

FIRST-PERSON: How to manage social distancing fatigue

by Willie McLaurin, posted Thursday, April 16, 2020 (11 days ago)



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NASHVILLE (BP) -- The coronavirus has propelled our world overnight into patterns that are not normal. Many of us had never heard the term "social distancing" until health professionals recommended that this is the solution toward "flattening the curve" of new coronavirus infections.

The initial rush to stock up on toilet tissue, sanitizing wipes and groceries was unprecedented. Aisle 13 at the local store was left with nothing but price labels and signs with purchase limit restrictions. The trusted world of Amazon Prime brought added disappointment as delivery times went from two or three days to four to six weeks.

In most crises, we are accustomed to being inconvenienced for a few days or a few weeks. Now we find our community in an extended season of social distancing.

This reality set in when pastors encouraged their church members to join worship through technology. The first few weeks many churches were scrambling to ensure that online worship and online giving were up and working. The innovation of transitioning to virtual ministry absorbed much of our energy. We were hopeful to gather on campus for Easter worship, only to have our hopes dashed by social distancing extensions. Community as we know it has been put on pause, and for many this has become frustrating.

The real test of social distancing is now upon us. How do we maintain our sanity after Easter? How do we stay motivated and on mission when the world as we once knew it exists no more? Let's face it, how many more days can you stay in the house serving as resident spouse, professor, chef and cosmetologist? Your daily routine involves moving from one room to the next praying that it's your turn to make the weekly grocery run.

In a real way many have experienced or will experience what I label "Social Distancing Fatigue." Social Distancing Fatigue (SDF) is the cumulative effect of embracing new behaviors for survival that compound over time to a point of exhaustion. Here are three ways to manage social distancing fatigue?

Stay rooted in the faith

I would suggest a steady diet of prayer, bible reading and personal worship. Read through the Psalms or choose a Gospel to read through. Commit to adding five minutes to your prayer time each week. I am reminded of the church marquee that read, "Seven days without prayer makes one weak."

Colossians 2:5-7 says, "For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

Stay connected to your family

"The family that prays together stays together." That phrase has been around since 1947. I am convinced that one of the ways to stay fresh and to manage social distancing fatigue is to spend time engaging with your family. My family and I have instituted one hour each day for family engagement time, better known as game time. During those 60 minutes, we have resurrected games such as Uno, Monopoly and Connect Four. My family is very competitive, and this competitiveness has been a way to release social distancing stress in a healthy way.

Technology has been a blessing, allowing our family to stay in touch with family members in different locations. The ability to spend a few moments communicating with family and hearing their stories is therapeutic. Be sure to carve out time for family members to express how they are coping amid social distancing.

Encourage family members to journal their thoughts from day to day. Journaling allows people to clarify their thoughts and release their emotions in a healthy way.

Stay engaged with your fellowship

There is something special and scriptural about the local church gathering together in fellowship. Psalm 133 declares, "How good and how pleasant it is when God's people gather together in unity."

I love the energy and excitement from gathering on the local church campus. During social distancing, there is sometimes a feeling of helplessness and fatigue. Take time to pray for fellow believers; write encouraging notes, text or call. You'll be amazed at how staying engaged will assist you in this season.

Here are two simple nuggets to hold on to during social distancing:

Do good

Find a way to do something good for someone else during COVID-19. People of faith receive blessings by extending our hearts and hands to encourage others. "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

(Galatians 6:10)

Don't give up

Everyone wants to know: "How long will this season last?" I can't give you that answer, but I can assure you that you have the power to last. When we practice doing good, we will receive the energy and the grace to see God's perfect will for our lives through this season. Paul reminds us:

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)