

The Exhausting Reality of COVID-19

By Mason King, Executive Director of TVCI

While we can't control when the world opens back up (or shuts back down), we are each trying to sort out how to move forward with daily life. To do so, we'll need to understand our bodies, acknowledge how our actions shape who we become, and find hope beyond returning to normalcy.

Understanding Our Bodies

There are plenty of lists for how to handle the now overturned applecart of daily life. Every natural barrier we have—the buffers of commutes between home and work, dropping kids at school, the ebb and flow of movement in a home throughout the day—these are all gone, and every hat we wear has been mashed together into a stack of responsibilities upon our heads. This constant task-switching is taxing by itself—then compounded by the consistent reminders of an invisible threat through empty shelves at stores, facemasks becoming normal, and the endless washing of hands.

If you've found yourself exhausted and unable to think deeply at the end of the day, there's a good reason why, and it's not your lack of discipline. Our bodies are doing the best they can to process this stress, and a main side-effect is exhaustion. Irritability. Anger. Lack of focus or drive. Sound familiar? These are trauma responses, where our nervous system (brain, spinal cord, and nerves) becomes overwhelmed trying to process a crisis. For some us, the anxiety of a threat is potentially more harmful to our nervous systems than the threat itself. Make that threat a once-in-a-generation pandemic, and the stress response is on overload for many. We are worn down.

We're also reaching for rhythm while we mourn the loss of what sustained us in March. All of our coping mechanisms, the internal and external props we use to avoid facing ourselves under daily stress, are able to run themselves to failure through overuse. We distract ourselves through TV, social media, work, exercise, addictions of other sorts—and continual use of these deepens fatigue because they do not deliver what they promise and they conform us to a common denominator of looking for the exit from difficulty. These props fail faster because we lean upon them harder, and we see they can't bring long term change.

The path forward involves a process of change into the kind of person able to respond with perseverance born out of healthy character—which isn't something available on Amazon Prime.

How We Respond Shapes Who We Become

It's said that how we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. Who you are inside is nearer to the surface now as the outside has halted. We have been asking, "What do we do now?" when we need to ask, "What kind of person do I need to become for what is ahead?"

The challenges ahead of us will depend more on our character than our legislation. What we do shapes who we become, and who we become shapes how we respond to trial. It's more than fight or flight, it is character under pressure. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 5 that, "suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope,"—it is how we respond to trial that shapes who we become. The picture here is not a hyper-vigilant disciple, but a non-anxious and present-minded follower of Jesus, who has grace for themselves (and others) in the midst of immense pain, suffering, and loss. As these disciples, we are able to have grace for ourselves and others when we put our trust in things that now prove fruitless for the long haul, which we do often. It is the invitation of Jesus to a better way, to the realization that we are, as one author puts it, "an ongoing process of change." Our bodies are processing anxiety at an international level, and our daily routines must be shaped to renew and transform our minds, not conform them to the news cycle. The hope that endures is a hope beyond quarantine.

Hope Beyond Returning to Normalcy

With states beginning to lift stay-at-home orders, the attempt at normalcy seems on the horizon. The issue is that the normal of March has been shown as fragile and as lacking as the coming normal of June. The hope of today is that our constancy is rooted in our Maker, who is accomplishing His desires even as our circumstances have changed and will change overnight again.

While this is new to our generation, it is not to many before us. For all our progress, mankind has been reminded of its finite power. Our hope is in the infinite power and beauty of Jesus Christ, who takes men and women who think they're in control, and reminds them they are loved, cared for, and welcomed into a kingdom over which they have no control.

Take a moment to look at the way you have engaged the anxiety of this season with your body. Have you tried to push through a wall of exhaustion? Where can you show compassion to yourself and others as we all seek to do the best we can with what tools we have available to us?

Who are you becoming? We are an ongoing process of change—so who are you being changed into by the habits you are choosing in this time? Simple habits and rhythms of being near to God and exercising your body are key.

Lastly, is your hope in normalcy or our Triune God? Is it in a return to your comfortable routine or in your Maker? We need a hope that is stronger than the gift of a normal Tuesday, and we have it in Christ.