

LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION FOR STRESS REDUCTION

The *Selah* Stress Management Trial, a three-year research study conducted by the Duke Clergy Health Initiative, identified scalable, low-cost interventions that support pastors in managing the challenges of ministry.



Loving Kindness Meditation is a mindfulness practice designed to help us to meet the strong feelings we have about ourselves and others with kindness and compassion. The act of sending loving kindness to yourself and others grounds your spirit in the here-and-now, while noticing your thoughts without judgment when under stress. You can adjust the practice for the time you have (10–30 minutes).

The *Selah* study showed that clergy practicing their choice of six mindfulness practices, one of which was Loving Kindness Meditation, improved their Heart Rate Variability (HRV), the measure of our heart's ability to recover after a stressful event. Studies of Loving Kindness Meditation by itself have also shown improved HRV. This means that practicing mindfulness can improve your heart in exactly the same ways that stress damages it.

**Jesus said,
“You shall love
your neighbor
as yourself.”
(Matthew 19:19)**

PARTICIPANTS:

- experienced improvements with an average of 28 minutes of practice per day.
- Improved anxiety symptoms by 45% at 3 months and 55% at 6 months.
- Improved spiritual well-being by 14% at 6 months.
- Improved Heart Rate Variability by 14% at 3 months.



LOVING KINDNESS MEDITATION

Find a quiet and comfortable position. Relax. Notice how your breath feels right now. Notice the texture of your breathing. The rate of your breathing. The depth of your breathing. There's no need to change it.

Bring your awareness to your chest. Keep your awareness there as you notice your breath. Notice what it is like to breathe into your chest, into your heart. Simply place all of your awareness right there, at the center of your chest.

Now slowly and silently repeat this phrase: **May I be happy, may I be well, may I be safe...and at peace.**

Direct loving kindness toward yourself: to your body and all its mental habits. Try to embrace all parts of yourself. This includes anxiety, fears, emotional habits and desires, physical aches and pains, as well as illness and old age. Embrace all of yourself. Leave nothing out.

Repeat the following phrase with gentleness and kindness: **May I be happy, may I be well, may I be safe...and at peace**

Now imagine someone you love very much. Notice how you feel, any changes in your body.

Slowly and silently repeat this phrase: **May they be happy, may they be well, may they be safe...and at peace**

Now imagine those with whom you worship or members of your congregation.

Repeat: **May they be happy, may they be well, may they be safe...and at peace**

Next imagine your neighbor and people across your community.

Repeat: **May they be happy, may they be well, may they be safe...and at peace**

Now imagine a difficult person: someone with whom you may be in conflict, someone you judge or hold resentment towards. As you evoke them in your mind's eye, try to let go of any ill-feelings. It may help to imagine them as they were when they were a young, vulnerable child. Try to include them in your well-wishes.

Repeat: **May they be happy, may they be well, may they be safe...and at peace**

Finally, expand your imagination to people all across the world: people of all kinds, all skin colors, all ages.

And say to yourself: **May we be happy, may we be well, may we be safe...and at peace**

As you conclude, reorient to your surroundings. Carry this feeling of loving kindness with you today.



This script was created by Rae Jean Proeschold-Bell, adapted from the two sources below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-d_AA9H4z9U

https://ggia.berkeley.edu/practice/loving_kindness_meditation