



### When Bad Things Happen to Good People

Whatever your spiritual or religious beliefs are, an extraordinary experience such as war or trauma **can** affect your spiritual fitness. Combat experiences can shake up your beliefs and lead you to question your values. Some service members may feel more alone, or even abandoned or betrayed by their God. Things might get shaken up so much that new priorities emerge, involving a new perspective on life, and less (or more) connection to what is held as sacred.



**Combat experiences can shake up your beliefs and lead you to question your values.**

What is it about stressful and traumatic events that can affect your deepest beliefs and sense of meaning? These events have a powerful impact because **they fall outside the range of most normal everyday experiences.**

We all go through life with ways that help us to make sense of the world and things we believe. For some, that's God and faith. For others, it's about personal beliefs, purpose, and whatever it is that fulfills and gives the feeling of being a part of something bigger. Most people believe, deep down, that for the most part:

- They are safe and worthy of love and respect.
- Other people are trustworthy and basically kind.
- The world is meaningful.

What about you? Do you believe those things? You might simply agree with those statements. But if you're not sure, think about a time when someone did something mean or rude to you. Or, a child was killed in a drunk driving accident. Or you heard about someone being unfaithful in a relationship. Were you surprised, angered, confused? Most people are, because these kinds of events go against their deeply held beliefs about what life is supposed to be like. When these things happen, it's confusing because it challenges heartfelt assumptions about being safe and worthy, about other people being trustworthy, or about life having an order to it.



## Successful Spiritual Coping

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These beliefs are, deep down, part of our spirituality, because they are about what matters and is meaningful, and about feelings of connection. So when a traumatic event shakes the foundation of how you see things, it can affect your beliefs, your spirituality, your feelings of connection, and your understanding of a higher power. This can lead to what has been termed “spiritual struggle.” If you are struggling spiritually, it’s important for your health and well-being to work toward a resolution. Some of the things you can do are listed below.

### Meaning and Connection

Remember: Spirituality involves focusing on what is *meaningful* and important to you. It is also about *connection*—being part of something “bigger.” People tap into these experiences in a number of ways.

Things you can do after a traumatic experience to restore some balance:

- It can help to talk about your questions and beliefs with someone you trust.
- Spending time thinking, expressing, and making sense of the experience, whether through talking, writing, art, music, or other means, can help to find some meaning.
- Having a spiritual practice can help you feel more connected and more focused on what is important to you.
- Counselors and chaplains are also available to help you rebuild your beliefs and find meaning.



**Spirituality involves focusing on what is *meaningful* and important to you.**



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How do you bring spirituality into your life? How have you in the past? Which of the following suggestions would you consider as a way to bring spirituality more into your life?

- Prayer.
- Meditation.
- Going to religious services.
- Spending time in a place of worship or contemplation.
- Seeking spiritual counseling.
- Participating in a religious or spiritual social group.
- Participating in a spiritual or religious reading or discussion.
- Being in nature.
- Performing a ritual (e.g., lighting a candle for a fallen friend, taking a pilgrimage to a sacred place, performing a “funeral” for the loss of your innocence and the rebirth of your spirit, or rituals associated with a particular belief system).



**Participating in activities with family, friends, or a larger community can add another dimension to your spiritual fitness.**