



FROM: THE DESK OF PASTOR CARUANA
To: People of Zion
Date: May 19, 2020

DEALING WITH UNCERTAINTY DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

FACT: Life is filled with uncertainty, especially at times like this. While many things remain outside your control, your mindset is key to coping with difficult circumstances and facing the unknown.

Uncertainty is all around us, never more so than today. The current COVID-19 pandemic has heightened uncertainty over the economy, employment, finances, relationships, and of course, physical and mental health. Yet as human beings, we crave security. We want to feel safe and have a sense of control over our lives and well-being. Fear and uncertainty can leave us feeling stressed, anxious, and powerless over the direction of our life. It can drain us emotionally and trap us in a downward spiral of endless “what-ifs” and worst-case scenarios about what tomorrow may bring.

We’re all different in how much uncertainty we can tolerate in life. Some people seem to enjoy taking risks and living unpredictable lives, while others find the randomness of life deeply distressing. But all of us have a limit. If you feel overwhelmed by uncertainty and worry, it’s important to know that you’re not alone; many of us are in the same boat at this time. It’s also important to realize that no matter how helpless and hopeless you feel, there are steps you can take to better deal with uncontrollable circumstances, alleviate your anxiety, and face the unknown with more confidence.

While we may not wish to acknowledge it, uncertainty is a natural and unavoidable part of life. Very little about our lives is constant or totally certain, and while we have control over many things, we can’t control everything that happens to us. As the coronavirus outbreak has shown, life can change very quickly and very unpredictably. You may have suddenly become sick, lost your job, or found yourself struggling to put food on the table, or keep your family safe. You may be anxious about when the pandemic will end or if life will ever return to normal.

To cope with all this uncertainty, many of us use worrying as a tool for trying to predict the future and avoid nasty surprises. Worrying can make it seem like you have some control over uncertain circumstances. You may believe that it will help you find a solution to your problems or prepare you for the worst. Maybe if you just agonize over a problem long enough, just think through every possibility, or read every opinion online, you’ll find a solution and be able to control the outcome. Unfortunately, none of this works. Chronic worrying can’t give you more control over uncontrollable events; it just robs you of enjoyment in the present, saps your energy, and keeps you up at night. But there are healthier ways to cope with uncertainty—and that begins with adjusting your mindset.

Here are some tips that may help you.

Tip 1: Take action over the things you can control

Much about life is uncertain right now and many things remain outside of your control. But while you can't control the spread of a virus, the recovery of the economy, or whether you'll have a paycheck next week, you're not totally powerless. Whatever your fears or personal circumstances, instead of worrying about the uncontrollable, try to refocus your mind on taking action over the things that are within your control.

For example, if you've lost your job or income during this difficult time, you still have control over how much energy you put into searching online for work, sending out resumes, or networking with your contacts. Similarly, if you're worried about your health amid the coronavirus pandemic, you can take action by regularly washing your hands, cleaning surfaces, avoiding crowds, and looking out for vulnerable friends and neighbors.

By focusing on the aspects of a problem you can control, you'll switch from ineffective worrying into active problem-solving. Of course, all circumstances are different, and you may find that in some situations all you can control is your attitude and emotional response. If that's the case, actively deal with yours emotions.

When circumstances are out of your control, it's easy to become overwhelmed by fear and negative emotions. You may think that bottling up how you feel, trying to put on a brave face, or forcing yourself to be positive will provide the best outcome. But denying or suppressing your emotions will only increase stress and anxiety and make you more vulnerable to depression or burnout.

When you can do nothing else about a situation, you can still actively face up to your emotions -- even the most negative and fearful ones. Allowing yourself to experience uncertainty in this way can help you reduce stress, better come to terms with your circumstances, and find a sense of peace as you deal with challenges.

Tip 2: Learn to accept uncertainty

No matter how much you strive to eliminate doubt and volatility from your life, the truth is you already accept a lot of uncertainty every day. Each time you cross a street, get behind the wheel of a car, or eat takeout or restaurant food, you're accepting a level of uncertainty. You're trusting that the traffic will stop, you won't have an accident, and everything you're eating is safe. The chances of something bad happening in these circumstances is small, so you accept the risk and move on without requiring certainty. As Christians, you also accept some doubt and uncertainty as part of faith.

Tip 3: Focus on the present

Uncertainty is often centered on worries about the future and all the bad things you can anticipate happening. It can leave you feeling hopeless and depressed about the days ahead, exaggerating the scope of the problems you face, and even paralyze you from taking action to overcome a problem.

One of the surest ways to avoid worrying about the future is to focus on the present. Instead of trying to predict what might happen, switch your attention to what's happening right now. By being fully connected to the present, you can interrupt the negative assumptions and catastrophic predictions running through your mind. Each time you focus your attention back on the present, you're strengthening a new mental habit that can help you break free of uncertainty.

Tip 4: Manage stress and anxiety

Taking steps to reduce your overall stress and anxiety levels can help you interrupt the downward spiral of negative thoughts, find inner peace, and better cope with the uncertainty in your life. Here's how ...

Get moving. Exercise is a natural and effective stress-reliever and anti-anxiety treatment.

Make time for relaxation. Relaxation is an effective stress-reliever and anti-anxiety tool.

Get plenty of sleep. This is also an effective stress-reliever and anti-anxiety thing to do.

Eat a healthy diet. This is a good idea whether you are stressed or anxious!

Now that I've given you all this information, let me give you one more tip: *Do as I say and not necessarily what I do.* Uncertainty, whether during a pandemic or not, is unsettling and tough to deal with; therefore, let me slip in one more thing. Rather than following all the above tips, you may prefer to turn everything over to God, and just go on living. After all, God is always with us.

*May God's Peace be with You
As You Live Each Day!*