

Midweek Message from the Pastor 02.15.18

Prayer vs. Anxiety?

As health-conscious people, we pay attention to the latest trends in health science. One day we heard that “sugar is the white death of the XX century,” and many of us switched to sugar substitutes that, as it was found later, came with serious side effects, including cancer. Now, we hear that protein diet is the best way to stay healthy and fit until we learn about ketosis and kidney failure. This morning, the first email I received was titled, “Can chewing gum offer health benefits?” As much as I promised myself to ignore anything about health-related trends, I’ve opened that email that convinced me even more in the power of prayer and meditation.

The majority of studies that looked into chewing gum showed increased alertness and sustained attention, while one of them showed mixed results. Others indicated that chewing gum reduces stress. With our stressful lives that sounded like an inexpensive life saver! The process of mastication (chewing) seems to increase overall blood flow to the brain as well as to specific brain regions, improves attention and releases the stress. How about anxiety? I’ve read that gum-chewing humans experience significant stress reduction.

Anxiety is when we look into our own future without seeing God in that future.

Let’s stop for a minute and define the phenomenon of anxiety before we start chewing gum. Besides, times have changed since the 80s: stale chewing gum just doesn’t excite us anymore, and now chewing gum is being looked at not only for potential health benefits but also problems.

Instead of looking for remedies, we should ask what anxiety is. **Anxiety is when we look into our own future without seeing God in that future.**

How could a chewing gum and even the most potent drugs reduce our anxiety about the future if we do not allow God to be in the heart of it?

“As far as we know, it is not a cure for cancer,” said Newberg, Director of Myrna Brind Center of Integrative Medicine. “It is not going to cure somebody of heart disease. The reason that it works is because it is part of the person’s belief system.”

He said it was particularly “fun” to watch what happened inside the brains of a group of Franciscan nuns when they joined together in meditative prayer. The area of the brain associated with the sense of self began to “shut down,” according to Newberg.

“You become connected to God. You become connected to the world,” he said. “Your SELF sort of goes away.”

Lent is a good time to practice selflessness. We need to focus our prayers on God to reduce our anxiety about the future. Every time we think about the future of our church we need to see God in there. This is not about us, this about the future of God’s church and God chose each of us to be a part of that big picture. Prayer is the part of our belief system. Let’s put it to use.

With all my trust in God and in you,

–Pastor Lydia