



Missionaries to Ministers and Ministering to Missionaries

Keep Calm and Carry On? Considerations for Calm in a COVID-19 World

A virus is impacting our lives and schedules, taking us into uncharted waters as a culture. Jesus slept through the storm while the disciples were frantic, fearing for their lives. We find them in Matthew 8 waking up our Savior, reminding Him what is going on, as if He did not know. It felt like He was doing nothing, yet He was, as my daughter Ella framed it, “teaching us as He slept.” When Dallas Willard was asked to describe Jesus in one word, he responded, “Relaxed.” Isn’t that a perfect word for Him, and a way to anchor ourselves to Him as our world is reacting to COVID-19? Relaxed is a state of trusting, knowing who God is, knowing what to do in the storm, being grounded in the One that is the teacher, even while it looks, feels, and sounds like He is sleeping.

Anxiety is the #1 mental health diagnosis in the USA so it should not surprise us that there are 365 scriptures on fear. It’s nothing new. One truth for each day, reassuring us every day of the year that we are going to be ok. Being anxious for nothing (Phil. 4:6) takes prayer, petition, gratitude - a process to get to His peace. The Lord is not surprised by our fear and He knows it’s a process, a daily process for some to be reassured that we can trust Him.

Anxiety can create havoc in our minds if we are not intentionally noticing and coping in healthy ways so that we do not get stuck in the fears of the unknown. We need to challenge our negative thoughts that increase our fears during this time. It is easier to challenge ourselves when we are coping well, and are less triggered. Here are some considerations for coping, noticing triggers, and further mental health intervention while this storm is impacting our lives.

Coping

Community: Relationships are being sequestered to small groups, not large gatherings. This will impact people differently. Keep an eye on those whose fears could increase toward having a fear of leaving the house (agoraphobia). Continuing to gather and encourage each other is important for our mental health, so whether online, phone, or one on one, it is important to stay connected (Heb. 10:25).

Breathe: When anxious, people breathe shallowly. It is important to practice breathing deeply, and devotionally. In through your nose to the count of 5 (feel the cool air?), hold for 5, out

through your mouth for a count of 5 (warm air out). This helps your brain to receive fresh oxygen and you are better able to shift your thoughts and then feel God's peace. Tool: Abide App.

Sleep: 8 hours. Don't miss 11pm-2am, which are often the trauma processing hours. His mercies are new every morning, especially after a good night's sleep (Lam. 3:23).

Exercise: Being outside, walking in the clean air is good for the mind and soul. Process through the difficulties on the way to where you are going and the solutions on the way back.

Caffeine: Sadly, this is not a helpful drug for an anxious brain. Not only does it restrict blood flow, but it amps up the anxious brain. You will not be good at regulating your mood when thrown up and down by caffeine & the sugar you may add to it.

Triggers: Notice what triggers your fears, stigmas, fatigue.

Social Media: It is set up to be addictive like a slot machine. You wait for new information, hoping something will be good. It is not the source of good news. If you are over-exposing yourself to social media, you are inundated with more information than is necessary. Scale back to a trusted news source when they send out updated information.

H.A.L.T.S. (Hungry, Angry, Lonely, Tired, Stressed, Sick): Meet your basic needs.

Hungry - If you are hungry, eat. Sometimes people don't feel hunger when anxious, so do make sure you are eating healthy foods throughout the day. Junk food will only add to your mood dysregulation and fatigue.

Angry - If angry, pause to consider the source. Usually there is an underlying emotion of fear, out of control, or hurt that drives the anger. Notice, talk about it to a safe person (not another angry person who will fuel your fire). What is not processed is often repeated. Hurt people hurt people, but healthy people help people.

Lonely - Who do you want to be around right now? Loneliness is different than solitude, which can cause you to pause and engage with God.

Tired - Rest

Stressed - What do **you** like to do to de-stress? Go for a run? Take a walk with your dog? Go for a drive? Talk with your spouse, friends, or family? Dinner with your favorite people? Boba with a neighbor? Journal your prayers at sunrise? Watch Masterpiece Theatre? Do Holy Yoga? Yep, it's a thing! Laugh at my suggestions? Haha. Seriously, what makes you laugh? Healthy de-stressors are amazing, fun and refreshing. Unhealthy destressors leave you feeling guilty, tired, hopeless. Big difference.

Sick - If you are sick, don't act like you are not. Rest your body, mind, and soul.

It might be the sabbath you have been needing but have been too busy to take. As Teihlhard de Chardin wrote, "Above all, trust in the slow work of God." Above all, trust God. He is trustworthy, even when our world is scared.

More Help Needed

If you are worrying about a variety of things over the course of six months, have some of the following symptoms that are disrupting your life: restlessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, irritable, muscle tension, difficulties with sleep, you may be dealing with a Generalized Anxiety Disorder. 75% of those with anxiety also have a co-occurring depression diagnosis (Dan Amen, M.D.).

Panic Attacks can happen on their own or within an anxiety disorder. They are scary and cause a great deal of fear of recurrence. Grounding yourself in the fact that they won't last longer than 15-30 minutes, standing with your back against a wall so you can breathe well, focusing on your 5 senses, not on the fear emotion, an icepack, and sips of water are some tools that can be helpful. Reassure yourself with statements like: This will pass soon, I will get through this, Not much longer, I am going to be ok. However, if your symptoms increase, allow someone to take you to the Dr. or ER in order to rule out other contributing factors.

With either of the above, your brain is not regulating: The Anterior Cingulate Gyrus (ACG) is the gearshift of your thoughts. When it gets stuck on a thought, you feel stuck. The neurochemicals in your brain are imbalanced and you remain in fight/flight amygdala response mode, startled and fearful. It is a scary place to be, but you do not have to remain there. Help is available. See a mental health professional (LMFT, LPCC, Psychiatrist) who can help you with a treatment plan that will help you as the Capernaum friends helped the paralyzed man in Mark 2. Good treatment helps people with paralyzed brains get to Jesus. Then you may be a friend to another paralyzed person one day. The Lord will use any circumstance **for our good and for His glory** if we let Him.

Blessings of anchored peace to you today.

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