

Have you ever met anybody who didn't have any problems in life? You know the person who has a perfect life; everything always goes right. They have all the money they need and they are in perfect health and have never been to a doctor. Unfortunately, there is no such person. We live in a world where there are always problems, conflicts, diseases and viruses. Someone once told me that they hated to go to the doctor or the dentist because they always find something wrong. Do you ever feel that way?

And at some point in life we are all going to hear some bad news. You may have heard the story about the doctor who came in and told his patient: "I have some good news and some bad news; which do you want to hear first." The patient replied: "The good news, of course." "Well, the good news is that the tests you took showed that you only have 24 hours to live." "That's the good news; what's the bad news." "The bad news is that I forgot to call you yesterday."

We all dread the day when the doctor comes in and tells us that we have cancer. Or you get a phone call in the middle of the night that a loved one has died of a heart attack or been killed in a car accident. The stock market drops and you lose all your retirement savings. A spouse is diagnosed with dementia. A child becomes addicted to drugs. A group of Hell's Angels moves in next door. You see where I'm going; you can probably add to the list. The point is that all of us have or will face a crisis in our life at some time, such as right now. Unfortunately, that's the way life is.

King Solomon understood this when he wrote those familiar words concerning the seasons of life in the third chapter of Ecclesiastes, the first eight verses. Listen to these words of wisdom.

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

So how do we handle those difficult times in life like what we are going through right now? I got to thinking about this the other day and then I remembered the inspirational speech by Jim Valvano in 1993. Some of you may never have heard of Jimmy V. He was a college basketball coach who started at Rutgers University, but became famous at North Carolina State University. NC State won the national championship in 1983 right here at the Pit in Albuquerque against all odds. They upset the University of Houston, the number 1 team in the country, with a last second desperation shot. Some of you may have actually been there or saw the game on TV as I did. One thing you may remember is that after the game winning shot, the TV cameras show Jimmy V running all over the court trying to find someone to hug.

About ten years later Jimmy V was diagnosed with cancer and given only a few months to live. In 1993, he was presented the Arthur Ashe Award for Courage. Because of his illness, they had

to help him to the podium where he delivered one of the most inspirational speeches that I have ever heard. Recently as I listened to the speech again, I thought this is good advice for handling those unexpected disasters in our lives like we are going through right now. Not only does it include some practical advice, but there is also some spiritual guidance woven into his words.

Here's what Jimmy V said: "To me, there are three things we should do every day. We should do every day of our lives. Number one is laugh. You should laugh every day. Number 2 is think. You should spend some time in thought. And Number 3 is, you should have your emotions moved to tears, could be happiness or joy. But think about it, if you laugh, you think, and you cry, that's a full day. That's a heck of a day. You do that seven days a week; you're going to have something special."

You know that's good advice as we endure this coronavirus: laugh, think and let your emotions be moved. Let's look at each one of these from the Christian perspective. Proverbs 15:13 states: "A joyful heart brightens one's face, but a troubled heart breaks the spirit." The *Message* paraphrases it this way: "A cheerful heart brings a smile to your face; a sad heart makes it hard to get through the day." If you can laugh at it, you can live with it. Martin Luther, the great reformer, said that if you are not allowed to laugh in heaven, he didn't want to go there. Of all the people who have lived on this planet, have you ever heard of anyone dying of laughter?

In his book *The Anatomy of an Illness: As Perceived by the Patient*, journalist Norman Cousins tells about being hospitalized with a rare, crippling disease. When it was diagnosed as incurable, Cousins checked himself out of the hospital. Aware of the harmful effects that negative emotions can have on the human body, Cousins reasoned that the reverse must be true. So he borrowed a movie projector and prescribed his own treatment consisting of Marx Brothers movies and old *Candid Camera* reruns. It didn't take long for him to discover that ten minutes of laughter provided two hours of pain-free sleep. To his amazement, his incurable disease was eventually reversed. After the account of his victory appeared in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Cousins received letters from doctors all over the world. A good laugh is the best medicine, whether you are sick or not.

Researchers at the University of Michigan found that while the average child laughs 150 times a day, the average adult laughs only 15 times. It appears that we adults take life way too seriously and don't enjoy the blessings of life like a child does. Maybe that's why Jesus said in Matthew 18:3 – "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." To truly receive Jesus into our hearts and experience the grace, forgiveness and love of God, there must be childlike qualities in each of us. These qualities include the innocent trust of a child, realizing that we are dependent on God as a

parent, a short-term memory, and freely accepting God's gifts of love and grace. In other words, to grow closer to God and to deal with the tough issues of life, we need to be a kid again.

There was a billboard alongside an Interstate Highway advertising motor oil; it read: "A clean engine always produces power." In the same way, a clean mind generates power, a positive life. An ancient scholar said: "A man's life is what his thoughts make of it." Ralph Waldo Emerson said: "A man is what he thinks about all day long." The Apostle Paul understood this when he wrote in Philippians 4:8 – "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." The *Message* paraphrases it this way: "Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and mediating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious – the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse."

In other words, watch your thoughts; they become words. Watch your words; they become actions. Watch your actions; they become habits. Watch your habits; they become character. Watch your character; it becomes your destiny.

What starts out as a simple thought may ultimately determine our destiny, even our eternal destiny. When he wrote this, Paul may have been thinking about the words of King Solomon in Proverbs 23:7 – "As a man thinks in his heart, so is he." Our thoughts reflect the person we really are. If we have thoughts which are hateful, they will manifest themselves as harsh words, violent actions, and bad habits. If, however, we fill our hearts with positive thoughts, then only good will come from it. Think right, act right; it is what you think and do that makes you who you are.

Let's face it, we are what we think. If you think about something long enough, you will soon act on it. For example, if you think about that last piece of chocolate cake in the refrigerator long enough, before long you are eating it and your diet is trashed. Now that's an innocent illustration; however, we all know that there are more serious ones that can lead to harmful consequences.

The human mind will always focus on something and Paul is encouraging us to focus on the positive things in life and not the negative. When we are faced with a problem, an illness or the coronavirus, we can easily let it get the best of us by focusing on it and let it occupy our every thought. We have all been there; it starts with a few harmless thoughts and before we know it, we are trapped under a mountain of negative emotions. How many of us have lost sleep worrying all night about something that we had no control over?

Our physical condition is largely determined by our emotional condition and our emotional life is profoundly regulated by our thought life. A doctor said: "Many of my patients have nothing wrong with them except their thoughts." In Mark 9:23, Jesus says: "Everything is possible for him who believes." If you think the worst, you will get it. If you think the best, you will get it. Don't let negative thoughts steal your happiness, your peace of mind. You may be thinking that things are so bad right now that you can't find anything positive to think about. Well, remember this: God loves you; He has promised to take care of you and see you through this current crisis; and God always keeps His promises. If that's not positive thinking, nothing is!

Finally Jimmy V said that our emotions should be moved to tears, either in happiness or joy. I don't think that he is talking about somebody who cries at the least little thing. I believe that he is saying that we should not suppress our emotions, our feelings, but freely express them. In other words live life; let it out. Watch a movie that makes you laugh or listen to a song that makes you cry. Embrace your emotions and be proud of what you feel.

Helen Keller said: "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart." Different things move our hearts. You may be touched by certain movies or songs. I know that some of our hymns bring tears of joy or memory to us. For example, I get choked up when I'm standing beside a casket at the National Cemetery in Santa Fe and they play *Taps*. Or who cannot be moved by the playing of *Amazing Grace* on the bagpipes?

Our emotions also show that we care. Jimmy V may have also been saying that we should focus on the needs of others and not our own problems. When you think about it there are a whole lot of people out there who have it worse than we do. When we put others first in our lives and thoughts, our problems really aren't so big. We need to let our hearts be broken by the things that break God's heart. I hope and pray that your heart is not so hard that it can't be moved to emotion and love.

During the speech, the teleprompter flashed a warning that Jimmy V had only 30 seconds left to speak. To which Jimmy V responded: "Like I care about that screen. I got tumors all over my body and I got some guy in the back telling me I have 30 seconds left." That remark drew laughter and applause. But it also reminds us to focus on what is really important in life. It reminds us that we have a tendency to let things get out of perspective; to make mountains out of mole hills.

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6, Jesus said: "Don't worry about your life, what you'll eat, or what you'll drink, or about what you'll wear. Isn't life more than food and the body more than clothes? Stop worrying about tomorrow, because tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Jesus is reminding us of what's really important in

life. It's not money, our cars and homes, what people think of us or if we fit in. When Jimmy V realized that his life had been cut short, his priorities were changed. He concluded his speech by stating: "Cancer can take away all of my physical abilities, but it cannot touch my mind. It cannot touch my heart, and it cannot touch my soul." His family, friends, and God became the primary focus for the remainder of his life. This is good advice for us also as we deal with the current crisis.

At the end of the speech Jimmy V announced that in cooperation with ESPN, they were establishing the Jimmy V Foundation for Cancer Research. It didn't save Jimmy's life. But it may save his children, our children, and others from this deadly disease. The motto of the Foundation is "Don't give up. Don't ever give up." That's a good motto for all of us as we deal with whatever life throws our way, such as this coronavirus: "never give up." Remember that God loves you and He will be there with you no matter what happens. So laugh, think, let your emotions be moved and live each moment of life to fullest for the Lord. Amen