Routine

May 17, 2020

Surely, through this time of uncertainty and change, things have been thrown out of whack. We all were hurled into a swirling sea without warning, and only a lifejacket to cling to. Our plans, social gatherings, Spring hopes and Summer vacations have mostly been tossed out of the window, and we were all left trying to establish a new, temporary way of living life. It was, and still is, jarring, uncomfortable, sad, and exhausting. But one thing that can tie many of these emotions together is “routine”.

Think about it, before COVID-19, you had specific ways you did things each and every day. Your school year, your job, your parenting style, your homework and extracurriculars, your meals – all of these things were very similar day to day, week to week, even year to year. Your routine kept you going. Now, routine was forced aside, and not many of us were able to re-establish a new one easily. Some of us still haven’t established a new routine.

In this month of discussing mental health, we have to remember the role that routine plays in improving our mental state. We’ve mentioned several times that things like anxiety, depression, and loneliness continue to be on the rise, and I would argue a piece of that is due to people not being able to form new routines – and unfortunately much of that is beyond our control.

Consider these statements regarding mental health and routines:\*

1. “When it comes to diet, sleep, and exercise, having good, strong routines is linked to improved mental and physical health.”
2. “People with more daily routines have lower levels of distress when facing problems with their health or negative life events.”
3. “It takes an average of 66 days for a behavior to become automatic (a habit), but for some people it can take as long as 8 and a half months.”

So, when looking at these statements, it’s no wonder that mental health issues are on the rise. Being forced into creating new routines not only has taken time (non-essential businesses were required to close in central PA on March 19, making May 18 day 60 of quarantine… I think), but encountering this grief without a routine to fall back on has created more issues in mental and physical health.

If you haven’t done so already, I encourage you to start working on a new routine. Some people may have fallen naturally into it, but it will take a conscious effort for most to kick that into gear! If you haven’t before, now is a great time to plug in Bible reading, prayer, and journaling into your new routine. Start small, don’t beat yourself up if you miss a day, make time for things you enjoy, and reward yourself for small victories. You can do this! We can do this! Continue to push forward and have HOPE!!!

*Questions for further discussion*

1. What is something different you have done as part of your new daily routines? New weekly routines?
2. Why do you think routine is so important for our mental, physical, and spiritual health?
3. Do you think you function better with a routine, or without a routine? Do you like setting daily goals and making to-do lists? Or do you prefer to take each day as it comes?
4. When people go on diets, or generally try to lose weight or get physically fit, it typically doesn’t last for a very long time. Why do you think that is? (*People tend to make large adjustments all at once with these goals instead of making small, slow adjustments*)
5. Read Daniel 6:10. What was Daniel’s routine? What do you know of Daniel’s life, and why do you think he trusted God so fervently even through chaotic life events?
6. Read Psalm 5:3 and Mark 1:35. Why do you think the authors made note of the time of day David and Jesus prayed? What is the significance of starting your day with God?
7. What is one unhealthy habit you could swap with a new, healthier habit?

*\*Statements and info above came from mhanational.org*