

Fear and the Coronavirus

Written by Bill Perkins

Last week the first case of the Coronavirus in Oregon occurred in Lake Oswego, a city where my family lived for twenty years. A city near Wilsonville, where Cindy and I now live. This news triggered a run on Costco and other stores. Fear is a powerful force that can trigger panic--that's not good. But it can also prompt us to take protective steps--that's good.

In the face of a growing worldwide pandemic--which is now in my backyard--we must manage our fears. The question is: how do we do this?

Thoughts Look Like Trees

According to current research, and it's exciting, thoughts are electrical impulses, chemicals and neurons. They look like a tree with branches. As the thoughts grow they produce additional branches that grow and link together and get stronger. As we change our thoughts, branches go away and new ones are formed (check out [*Who Switched off My Brain*](#) by Dr.

Caroline Leaf). Negative thoughts like, "My life and the life of those I love is in danger, " release toxins into your body that create fearful emotions. No wonder Solomon said, "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23). Those words are true ... literally.

In Gethsemane

In Gethsemane Jesus battled fear as he faced his impending suffering and death. Yet, instead of obsessing over what would happen, he asked God to remove the cup of his suffering and then bowed to God's will. He embraced his worst fear because he knew whatever happened would pass through his Father's hands (Matthew 26:36-46).

I'm skilled at asking God to remove what I fear and parroting Jesus's prayer, "Not my will but yours." In the past when I uttered his prayer, I sensed it was a scheme to trick God into giving me what I wanted. If I prayed like Jesus then maybe God would remove the cup of my future suffering, unlike what he did for Jesus.

What We Can Control

Ultimately, we overcome a fear of the Coronavirus by refusing to focus on potential harm. Yes, we need to be aware, but our focus needs to be on the goodness of God and his protection and purpose for us. We need to take practical steps to protect ourselves: wash our hands, sneeze and cough into our arm, sanitize surfaces we may touch or where food is prepared, wave rather than shake hands and avoid sick people. All of this we can control. .

But we also pray the Lord protects us. And we meditate on Psalm 46:1-3, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging (NIV).

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