

Thanks Dan. I am happy to be with the Covenant community this evening.

The title of this talk is “Maintaining Emotional Wellbeing during difficult times.”

Breathe meditation practice – 2 minutes.

During our lives we encounter many struggles and times of trial. We are likely to encounter several major events during our lifetime which creates a shift in our lives and requires us to transition to a “new normal”. The COVID-19 pandemic is an event that will likely require 3-5 years to work through the effects on society and will affect our lives. How should we respond to these events and how can we protect our mental, physical, and emotional health during the process?

We are surrounded by sources of stress. During the pandemic; physical isolation, racial disparities, interpersonal struggles, political struggles, and economic hardships often manifest as fear, anger, hatred and suffering for many people.

It is like the Universe has pressed a “reset button” giving us an opportunity to stop what we have been doing, assess the path we are on and consider a change in direction. And clearly, we have entered a time of fundamental change, where norms are being re-defined. We should take this opportunity and make appropriate changes that will allow us can live in harmony with the planet and with one another. I am sure we are all wishing this would just all end or go away, but it won't and it just keeps getting worse and more confusing. And so “anxiety, stress and depression” set in.

While momentary stress is a natural response of our body to external attacks, fear and threats, chronic stress and pain that occur over time become embedded in the nervous system, our bodies and the brain. Ongoing stress creates illness and disease of the body and the mind, and we should take action to become resilient against the sources that cause us harm.

Tools including Yoga, meditation and healthy daily living practices can help us prevent adverse health effects and with discipline we can overcome the adverse effects of stress and anxiety and chart a new course for our lives.

I would like to offer some life changing suggests on how to meet the challenges we face and help us overcome the present struggles of our times that have taken us out of our comfort zone.

Jesus Teachings:

I think it is fitting to begin with the story of Jesus' early ministry recorded in Matthew 8:23-27. After a long hard day of teaching and healing, Jesus and the disciples got into a boat to cross the lake to escape the crowds and find a place of rest. Upon leaving the shore Jesus soon went to sleep and a furious storm came up that threatened to sink the boat. The disciples believed they were about to be destroyed, so they awoke Jesus, pleading for him to save them or they would surely perish. We are "going to drown, Lord save us." Jesus response was "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" He calmed the waters and they were amazed that even the wind and the waves obey Him. In this story Jesus teaches us the key lessons of "faith and trust" in a power greater than ourselves.

Do we trust in our Lord and do we have faith all will be ok, regardless of what circumstances unfold ahead of us.

I would like to share with you a little of my life's journey and the experiences that have brought me to the Covenant community. Perhaps the biggest challenge we face as humans outside of meeting our basic needs for food, safety and shelter is our need to be connected to one another, to find meaning in the "relative reality" we call life. What is this life all about? How am I? Why am I here? What is my purpose in this life?

- I grew up in the Southern US – SC, NC, and VA.
- My Mom and Dad were raised on farms in rural South Carolina during the Great Depression and nearly starved to death after cotton prices collapsed and the banks failed in 1929.
- Dad served as an Army paratrooper in Europe during WWII and Mom was educated as a school teacher who became a homemaker after they married in 1947 and I was born in 1952. Both of my parents have passed on. You may recall Mom died at 95 years of age on the morning of March 16th this year, after being in hospice care for 28 days.
- Our families followed Southern Baptist and United Methodist traditions after migrating from Virginia to South Carolina during the Revolutionary War. My ancestors were from Ireland and England arriving as early as 1655 and settled in the Virginia colony before migrating to SC.
- I was a product of the schools of the 50's and 60's, rock and roll music and the peace moment. My senior high school class in Wilson, North Carolina

was first integrated in 1971 the year I graduated. I remember well the racial struggles of the 1960s and early 70s.

- I attended University studies in economics and worked as a quality control statistician and engineering manager for BWXT for 21 years after moving to Lynchburg, Va. in 1985. Later I worked for 10 years as a Program Manager for a company in Southern California working from home in Lynchburg and traveling to high tech facilities round the US before retiring in 2016.
- As I look back on my life, I see myself as the typical product of a white middle class upbringing with the normal activities including family, education, and Church. I have been married twice, have three beautiful children and 6 beautiful grandchildren (4 boys and 2 girls) ranging in age from a 1 year old to 10 years old who all live in Virginia.
- Throughout the first 59 years of my life there was a yearning for something deeper and more spiritual within me and a struggle to find more happiness, than life's journey had provided. Something was missing and so I began a path in search of deeper meaning.
- My heart told me there must be more to life than chasing "joy and happiness" through objects and activities, which never seem to produce the desired result.
- There must be a deeper meaning to life.
- In 2011 I began a journey of deep personal exploration through Yoga and Meditation. Over the past 9 years I have become a regular practitioner of yoga, meditation and Ayurveda (science of healthy living).
- Many in the West view Yoga practice as an exercise program. But in the Eastern world, the science of Yoga and Meditation includes an accumulation of 5000 years of practices that create a foundation for the study of oneself (our True Divine Nature) and the realization of our unity (Oneness) with the creator of all manifest reality. Humans are a natural product of God's evolutionary process and conscious desire for intelligence on this planet in the vast universe. Yoga and Meditation help us connect to the Divine intelligence and cosmic energy that creates and sustains the reality we observe.
- During the past three years I have travelled to India three times. Twice to Northern India in 2016 and 2019 to study yoga.
- During January and February of this year I traveled to Southern India for a 21 day health care retreat and detox with an addiction recovery group called "Yoga of Recovery". During the stay our group consumed vegetarian

organic diet, herbal medications, received daily therapeutic massage and detox activities, including lots of rest and relaxation. The trip was intended for healing of the body and total stress relief. Upon my return to Virginia, I have continued these daily practices to maintain health and well-being. In retrospect it was the perfect time for me to experience these teachings and to learn the Ayurveda practices.

This brings me back to the story of Jesus on the boat the lesson of “faith and trust” and Divine guidance. With COVID-19, we are like the disciples in the boat, begging for a solution, while Jesus message to us is to have faith and persevere. Don’t be troubled. So, what tools and daily practices does our Lord give us to make it through these difficult times?

The follow are 10 tools to a more healthy and productive life to overcome our challenging circumstances.

- Daily quiet time for Prayer, Devotion and Meditation (Matthew 22:37 -The Great Commandment to love the Lord)
 - Begin each day with time in the morning to calm and clear the mind and set an intention for each day with focus on the actions that will help to make a positive change in our world. Read the scriptures, not just the Bible but other religious text and devotionals. I like the Center for Action and Contemplation – Dr. Richard Rohr.
- Practice gratitude each and every day (Philippians 4:6)
 - Regardless of our circumstances we can acknowledge our gifts and blessings. There are many things to be grateful for and focus on the positive events in our lives changes our prospective regardless of external circumstances.
- Limit consumption of news and political information, to one hour per day (Philippians 4:8)
 - What we consume through our minds has a major impact on how we see the world and our prospective. Read the scriptures or a watch a TED talk. I am always amazed and encouraged by what others are doing to influence our world. Stick to facts and sources of information that will keep us informed without being consumed by negative politics and division. Limit social media to connections with a few trusted friends.

- Journey daily (Philippians 4:9 – put into practice)
 - Reinforce positive actions by writing down our thoughts, and making an action plan or task list.
- Lean on the faith community (John 13:34-45 Love one another)
 - Reach out to others, share love and help your neighbor. Jesus teaches us to love and forgive one another, without judgement.
- Serve others (John 13:15 Jesus set the example of service by washing the disciples feet)
 - We can find ways to lend a helping hand, and take baby steps to get there, with one step in front of the other.
- Eat Well (1 Corinthians 3:16 our bodies are God’s sacred temple)
 - Eat healthy nutritious foods, fresh harvested in season and use minimal refrigeration for maximum nutrition in our diets. Limit consumption of comfort foods (sugars, starches and sweets).
- Get adequate sleep and body rest every day (Matthew 11:28-30 come to me and I will give you rest)
 - 7-8 hours daily.
- Exercise the body and the mind every day, as an act of worship (Romans 12:1-2)
 - Outside nature walks are great as they connect us to the beauty of the earth and ground us to Mother Nature. Note: Be safe and wear a mask when around others. Don’t stress the virus, but do take appropriate measures to protect yourself and those you are around.
- Take care of our bodies and minds (Romans 12:1-2)
 - When we need to see a physician or councilor, it is important to do so.

Jesus gives us assurance that if we follow his teachings with discipline, he will give us rest and peace.

John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Matthew 28:20b “And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Contact Information:

I teach Yoga and Ayurveda practices to personal clients in Lynchburg including classes at the Downtown and Jamerson YMCAs, Kratos Fitness and Interval Studio and at our Donation Studio at the Camp Kum Ba Yah Youth House this summer. I invite you to join me for classes or consultation.

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