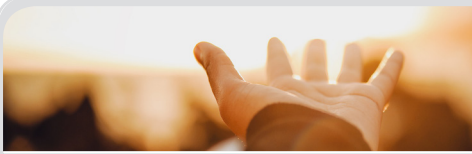


Help Hope Growth

APOSTOLIC CHRISTIAN
Counseling & Family Services

May 2020

Helping the hurting. Nurturing hope. Encouraging growth.



The Father's Embrace Finding Comfort in Presence

God has taught me a lot about faith and fear during times of crisis. My daughter brings her fears and hard questions to me. She sees me as the one who should quiet her heart...and I'm not. This failure on my part has made me quite introspective to the nature of fear and comfort. I have come to realize the solace she yearns for is circumstantial. If I could tell her "this will pass quickly and it won't be bad", her fear meter would move from fearful to fearless. I'm not surprised at this. I also find myself always looking for favorable information and circumstances to move my fear meter toward fearless.

If we define faith as assurance apart from our senses, then it's quite apparent the fearlessness I seek does not spring from faith. The fearlessness I long for is a good report of tangible data I can see and touch. This longing has opened my eyes to the comfort of God - the Father I'm supposed to replicate to my daughter.

"...for my soul trusteth in thee: yea in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast." Psalms 57:1

Since I'm not smart enough to answer her questions and I'm not strong enough to calm her fears, we've decided to just embrace. Whenever she is scared, she can come get a hug. And when we do, I pray she can feel the one thing I want her to know - God's got her.

Very often in the Scriptures, we find men and women asking God for circumstantial answers to their worrisome questions. Very often we find God not settling our

hearts with logistical clarity but offering Himself as the answer to our worries. May we demonstrate to each other this unflinching, personal love of God.

I asked my daughter as we embraced, "Does our hugging help?" She replied, "kind of". I smiled because that's what I would expect. My arms, my voice and my presence will all have a limited effect. While I am, for her, a substitute for The Father - I am a poor one. She, and we, will find complete ease of heart and mind in our heavenly Father alone.

Ideas to share comfort:

- Let your loved one be afraid without feeling guilty about it.
- Let your loved one ask hard questions without answers.
- Let your loved one vent their frustrations without passing judgment.
- Let your loved one feel God's reception through your embrace.

Calming Our Fears Dealing with Worry



It took three small words to change everything. Despair gave way to hope. Fear dissolved into peace and the angry waves and howling wind became silently calm. *"Peace be still."* Mark 4:39

Jesus calming the storm has been a comfort to the believer. Yet the most amazing aspect of this account is perhaps that Jesus was sleeping in the midst of the terrible storm. He must have known something no one else knew.

Before entering the boat, Jesus exclaimed, *"Let us pass over unto the other side."* (Mark 4:35) This command itself is powerful. It allowed Jesus to sleep through the waves and thunder. It was this command that earned the fearful disciples a rebuke. If Christ said they were going to the "other side", could they possibly perish in the middle? Not a chance.

Fear and worry are part of the human experience. In varying degrees, we all struggle with these emotions. Anxious thinking leads to anxious feelings, which in turn give rise to anxious behavior. Consider the disciples: they thought they were going to sink, thus, fear rose in their hearts, which gave way to waking the Savior. *Philippians 4:6-8* speaks to the connection between our thoughts and our worries. Do not be troubled with many cares, Paul says. God's peace aligns our minds in Christ as our thoughts rehearse those things that are right and true. If Christ has said you are going to the other side, then do not fret the storm. You are not going to perish. Let peace and calm result from remembering and believing what the Lord has said.

Skills for calming your thoughts & settling your mind:

- Avoid catastrophizing (ruminating on worst-case scenarios).
- Sit quietly and meditate on the promises of God.
- Enjoy God's creation.
- Listen to hymns and calming music.
- Exercise and eat healthy.
- Practice good sleeping habits.

Ask the Counselor...



Five Ways to Beat Depression

Depression is a common mental health condition caused by a variety of situations. While depression can be mild, moderate, or severe, the pain it causes is real, and treatment should be sought. There are also practical lifestyle options which help prevent or address depression.

1. Get Regular Physical Exercise

Regular exercise has benefits for lowering depression, stress, and anxiety. Current exercise guideline for most adults is 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. This amount of exercise can help with

heart health, help keep a healthy weight, and boost your mood.

2. Improve Your Diet

When depressed, some people lose their appetite and lose weight while others can't seem to stop eating. As a whole, research has shown the impact on mood due to the quality of one's food intake. Diets rich in vegetables, nuts, fish, lean protein, olive oil, and complex carbohydrates lead to a lower risk of depression.

3. Cultivate Healthy Thinking

Depression is often characterized by negative thinking about the past, oneself, and the future. Thinking and mood are highly interconnected. Perfectionism and critical self-talk fill our minds with judgmental "shoulds, oughts, and musts." Our goal should be that, over time, our self-talk sounds more like the voice of

Jesus as we develop the mind of Christ.

4. Socially Connect

Depression is isolating and the more one stays away from social gatherings, the more one feels distant and like they aren't wanted or loved by the others. However, interpersonal relationships where one feels safe and supported to share aspects of their life are key to breaking depression.

5. Spiritual Grounding

In times of depression, it is easy to view God through the lenses of depression instead of who He actually is. If I feel unlovable because I am depressed, then that is how God must see me. However, that projection is not true. God's love for us is constant through the ups and downs of life (*Romans 8:38-39*). Grounding ourselves in Scriptural truth can be key in overcoming depression.



Unmet Expectations

Often reality does not line up with the expectations we had hoped for. These unmet expectations can be challenging and exist as a type of loss, a pain brought on by absence. The soul suffering grieves the reality that never was. Perhaps the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an acute sense of loss or tragedy. Or perhaps we missed out on the end of a school year, a graduation, or experienced

job loss. Or perhaps this sense of loss is present due to other disappointments in life which we can experience almost daily. While we cannot escape having expectations unmet in our lives, we can frame them in a larger understanding. We walk through them together, realizing this is a common occurrence in the lives of many. A few key steps can help us gain a larger perspective:

- Remember the big picture of God's love for us in the midst of confusing and undesired times.
- Remember we live in a broken world corrupted by sin.
- Redeem your identity in Christ and Him alone...not

in your accomplishments, your family, or your abilities.

- Rest in the hope of the Scriptures. Put your faith in God's promises.

These steps will not make the pain instantly cease, but they can help cradle the pain in the larger picture of God's love for us and His story through the ages. May God begin to fill the gap of unmet expectations in your life as only He can.

*"My soul, wait
thou only upon
God; for my
expectation is
from him."
Psalms 62:5*

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