



5 MISTAKES TO AVOID

DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

INNERWELL 

These past few years have been some of the most difficult we've ever faced. Economic instability, political unrest, racial tension... With each experience, it feels like our loss, anxiety, and disappointment only grow stronger.

It's tempting to ignore these feelings or convince ourselves that they'll go away with time. Unfortunately, the impact of COVID-19 goes much deeper than our physical health. It can impact everything from our life outlook to the relationships with the people who matter most.

And if we keep making the same mistakes, we could find ourselves empty, lonely, and disheartened when the pandemic finally stops disrupting our lives.

So how can we learn and grow despite the challenging season we're in? Is it even possible to live without worry when our world is changing so much?

While we might not be able to control all the heartache we face during the pandemic, we can control how we deal with it. In this guide, I share 5 common mistakes you could be making right now that prevent you from healing, growing, and finding hope despite the scars COVID-19 has left behind.



MISTAKE #1

SWIMMING IN THE SHALLOW END

Humans have a natural aversion to discomfort, pain, and suffering. Our instinct is to eliminate or avoid it at all costs through distractions and denial. Since we cannot eliminate the many hardships of COVID-19, it feels like we're left with one option: find a way to cope with it. For many of us, this means keeping our minds numb.

It's tempting to hide behind Netflix, Facebook, or football when life becomes overwhelming. And at first glance, this doesn't seem to be a bad thing. Shouldn't we be able to cut ourselves a break, particularly when we've been struggling to keep our heads above water for so long?

The truth is that the deep things in life are often revealed in times of suffering and change. When the world has forced us (or 'gifted' us, depending on your point of view) to be in the deep end for a while, hiding in the shallow end doesn't just keep us stuck in one place. It prevents us from uncovering everything the deep end could teach us about the world, each other, and ourselves.



So how can you embrace the deep end without drowning? Instead of avoiding the painful experiences of the past years, consider journeying inward. Set aside time to pause and ask yourself these questions:

- What do I really want?
- What do these feelings stir inside of me?
- Who am I becoming?
- What does this mean for the next season of my journey?

By taking the time to reflect, learn, and process, you can turn a painful circumstance into an opportunity for growth.





MISTAKE #2

FEEDING YOUR GUILT, SHAME, AND ANXIETY

[The fourteenth Dali Lama](#)

once said, “[Man] is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being that he does not live in the present nor the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then dies having never really lived.”

If you find yourself stuck in a place of guilt, shame, or anxiety, this quote may hit home. You want to live the best life possible, but these emotions are holding you back. They're incredibly powerful and difficult to overcome—even for the strongest people.

Fortunately, these feelings will only control you if you let them. There are steps you can take to reduce the influence they have over your life, so you can start to live a life that reflects the values that matter most to you.

The first step toward freedom from guilt, shame, and anxiety is to understand where these feelings come from. Our default headspace is a combination of three things. We can't control these three things.





At some point or another, every one of us will struggle with these three problems. But what we can do is prevent guilt, shame, and anxiety from growing once their seeds have been planted.

- Struggling with the aspects of our past that remain unresolved or unhealed (the source of our guilt or shame)
- Playing the comparison game and chronically judging ourselves against others (social media has doubled this anxious tendency)
- Or being preoccupied with the things about life that we ultimately can't control anyway (a second main source of anxiety).

Instead of giving into these emotions or mistaking them for truth, double down on the practice of being present. COVID has been our most recent teacher for the importance of being present. We see now more than ever how essential it is to simply be with family and friends, cook meals, and play games together. If you were forced to quarantine, you have likely experienced this first hand.

Don't let guilt, shame, or anxiety prevent you from truly living in this moment. Take some time to enjoy the simple gifts of the present, like a good conversation with a friend, good food, sex, times of recreation, or being in nature.



MISTAKE #3

KEEPING BUSY

In an episode of the [Being With](#) podcast, Dr. Geoff Holsclaw said that our modern society naturally defaults toward distraction and reactivity. You are bombarded with more words, messages, and decisions that are competing for your prized attention.

And as your attention is pinballing from source to source, chances are good that you're finding yourself struggling to be attentive and empathetic toward others. You may even struggle to stay attuned to your own body and soul and find yourself doing things you don't even believe in.

There's nothing inherently wrong with staying busy. When you're busy at work, time flies by, and you need to work to support the people you care about. But when that overachieving mindset follows you home after the workday ends, troubles can start to surface.



Maybe you spend your weekend working on projects instead of visiting family members. Perhaps you space out during conversations with friends because your mind is focused on the tasks you could be doing instead.

The irony in living a life full of busy tasks is that it ends up feeling incredibly empty. You grow apart from the people you love and lose sight of the things that matter most. When you take time to unplug and engage with others, however, you're able to reconnect with others and the world around you.

What if you regularly disconnected from the digital world and redirected your attention to the people and causes that matter most? What if your outer, balanced practices were a welcome friend and fueled your inner practice of being present?

Today's culture demands that we curate our decisions and consumption to give our best energy and attention toward who and what we really value. This is even more true during the pandemic.



MISTAKE #4

SUCCUMBING TO OUR POLARIZED & DIVIDED CULTURE

If you're often worried about the state of our country or what the future holds, you are not alone.

Anxiety has become a significant concern for many people in the past decade, and COVID-19 only made those feelings worse.

From August 2020 to February 2021 alone, the percentage of adults with symptoms of anxiety or depression increased from [36.4% to 41.5%](#).

So what's making us so anxious? Well, we live in a culture of fear heavily focused on fight-or-flight, win-lose, and us-versus-them mindsets.

When we are reduced to this level of thinking, the first thing to shift is how we view people—especially how we treat those that are not of our tribe or ideology.



ENOUGH
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ENOUGH!
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“Democrats are the problem.”
“Republicans are the enemy.”
“This group is dangerous.” “That organization is evil.”

Somehow, we have started to believe that we are “separate” and not all interconnected and interdependent. As a result, we feel anxious. We don’t trust anyone, not even ourselves.

These problems have been happening well before the first COVID case hit China, and they will likely continue well after the virus is under control.

While we might not be able to change our culture anytime soon, that doesn’t mean we should embrace it.

Instead, choose to regularly listen to and learn from those that are different from you. The easiest way to develop your own opinions and identity is to foster relationships with people who have different views than yours.

Not only will this open your eyes to new perspectives, but it also helps you develop humility and mutual respect.



If you are middle or upper class, how often do you connect with someone from the culture of poverty? As a white, middle-class man, these months have convicted me to read more authors who are women or people of color.

On a daily basis, I am trying to have my mouth closed and to listen more than I speak, and to ask more questions than share my thoughts. And my inner fear and outer division and judgment are slowly deflating.

Forcing yourself out of your comfort zone is never easy, but it's well worth it. Meeting with someone from a different background, race, religion, or economic status as yours can help you become more confident in who you are and better understand and appreciate others.

It's a simple way to fight against the effects of our me-vs-you culture and foster a compassionate spirit with all of our neighbors.



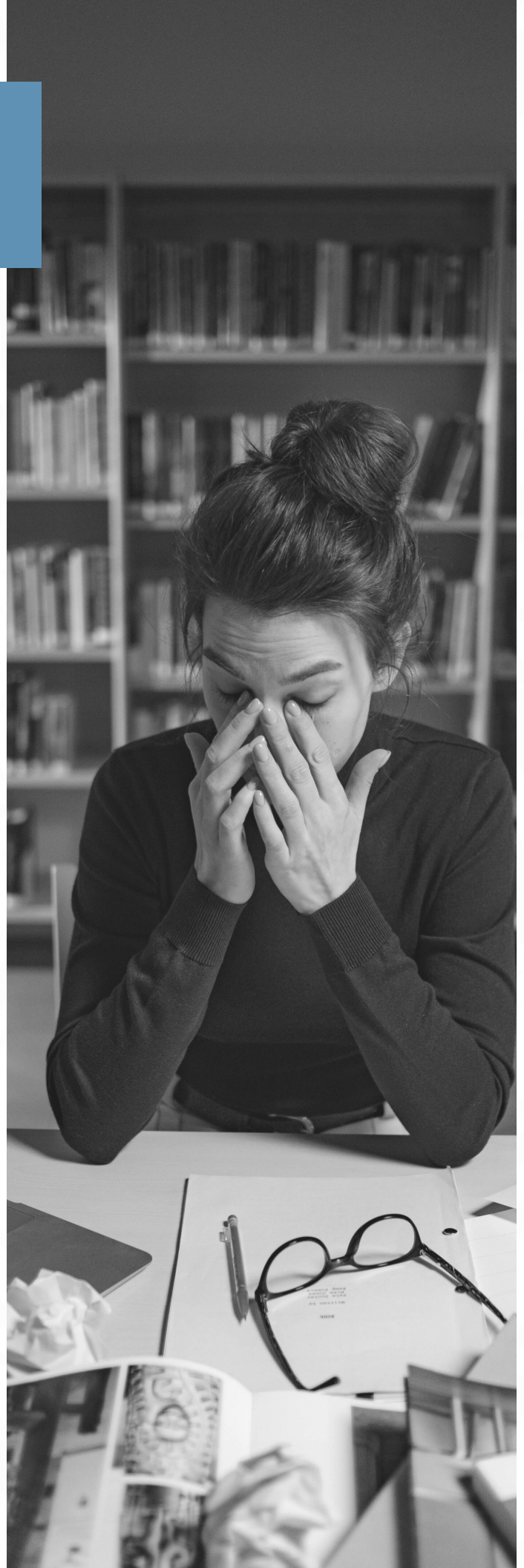
MISTAKE #5

WEARING YOURSELF DOWN

With one kid in college and one finishing high school, I am almost an empty-nester. I am in the first generation of parents to raise our children in the digital world and for all the benefits technology has brought us, it's also made life a lot more challenging. Everything seems faster and more complex than just a generation ago.

We are now swimming (maybe more like drowning) in the waters of overcommitment. Today's work-life allows you to bring your work home with nonexistent lines between the two. For many, the high expectations and schedules of children's sports and activities almost don't feel like fun anymore.

Our world of work and family both lend themselves to a frenetic pace with very little margin. We must keep up. We must seem like we have our act together. And it's killing us.





[Almost 70% of Americans](#) feel fatigued at work. We're not getting enough sleep. We feel drained even when we do sleep. And this can have a significant impact on your life, beyond your energy levels.

When you're fatigued, you are:

- As cognitively impaired as someone with a blood alcohol content of .05
- 3 times more likely to be in a car crash
- More likely to get injured or sick
- Slower to recover from injuries and illnesses
- Less productive, less patient, and less empathetic

Life is too short to waste on exhaustion. Instead of overcommitting and wearing yourself out with unending tasks, make self-care a priority. Find ways to guard the emotional and spiritual space in your life to simply be instead of produce.



Create a regular time every day, and maybe even an entire day every week, for your personal renewal. Pick a few of these self-care activities regularly to keep your mind and your body well-rested:

- Do breathing exercises for 5 minutes a day. A popular exercise is to breathe in for 4 counts, hold it for 4 counts, breathe out for 4 counts, hold for 4, and repeat. This helps relax your body, improves your sleep, strengthens your cardiovascular muscles, and lowers your blood pressure.
- Practice sleep hygiene daily. This means going to sleep and waking up around the same time (even on weekends), no phones or computers before bed, and only using your bed for sleeping or sex.
- Say “no” more. While being helpful can strengthen your relationships, you can’t be the friend you need to be when you’re exhausted or resentful. Don’t agree to do something just because you’re afraid of upsetting someone.
- Move your body and exercise. Do simple yoga stretches or go for a walk for 30 minutes each day. If you have arthritis or health conditions that make moving hard, water aerobics can help reduce pain during exercise.





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- Simplify your environment. Spend one day a month giving away clothes, decor, and other items you haven't used recently. Limit your screen time, minimize your spaces, slow down your schedule, and use fewer and fuller words.
 - Be in nature daily. Go for a walk around your block after dinner. On the weekends, plan a hike or bike ride if the weather allows. If exercise is difficult, sit on your front porch and watch the sunset daily. You'll be amazed at how much of an impact nature can have on your energy levels.
 - Set a boundary each time you agree to do something. If you need to take your kids to a game, you might set the expectation that you're going to eat out so you aren't stressed about cooking. If you need to pick up an extra task at work, add the expectation that another task will be postponed.



FIND ANSWERS, HEALING, & HOPE

DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND

Avoiding these mistakes can feel impossible, especially when you're already exhausted and discouraged. But by following the advice above, you can maintain the relationships you care about, be present despite the pain, and emerge from COVID as a stronger, better version of yourself.

You don't have to navigate these pitfalls alone. As a husband, father, and spiritual leader, I know firsthand how frustrating it can be when you feel like the pandemic has changed your family and who you are for the worse. All 5 mistakes above have described my life at one time or another, and even now they are not far from me.

But I have also experienced how fulfilling it can be to grow stronger during times of trial, and it's my passion to help people just like you experience connection and hope--no matter how challenging life becomes.

You don't have to stay stuck in a place of anxiety, disappointment, or guilt. As a certified life coach and corporate chaplain, I help people stay grounded in the chaos, so they can pursue a life of hope and fulfillment. Give me a call at 806.282.5263 or visit my website to schedule a meeting today to get started.

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