

September 30, 2012

There are some things we can all expect in life: some days will be blissfully happy, some days we will be frustrated and stressed and some days will be plain bad. The Book of James is unique in that it is unafraid to grapple with the practical, personal issues faced by ordinary Christians. This passage is a call to prayer. This is not like the "have a nice day" that gets tossed off by strangers at store exits. James believes emphatically that prayer does make a difference when it comes to getting through the challenges and successes of life... even in our complex, confounding 21st century world!

James 5: 13-20

¹³Are you hurting? Pray. Do you feel great? Sing. ¹⁴Are you sick? Call the church leaders together to pray and anoint you with oil in the name of the Master. ¹⁵Believing-prayer will heal you, and Jesus will put you on your feet. And if you've sinned, you'll be forgiven—healed inside and out.

¹⁶Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with. ¹⁷Elijah, for instance, human just like us, prayed hard that it wouldn't rain, and it didn't—not a drop for three and a half years. ¹⁸Then he prayed that it would rain, and it did. The showers came and everything started growing again.

¹⁹My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back ²⁰and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.
THANKS BE TO GOD!

Sermon – "Anxiety and worry are not 21st century inventions"

Last Sunday I talked about the dilemma we face trying to be faithful in a world that prizes competition.

I know from your comments that this topic hit a nerve for many of you.

One of the by-products of our highly competitive world is stress.

I'm not even going to ask if you experience stress in your life! – it's a given!!

Stress, worry and anxiety are very real for us at least some of the time.

James writes from the premise that even the most faithful people aren't perfect – we can fall victim to the pressures of our culture AND we can victimize others in our pursuit of what we want

More than any other New Testament document, it focuses on how to develop a Christian character and a Christian lifestyle in the face of a hostile world (one that not only sees no need for God, but which is in fact opposed to God). Freeman Sleeper, James, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries.

- James was said to be the favourite book of scriptures for Martin Luther King. It looks at the world we live in with eyes wide open.
- Makes no effort to sugar-coat or diminish what is really happening in our lives.

James wrote for people experiencing exhaustion, embarrassment, shame, stress and worry.

AND, he offered them a strategy for coping.

He told them to pray.

Pray for themselves setting out clearly what was troubling them.

Pray for their neighbour whom they know to be enduring a bad time.

Pray for the stranger whom you know to be in distress.

Pray - believing that it will make a difference.

Pray - because you don't want anyone to ever feel alone in their hardship.

Pray - because it allows us to do something constructive and meaningful no matter how dire the circumstances.

Now here's a curious observation from a lot of reading about stress, worry and anxiety:

OK, so what else can I do to feel better?

- Learn to manage stress in your life. Keep an eye on pressures and deadlines and make a commitment to taking time out from study or work.
- Learn a variety of relaxation techniques. Physical relaxation methods and meditation techniques really do help.
- Look after your physical self. Eat healthily, get regular exercise and try to keep a regular sleep pattern. Avoid alcohol, cannabis and junk food.
- Practise deep abdominal breathing

<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/printerfriendlynews.php?newsid=7603>.

The parents' role in working with anxiety includes a number of components including nurturing an optimistic mindset and ideas to help the child develop a feeling of control. This means having a realistic hope and a belief that problems are surmountable. The child needs encouragement in knowing that it will be possible to manage their fear and anxiety.

Worry and Anxiety – Grant L. Martin, Ph.D.

Overview – NY Times Health

<http://health.nytimes.com/health/guides/symptoms/stress-and-anxiety/o...>

- Finding healthy, fun ways to cope with stress helps most people. You can learn and practice ways to help you relax. Find out about yoga, tai chi or meditation.
- Take breaks from work. Make sure to balance fun activities with your job and family duties. Schedule some leisure time every day. Spend time with people you enjoy, including your family.
- Try learning to make things with your hands, playing an instrument, or listening to music.
- Think about what might be giving you stress. Keep a diary of what is going on when you have these feelings.
- Then find someone you trust who will listen to you. Often just talking to a friend or loved one is all that you need to feel better. Most areas also have support groups and hotlines that can help.

Be conscious of your worries. Set aside 15 minutes each day where you allow yourself to focus on problems and fears – and then vow to let them go after the 15 minutes is up. Some people wear a rubber band on their wrist and “pop” the rubber band if they find themselves going into their “worry mode”. Do whatever you can to remind yourself to stop dwelling on worries.

Learn to relax. Relaxation techniques can trigger the relaxation response – a physiological state characterized by a feeling of warmth and quiet mental alertness. This is the opposite of the “fight or flight” response. Relaxation techniques can offer a real potential to reduce anxiety and worries. They can also increase your ability to self-manage stress. With relaxation, blood flow to the brain increases and brain waves shift from an alert, beta rhythm to a relaxed, alpha rhythm. Practiced regularly, relaxation techniques can counteract the debilitating effects of stress. Common relaxation techniques include deep abdominal breathing, meditation, listening to calming music, and activities like yoga and tai chi.

Meditate. Daily meditation – instead of worrying – may help you move beyond negative thoughts and allow you to become “unstuck” from worries that keep your body on high alert. With meditation, you purposefully pay attention to what is happening at the present moment without thinking of the past or future. Meditation increases hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline, which are released during the “flight or flight” or stress response.

Have a strong social network. Loneliness may be as much a risk factor for disease as having high cholesterol or smoking cigarettes. People who are happily married and/or have large networks of friends not only have greater life expectancies compared with those people who do not, but they also have fewer incidences of just about all types of disease. <http://www.webmd.com/balance/guide/how-worrying-affects-your-body>

What became obvious to me in reading through the literature = the best way to deal with stress is:

- Disclose your worries – let them go.
- Stop and take time to reflect.

- Meditate be part of a supportive community.
- Find someone who will listen to you.

This is a recipe for developing a prayer for life in 2012 – and it might just have easily been pulled from the 5th chapter of James in the early 2nd century!!

For James, as for us, prayer is “a good general principle” for life.

Our greatest failing is that we don’t persevere at it – we give up too quickly/get out of the habit.

Prayer is a common sense strategy for coping with the real world -> and God will never put you on hold or voice mail!!