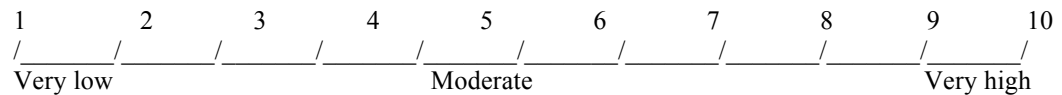


I Can See It In Your Face

On Sunday, we continued our sermon series called “The Beauty of Christ – Living in Me” by considering how Jesus coped with overwhelming stress in his life.

1. Warm-up Question: When Popeye reaches his limit, he always says, “That’s all I can stand, and I can’t stand no more!” Tell us about a Popeye moment you’ve recently experienced when stress was threatening to boil over.
2. Stress is a pervasive fact of life. Left “untreated,” stress can become hugely disruptive and sometimes even disabling.

a. On the following scale, how would you rate the level of stress you’ve been experiencing over the past couple months?



- b. What are the greatest stressors in your life right now?
3. Science tells stress causes our nerves release a hormone called NPY that inhibits cells in the immune system that destroy pathogens in the body. Stress can even counteract the beneficial effects of healthy eating. Harvard reports that 60-90% of all doctor office visits are made for stress-related symptoms. How would you describe what it feels like when stress invades your body? In your imagination, what do you picture is happening inside your body when stress invades? If you were to depict the impact of stress on your body in an animated Disney movie, how would you present it?
4. Jesus faced enormous stress – unending streams of people wanting healing, harsh criticism from religious leaders, pressure from King Herod, disapproval from his family who thought he’d gone off the deep end, and desertion by the majority of his followers (John 6:66-67). On top of all that, Jesus had no spouse to comfort him, no familiar home to go to, no income, and a deep intuition that his ministry was going to end in death. All of which causes us to wonder, how did Jesus triumph over all that stress? As you read the Gospel records, one answer comes through loud and clear:

Luke 6:11. “[The religious leaders] were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus. Now during those days, he went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God.”

Luke 9:18. “[After feeding 5,000 people,] Jesus prayed alone.”

Luke 11:1. “[One day] Jesus was praying in a certain place.”

Matthew 14:22. “Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and to go ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone.”

Luke 22:39. “[After the Last Supper,] Jesus . . . went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives . . . , withdrew from the disciples . . . , knelt down, and prayed.”

For further insight, read Luke 9:20-36.

- a. What kinds of things seemed to be on Jesus mind at this point in time? When Jesus got to the top of the mountain, centered himself, and began to pray, what kinds of things do you imagine he needed to talk to God about?
 - b. Why do you suppose God sent Moses and Elijah? What kinds of things might they have talked to Jesus about?
 - c. What impact did this prayer encounter with God seem to have on Jesus?
5. On Sunday, Jeff focused our attention on that key phrase that says, “While Jesus was praying, the appearance of his face changed.” Luke 9:29.
- a. In your mind’s eye, how do you imagine Jesus’ face changed?
 - b. Think back across your own life and tell us about a time you’ve had an encounter with God that had a huge transformative impact on you.
 - c. When you have a Personal Encounter with God in prayer and worship, how does that impact your mind? Your feelings? Your body?
6. The kind of prayer encounter that transforms us, and lifts the weight of the world off our shoulders, requires more than 5-10 minutes of reciting prayer requests to God. Jeff offered an outline of key steps for high-impact Personal Encounters with God gleaned from a cross-section of prayer and meditation resources. Virtually all these resources recommend the steps outlined on page 3. Take a moment to read through the steps together, then tackle the questions below.
- a. Which of the Five Steps is most challenging to you or potentially most helpful?
 - b. Where is your favorite quiet place to encounter God?
 - c. For you personally, what method listed in Item 2 of the outline (or beyond the outline) best helps you quiet yourself and open up to God?
 - d. Do you tend to ask God questions in prayer? Do you sense answers? If so, how would you describe this process for you, if a friend asked you to explain how it works for you?
 - e. Do you have a regular schedule of quiet times with God? What’s your schedule? Are you keeping your schedule?
 - f. Do you practice “Balance Breaks” or “Sacred Pauses”? What form do they take for you? Are they helpful? How so?

How To Have Personal Encounters With God

1. Go to your quiet place.
2. Quiet yourself. How? Experiment with various options such as:
 - a. Listening to a few minutes of worship music.
 - b. Gazing at nature or an object, like a candle or cloud.
 - c. Sitting in silence, breathing, dismissing all conscious thoughts.
 - d. Pondering a Scripture passage.
 - e. Repeating a Bible verse or breath prayer over and over again as a mantra.
 - f. Expressing gratitude for the blessings of the last 24 hours.
 - g. Visualize being in a beautiful place.
3. Speak to God from your gut and listen to what God says back.
 - a. Tell God what's stressing you and ask what God wants to say to you.
 - b. Verbalize or write down what you sense God saying.
4. Schedule your encounter times with God or the crush of life will **ALWAYS** crowd them out.
5. Take a couple brief "Balance Breaks" or "Sacred Pauses" through the day (1-2 minutes each).