

## Pandemic Blues

Is the pandemic wearing you down? Are you living the “Pandemic Blues?” In North Carolina we were nearing the proposed end date for Phase 2 re-opening. Three days prior to the proposed transition to Phase 3 the Governor extended Phase 2 another three weeks. At the same time he announced that we haven’t slowed the spread enough for a safe, full-time return to school. As a result, our district has decided to have remote learning only for at least the first 9 weeks of school. Although the announcements were not surprising it was a “downer” for most of us. We long for a return to a sense of normalcy, yet the year 2020 is anything but normal. I could feel the air being let out of the balloon. North Carolina’s infection rate resembles that of many other states so, in our minds, we imagine the “trickle down” effect on sports and entertainment, as well as businesses trying to stay solvent. Staying in our homes with limited social interaction is wearing on us. God intended humans to be socially interactive, so our anxiety level increases with the continued restrictions. The finish line to normalcy has been moved again. In addition to the pandemic, devastating news stories add fuel to our anxiety. And a national election is just a few months away, creating negative advertising. It seems as if there is no end in sight.



Psalms 88 talks about being overwhelmed with troubles. Being a believer is not all happiness and singing “kumbaya” around the campfire. Bad stuff happens to all of us. The palmist tells us that dark times are part of the journey, but calls upon the Lord when he says, “I call to you, Lord, every day; I spread out my hands to you ... (Psalm 88:9). The Bible also prepares us for those times: *Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*” (Deuteronomy 31:6).

How do we address anxiety and perhaps growing depression at a time like this, especially when the news about progress isn’t encouraging? How do we stay upbeat when everything seems to be going badly?

There is no pat answer, but here are a few strategies that come to mind for me as a retiree. Perhaps your list might be different, but having a strategy might help.

### Inspiration

- Instead of focusing on what we don’t have, **take inventory of your blessings**. I have a wonderful, caring family. I have a home that meets my needs. I could list the blessings for pages, but you get the idea. *How abundant are the good things that you have stored up for those who fear you, that you bestow in the sight of all, on those who take refuge in you (Psalm 31:19).*
- Play some **inspiring music**. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July I heard (on Facebook) a wonderful rendition of “God Bless the USA.” At a time when I felt our country was unraveling, the lyrics and uplifting harmony made me proud to be an American. *My heart, O God, is steadfast, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music (Psalm 57:7).*
- Start a **daily devotional time**, reading the Word of God every day. I enjoy devotional books by Oswald Chambers, Tim Keller and Max Lucado. I also keep a journal about key points from each day’s readings. *Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:8).*
- **Pray for others**. Focus on the needs of others and seek a closer relationship with God through prayer. *And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people (Ephesians 6:18).*
- Relax and go on an **inspiring movie** binge. We enjoy Hallmark movies at our house, which always end in a heart-pleasing way. *We love because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).*
- **Talk with others**. Instead of an “ain’t it awful” conversation, focus on the positive. It is not just a matter of telling someone to “cheer up.” Overcoming anxiety and depression is not that easy. We are not alone in our issues. The entire world is encountering what we are facing. *Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2).*

## Service to Others

- Do something to **help someone** else. Bake something and deliver it to their home. Take some flowers to someone who lives alone. Send an on-line greeting card to encourage a friend. Pay for the meal of a person in line behind you at the drive-in restaurant. Mow the grass of a neighbor's yard. Just think of what would bring a smile to someone and do it. *And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (Hebrews 13:16)*
- **Contribute to a worthy cause.** Most human service organizations are really struggling right now at a time when the needs of people are spiking even more than the COVID-19 infection rate. Unemployment is widespread so families are in need of food -- contributing to food drives would be very helpful and timely. Your contribution could be large or small and will give you a good feeling about being "part of the solution." *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, (Matthew 25:35)*

## Health

- **Be active.** Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day. *Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well (3 John 1:2)*
- **Eat healthy.** It is summertime so fresh fruits and vegetables are plentiful. You will feel better with healthy eating rather than too much snacking. *Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God...? (1 Corinthians 6:19).*
- **Stop bombarding yourself with bad news.** Turn off the news for a few days. Chances are not much will have changed during that time period. Think good thoughts – it is good for your mental health. *Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things (Philippians 4:8).*

## Purpose & Sense of Accomplishment

- Each day may seem the same as yesterday, and boredom adds to the anxiety. **Set a goal** of what you want to accomplish each day. This will allow each day to have its accomplishments. *I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. (John 17:4).*
- If your situation allows, this might be a great time to do some **projects** around the house. Our yard looks better than usual and I have done some inside projects as well. As you finish your day you can have a sense of accomplishment. *But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded." (2 Chronicles 15:7).*

## Enjoyment of Life

- **Read and/or do something fun.** At a time when we tend to get too serious, make sure there is something fun in your routine. You can order books on-line for your Kindle or iPad, or just look through your bookshelf for a book you have not read. *A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God (Ecclesiastes 2:24).*

The common denominator of these strategies is to take your mind away from looking inward at yourself and, instead, to look upward to God and outward to others.

People are dealing with some serious issues at this time and we are all dealing with the uncertainty of the future. Perhaps it is job or economic security or health worries. Don't let possible future issues rob you of your energy today. Deal with issues as they actually occur. The goal is to not let issues dominate our everyday life, but instead, call upon God for comfort and strength. Seek a sense of personal satisfaction and purpose rather than wallowing in disappointment for things beyond your control. Don't let the "Pandemic Blues" control your life. This coronavirus crisis will pass but God's blessings in your life will continue throughout your life here on earth and into eternity. Be at peace. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (John 14:27).*

**Question:** What can you do to avoid the anxiety that comes at a time like this?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father. These are trying times. The news is not good and so much is happening that is out of our control. What is good is you, Lord. Let us look upward to you and outward to others to give us peace and joy. We thank you for your love and the promise of eternal life. Amen.