

It Is Not All Bad

01/15/17

2 Corinthians 4:16

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, yet our inner self is being renewed day by day.

I read a criticism from a respected teacher/philosopher. He wrote: "Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise; they no longer rise when elders enter the room; they contradict their parents, chatter before company; gobble up their food and tyrannize their teachers."

While many of us are inclined to smile and nod our heads, we are surprised to hear that these words were written by Socrates in the 5th Century BCE.

Yes, it does seem like "everything old is new again".

As we listen to the media, we are inundated with all the things that are going wrong: the economy, the wars, the conflicts. It is enough to make people afraid and depressed, but boy does it sell books, movies, and radio and television time.

And isn't that the point? Perhaps I am cynical, but sometimes I believe the media needs us upset and afraid so that we will continue tuning in and endure the commercials for 5 minutes until the gloom can once again captivate our attention.

Sometimes I wish someone would report on what was going right. Well, in that light, here are a few things to consider:

- New chemotherapy breakthroughs have increased the 5-year survival for pancreatic cancer from 16% to 27% (and is getting better).
- Measles has been eliminated from the Americas.
- In 2016, some of the world's biggest diseases, like colon cancer, dementia, and heart disease, started declining in wealthy countries.
- A new study from the world's leading health journal reported that the number of women dying from pregnancy and childbirth has almost halved since 1990.
- Mobile phones made significant inroads in the fight against rabies, a disease that kills more people annually than all terrorists combined.
- World hunger reached its lowest point in 25 years.
- Homelessness in the United States declined by 35% since 2007.
- Black incarceration rates fell in the United States in 2016. Not fast enough, but certainly something worth observing.
- The United States now feeds healthy lunches to more than 30 million children, is about to ban trans fats, and has enacted one of the biggest overhauls of nutrition labels in decades.
- Scientists figured out how to link robotic limbs with the part of the brain that deals with intent to move so people don't have to think about how they will move the limb, it can just happen.
- Child mortality is down everywhere and it keeps going down.

- High school graduation rates are at an all time high.
- Teen birth rate has reached an all time low.
- Thanks to the ice bucket challenge the gene responsible for ALS has been found, meaning we are closer to an effective treatment.
- Wild Tiger numbers increased for the first time in 100 years. Manatee, Giant Pandas and Humpback whale numbers have grown to the point that they are no longer endangered.
- Wild wolves started coming back to Europe, and for the first time since the American Revolution, wild salmon began spawning in the Connecticut River.
- 70,000 Muslim clerics declared a fatwa, or law, against ISIS.
- World crime as a whole is down. Property crimes in the US is down 2.6%. from 2015. Violent crime is down 16.5% over 2006 figures.
- The Colombian government and FARC have agreed to a peace deal after 50 years of warring.
- The US unemployment rate is lowest since August 2007.
- The Stock Market is basically at an all time high.
- Chicago Cubs won the World Series. First time since 1908.
- Coffee consumption has been proved to help curtail cancer and suicide rates.
- We made massive strides in Alzheimers' prevention. Precision treatments for cancer are hitting clinical trials and are WORKING. Death by heart disease has decreased by 70% in the United States.
- California is now powering over 6 million homes with solar power, a record in the US. Volunteers in India planted 50 million trees in 24 hours.

- Global carbon emissions from the burning of fossil fuels did not grow at all in 2016. It's the third year in a row emissions have flatlined.
- The ozone layer is repairing itself and all the work we did to get rid of those aerosol chemicals was actually worth it.
- Physicists have confirmed the existence of gravitational waves.
- Good science and simple economics have started a reversal in overfishing in the United States.
- The average number of large oil spills around the world has been drastically reduced, from an average of 24.5 per year in the 1970s to just 1.8 a year in 2015.
- A new therapy developed in Israel could cure radiation sickness.
- Pope Francis and the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill met in Havana, Cuba. It marks the first encounter between the leaders of Christianity's two largest churches since 1054.
- 200 strangers attended the funeral of a homeless WW2 veteran with no family.
- Harriet Tubman will replace Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill.
- 2015 was America's most generous year ever, with charitable donations from individuals, estates, foundations, and corporations reaching record highs. 2016 is on track to be even bigger.

You want to know what else? Families grew. People survived cancer. People overcame depression. Any kind of victory, even if it affects only one person, is still a victory and worth noting.

Other fantastic things are coming our way: Puppies, yes puppies are coming to some family somewhere. That is good news! Birthdays are coming. Chocolate, rainbows, butterflies, kisses, hugs, music, friends, and laughter...yes, it is coming.

Now, doesn't that feel good...to hear something that isn't negative and frightening? Not all is bad and wrong with the world.

Here are a seven things to remember and consider when times get tough, many of which I speak about regularly.

1. Remember that God is with us, everywhere present. Isaiah 41:10 *Fear not for I am with you.* Psalm 94:14 *The Lord will not abandon His people.*

A television announcer asked a six year old girl, "Do you know where God is?" The little girl immediately responded, "Do you know where He isn't?" There is no place that we can go where God is not.

2. Draw close to God daily, in prayer, reading, contemplation, meditation, and silence. We cannot hold two opposing thoughts in our mind at the same time. As we fill our minds with positive inspiring words and thoughts, we attract more of the same. As we change our focus, we change what we see.

Philippians 4:8 ...*whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.*

3. So, we choose to be positive. We choose our attitudes; we choose our dispositions. One study suggested that only 25% of our propensity toward optimism is genetic, the rest is acquired through choice, focus, and practice.

We choose to focus on what is good. We choose to take the spotlight off ourselves and our situations and concentrate on others by serving them, helping them, engaging in more than just our concerns.

4. Value friends, family, and good company. Part of remaining positive and optimistic is hanging around people who are positive. Our personal associations have a powerful impact over us. A London newspaper offered a substantial cash prize to the one who gave the best answer to the question, “Which is the shortest way to London?” The answer that won the prize was, “The shortest way to London is ‘good company’.”

Proverbs 22:24-25 *"Do not associate with a man given to anger; Or go with a hot-tempered man, lest you learn his ways, And find a snare for yourself."*

Choose carefully whose influence you allow.

5. Live in the now, one moment at a time.

Matthew 6:24 *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore*

do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

6. Have faith in God. Jer 29:11 *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.*

7. Remember the basics: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 *Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks:*

In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus told us the greatest commandment was to ‘*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘*Love your neighbor as yourself.*’

It is my prayer that we focus on the good, true, right, admirable, lovely and pure. We don't have to deny that evil and darkness exist, but at the same time we don't need to amplify it with our mental energies. When things appear in turmoil, and we are prone to fear or depression, it is in times like these that we cling to our faith in God, drawing our awareness ever more acutely to that One Presence and One Power in our lives and Universe.

Let us pray....