



GATHER AND PRAY the Lord's Prayer.

Lift up in prayer especially people in our country who have been most affected by the virus crisis: the sick and those recovering, those who have lost loved ones, health workers, those who must work, the unemployed.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION

"Now since the children share in blood and flesh, he likewise shared in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life; . . . therefore, he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested."

—Hebrews 2:14-15, 17-18

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

—Hebrews 4:14-16

- How does it affect you to know that not only is Jesus divinely powerful and good, but he also knows what it is like to be human, to suffer, and to be tested by hard experiences?
- With churches closed for months and then open with unusual rules, it has been hard for many people to feel connected to Jesus and the Father. What place has God had in your awareness since the Spring of 2020? How have you related to God?

SOCIAL INQUIRY

Social distancing, concerns about getting sick, and financial stress have made this a difficult year for many individuals and families. Those who live alone have struggled with isolation. Those who have been living and working at close quarters with family members—often all day long—have experienced tensions, even domestic violence. For 90 days beginning on April 23, 2020, the Census Bureau surveyed Americans about symptoms of depression and anxiety. In the week ending May 19, 28.2% of adult Americans were showing diagnosable symptoms of anxiety disorder. In that same week, 24.4% were experiencing symptoms of depression. In the previous

year, January-June 2019, those figures were 8.2% and 6.6%. (Household Pulse Survey, National Center for Health Statistics, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/pulse/mental-health.htm>)

Rates of anxiety and depression were higher among lower income Americans, and among those with less education, perhaps partly because those groups were harder hit by unemployment.

Children and teens have also seen anxiety and depression rise as they were cut off from friends, the familiar routines of school, and milestones like graduation. Mental health professionals expect both adults and young people to continue to struggle emotionally unless they are able to help one another tap into the resources of resilience. Resilience—the ability to bounce back from, and even grow from, trauma—is the key here. What helps adults and young people be resilient?

Two crucial factors in resilience are 1) a support system of people who are reliable and truly care about us, and 2) beliefs about the world that give us a sense of meaning and a true reason for hope.

Psychotherapist Dan Pollets writes, “Growth does not occur as a direct result of trauma, it occurs when the individual confronts the challenges of the new reality in the aftermath of trauma” (Pollets, p. 7). Based on the work of the Posttraumatic Growth Research Group, Pollets lists five areas of growth we can pursue—and help our children pursue—as we face our reality after a painful experience:

1. A sense of new opportunities or possibilities: goals, missions, values.
2. Improved relationships with others that involve increased compassion and understanding.
3. Increased personal strength: a sense that anything can be gotten through.
4. Greater appreciation of life: things not taken for granted.
5. A spiritual or religious deepening that may involve significant changes in beliefs.

[Reference: Dan F. Pollets, “Post-Traumatic Growth Following Cancer: One Man’s Journey,” *The Therapist*, May/June 2020, pp. 6-9, www.camft.org.]

OBSERVE

1. What losses have you endured as a result of the Covid-19 crisis? What losses have family members and friends endured? (For example, children may have seen setbacks in school performance, missed friends, missed summer plans, or faced limits on what they can do in this school year.)
2. What reasons for uncertainty do you or your loved ones continue to face? (For example, not knowing if the virus will become bad again in the area where you live, not knowing if your family will have enough money, or not knowing if you will be able to go to college.)

3. How has loss, loneliness, or uncertainty affected the way you or the people around you are dealing with life these days? How are your ways of dealing with things similar? How are they different?

JUDGE

1. *Anxiety* involves feeling or acting nervous or on edge, or having trouble putting worries out of your mind. *Depression* involves having trouble enjoying things in life, or feeling down or hopeless. Do the Census Bureau statistics that show a threefold rise in anxiety and fourfold rise in depression surprise you? Why or why not?

2. When we look for meaning or purpose in the events that happen to us, we sometimes ask questions like, “How could a good God have allowed this?” or “Who is to blame for this?” How helpful do you think these questions are? What do you find to be a helpful approach to pursuing meaning and purpose in your current situation?

3. *Hope* is having confidence that something we do not currently have will someday come to us. What genuine reasons for hope does faith in Jesus Christ offer you?

ACT

1. Who are the people in your support system? Take time to thank them.

2. Who could use some support from you? Reach out.

3. Problem-solving skills and resources are important for resilience. If you need help, who could you reasonably ask?

4. Talk with your children about what Christian hope is. What are we looking forward to that we don't currently have? (Children age 10 and under tend to think in short-term, concrete terms. Help them put words to the things they are longing for. Are they things that you and they can reasonably hope for?) Why do we have good reasons for confidence that we will have what the Scriptures and the Church promise?

5. Spend some time in prayer, offering to God the things you worry about. Talk with God about the difference, for you, between worrying about things and asking for them.



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