

How Staying Calm Keeps You Healthy

You've probably noticed at least one of the countless "Keep Calm" posters that seem to be popping up all over social media sites bearing imperative phrases that are as cutesy and quaint as "Keep Calm and Eat a Cupcake" and as instigative and contradictory as "Keep Calm and Punch People in the Face."

A Google search will inform you that the original "Keep Calm and Carry On" poster was created in 1939 by the British government just before World War II began with intentions to boost morale. The British public, having just been made aware of a prediction of mass air attacks on major cities, were encouraged to carry on with business as usual. (Easier said—despite the advantage of a delightful British accent—than done!) Keep calm and have a crumpet. Have a spot of tea. Don't panic; just "carry on."

More than 2.5 million copies of the poster were printed and set for distribution upon the invasion of Britain by Germany. Fortunately, this never occurred, and so the poster was never seen by the public—at least not until the year 2000, when a bookseller stumbled across a copy buried beneath a pile of books bought from an auction. Since then, the poster has been reissued by a number of companies promoting a wide range of products and also by individuals sharing their own unique brands of humor, motivation and stress management, as you saw in the aforementioned examples.

My favorite "Keep Calm" poster simply reads "Keep Calm and Keep Waiting on God." If King David were reigning today, I can imagine he'd have it framed and hanging in his living room (by a window overlooking green pastures and still waters, of course!) beside his book of Psalms, opened to the 130th, which reads:

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
And in His word I do hope.
My soul waits for the Lord
More than those who watch for the morning—
Yes, more than those who watch for the morning” (vv. 5-6,
NKJV).

There may not be much merit in eating a cupcake in an attempt to keep calm. One is *certainly* not made calm by punching people in the face. (One is usually incarcerated.) But continuing to wait on God *always* generates a sense of peace, an uncanny wave of calm that originates in our spirit and manifests itself in deep breaths of incomprehensible contentment.

This past weekend I heard a story of a few young brothers who were playing tag outside near a freshwater lake in Florida. The boys’ father had to go in the house to take a phone call, but before leaving, he sternly instructed the elder son to make sure the youngest—just 3 years old—didn’t get too near the water’s edge because he didn’t know how to swim.

No sooner did the man go inside than one of his sons cried out that his little brother was in the lake; he’d tried to tag one of his brothers who quickly evaded his touch, sending the younger one over the edge.

The father ran full speed across the pier and dove into the murky water. He spent a full 60 seconds swimming blindly, reaching out desperately for his little boy. He came up gasping for air and asked the others if they’d seen anything, any movement or air bubbles.

Nothing. All was smooth on the surface.

The father dove back down, this time frantically exploring the underside of the pier. Spreading his body out as far and wide as he could, hoping to feel the hand or foot of his drowning son, he crashed again and again against the wooden pillars. At

last, after what seemed like an eternity within an airless, mud-colored cave, he felt his son's tiny body wrapped tightly around one of the columns.

The father climbed his way out of the watery nightmare and carried his son to shore. After spitting up bit of water, the little boy was perfectly all right and eager to resume playtime with his brothers.

What struck me most about this story, more than the boy's miraculous rescue after upwards of three minutes under water, was his response when his dad asked him why he was clinging to that pillar.

"Because," the boy said, "I was just waiting for you to come get me."

It was as simple as that. This helpless 3-year-old didn't know much, but he knew the most important thing: He could count on his father. As long as he just kept calm and kept waiting, his dad would show up, scoop him up and carry him up and into the light.

This story is a beautiful parable demonstrating what it looks like to keep calm and keep waiting on God. How often in life are we that lost and imperiled child with deep waters swirling all around us and no way of escape? And how often do we just keep calm and wait for God to come and get us? Probably not nearly enough.

Isaiah 40:31 tells us that those who wait on the Lord will renew their strength, soar like eagles and run without growing weary. Science also confirms the importance of staying calm amidst stress and danger with numerous studies that show keeping one's cool can reduce the risk of acquiring neurological illnesses in old age.

When we allow anxiety to have control over our thoughts, words and actions, the result can be catastrophic. An overload of

stress means an overwhelmed nervous system. When your nervous system is stressed, panic attacks, nervous breakdowns, and depression are often the result. Be wary of “mild” stress, too. Headaches, stomach aches, and digestive disorders may not *seem* like a big deal, but they can lead to conditions that are much more devastating, such as heart attack and stroke due to high blood pressure, and a weakened immune system.

Thankfully, there are proven ways to combat stress and wash away worries. Doctors suggest:

- Exercising
- Taking a vacation
- Sleeping more
- Listening to relaxing, soothing music
- Reading
- Do deep breathing and/or muscle relaxation exercises
- Journal
- Meditate
- Pray

Personally, I’d start with the last bullet point: pray. I will honestly confess that I don’t always bow my head when I feel stress coming on. Indeed, the enemy will do everything he can to distract and dissuade you and me from going before the Lord with our problems and fears; he doesn’t want us to wait for God but to toil to find our own solutions. Why? Because after millennia spent observing and afflicting followers of Christ, Satan knows we are most powerful when we’re on our knees, that we’re strongest when we’re staying still, holding fast to our faith in God like the little boy with the pillar.

When we take a moment to pray amid the chaos howling like a wicked wind and the worries filling our minds like a flood, we are given the strength to wait and to sing with David, “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!” We are given the faith to wait for our Abba Father to find us in life’s darkest moments, wrap His arms

around us, and carry us to shore.

“Humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you” (1 Pet. 5:6-7, NLT).

Stay fit and stay faithful.

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