

All the Prayers of God's People
July 14, 2020
The Word Pray

If ever you have a question about a particular word and where to find it in the Bible, all you need to do is pick up a good concordance of the Bible to figure it out. According to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, the word "pray" appears in the NIV version of the Bible 125 times. The word "prayed" occurs 68 times and the word "prayer" occurs 105 times. That does not include prayers, prayest, prayeth, or praying! This means that there is a scriptural reference for every day of the year with some version of prayer associated with it for us to reflect on.

That's highly encouraging when we may, in fact, be finding ourselves in what I would call "moral stress" or "moral anxiety". During this time of Covid and social crisis across our nation, we face decisions and struggles with risks that are beyond our control. Do we go to the grocery store? Do we hang out with those friends or have that dinner party? Decisions about schools reopening, employees making difficult decisions, if we support rallies, discussions of race and violence, or even whether to wear a mask in public can all cause moral anxiety/stress (which I hold this is one of the most purposeful displays of love today).

Moral stress is the stress which occurs when a person's actions do not align with their core values. Sometimes our core values are competing within ourselves but other times this stress occurs when we are asked to act differently than what we believe. These decisions create a tension within that follows us and is hard to dispel. If you find yourselves extra tired, anxious about decisions or feeling helpless to influence others, you are likely experiencing moral stress.

How do we deal with this? One practical way is to offer that specific stress in prayer. Perhaps using the concordance! Other ways are to

foster self-compassion for yourself and help others to find theirs. Maybe this is yoga or meditation, but essentially it is practicing something that engages our minds and bodies to relieve that stress. Our own Sandra Johnson's 365 Mind Body book is a good way to start!

Another way to deal with this stress is to share your experiences. This doesn't mean only talk to your closest peers about what you all have in common. This means to find a cohort, a few friends who vary in walks of life, a spiritual leader or a prayer partner to share these conversations.

Another important aspect to remember is that moral stress makes our hearts especially tender. The grief of what our world has gone through coupled with the uncertainty of tomorrow, the change in our midst of all that we hold dear gives way to this kind of stress. Be gracious with yourselves.

Maybe you won't get it all done and that's ok. Maybe your waistline is a little bigger, and that's ok. Maybe you need an extra bath in the evening, and that's ok. But maybe you need prayer above all. If prayer is our conversation with God, and we bring our moral stress to the foot of the throne, ask God to create places where that moral stress becomes a place of growth and adaptation. Then share that grace with those around you, who likely, are in their own midst of moral stress too. Christ died on the cross for us, offering a grace that abounds and surpasses our own understanding. Perhaps this is just the grace we need "for such a time as this".