socializing it provided.
- Amy encouraged us to drop our facades. When we pretend we are not stressed, that actually contributes to our stress.
- Practice [The Examen](#).
- Develop a discipline of praying for others daily.
- Be mindful of your breathing. Pause and take a deep breath in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth.

Community is essential for stress relief. The panelists reminded us to:

- Use social media for good. Put something positive out into the world.
- Seek out community that's uplifting. It's easy to engage with people who want to commiserate and complain. Avoid that when possible.
- Some days you will just be sad. Name that.
- Pastors should be mindful of their own trauma. You must deal with that before you can help others.
- Pastors should also be mindful of their limitations and refer people to mental-health professionals when needed.