

Laurie's Message for Friday, May 15, 2020



Hello Apostles Family and Friends!

I hope this message finds you well and having a great week. It seems like such a long time since we have seen each other! I am sending this socially distanced hug to you in case you need it! Who can't use a hug every now and then? Hopefully, we will be able to resume in-person church services in a few weeks. Won't it be wonderful to be inside the church and see one another again!

So, what have you been up to? Bert gave you a glimpse into our daily lives yesterday with his blog. And as you can see, we are doing well and making the most of the social distancing situation. Thank goodness for technology as it has really helped me keep connected with my social network! I am a people person – I enjoy being with others and I enjoy helping others.

I am a true "mind, body and spirit" gal, and I try to keep my brain and body challenged and active. Our lives have probably all been touched by someone with mental health issues, be it a mental illness or a condition such as a form of dementia that affects the brain. Just like the Coronavirus, mental illness and dementia are invisible until it really takes hold on someone. And unfortunately, many individuals with either disease can easily face a life of social isolation or they feel socially isolated even if they are not. Since COVID 19 has given us a taste of what it is like to be or feel socially isolated, my empathy for individuals afflicted with mental illness or a form of dementia has increased.

They say one way to fight either disease is to engage the brain and body and to keep active. A recent study that I read on the topic states that the older you get, the more important it is to keep an active lifestyle and a diverse schedule to the best of your ability. So, we need to break from our routines and shake it up sometimes! Reverend Don Stephenson once told me that doing just one thing different when having a bad day can really make a difference. I generally do 2.5 – 3 miles on the elliptical every morning, practice yoga 3 times a week and grab a nice afternoon walk when I can. I love to work the creative side of my brain when I can make the time. I will spare you the workout photos, but during this mandated stay at home order, I have redecorated our sunroom and done a tone of crocheting. And, I love puzzles. Particularly sudoku and reading in the evenings for the analytical and problem-solving challenges. And I try to eat a healthy diet with lots of vegetables and omega proteins, but I must admit that I love those carbohydrates and desserts!





But, did you know that conversing with God (conversational prayer) and going to church is good for your brain?! I came across a remarkably interesting article yesterday that contained a partial interview with Dr. Andrew Newberg on his research about God and the brain. Dr. Newberg is a pioneer in the neuroscientific study of religious and spiritual experiences, a field frequently referred to as neurotheology. According to Dr. Newberg, your brain changes your thoughts and your thoughts change your brain. The more you focus on a belief or belief system, the stronger those connections become. If you focus on God being loving and compassionate, you increase the amount of love and compassion in your brain, and your outward behaviors! As the saying goes, neurons that fire together wire together, and this is true no matter what our beliefs are. The more we focus on something, the more it becomes a part of how our brain functions.

Dr. Newberg states that practicing conversational prayer with God activates the social areas of the brain and, when combined with feelings of love and compassion, will likely reduce stress and anxiety, as well as enhance a person's social interactions. How wonderful! As mentioned in my message from last week, Philippians 4:6 instructs us, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." We are to take all our worries to God through prayer. Dr. Newberg's research supports this scripture written over a thousand years ago. Faith and science are not in opposition for once!

Good habits can actually prevent brain atrophy with aging and illness. The brain is like a muscle, the more you work out, the bigger it becomes. But you have to use it, or you lose it. If you stop focusing or practicing an idea, the brain will lose that connection over time. So, we want to keep practicing good habits and positive thoughts! The interviewer asked Dr. Newberg if attending a positive and healthy church might be good for the physical body and brain. His response was, "Absolutely it can be good. The more you activate the positive emotions, derive meaning and optimism, access social support, and engage the brain in music, movement and contemplation, the better it is for your whole body and brain."

So, let's remember to engage the body, mind and spirit on a daily basis to keep our brains healthy and active. If you need some help getting your creative side working, I have included a few attachments with this message that you can print and color! You will be amazed how creative you can be and how relaxing coloring can be! Grab some colored pens, pencils or crayons and give it a try. Yes gentlemen, you can do it too!

Romans 12:2 tells us:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

Dear God, thank you for giving us such amazing brains, and thank you for making it possible for us to rewire our brains for the better by focusing on positive thoughts and performing positive actions. Please give us the ability to identify positive rewiring opportunities when they present themselves and the courage to follow through with positive focus and action. Bless and comfort those who are experiencing a mental health crisis or a condition like dementia. We know the number of these sufferers will increase the longer this pandemic is with us. Help us to respond to those experiencing a mental health crisis or condition like dementia with kindness and express the right words at the right time. Amen.

Blessings to all,
Laurie