

How to Inoculate Yourself Against This Insidious Disease You Can Get From Your Couch

People all over the world are social distancing, sheltering in place and huddling in their homes motivated by five things: fear of the coronavirus, fear of the government, fear of social pressure and the judgement of others, and the great excuse we now have to do nothing, along with the simple shortage of places to go. The purpose of this article isn't to debate the pros and cons of social distancing and sheltering in place. It's to point out that, as we shelter, we run the risk of being infected with a disease that's much more dangerous and long-lasting than COVID-19. Little attention is paid to this risk, even though it is more pervasive and potentially more devastatingly long-term than the coronavirus. Here are three manifestations of the disease and ways to protect yourself against it.

Symptom: Stinkin' Thinkin'

My grandmother used to quote the book of Proverbs when she'd say, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop; idle lips are his mouthpiece." Whether you believe in the devil or not, I'm sure you've experienced that idle minds don't stay idle for long. They're actually not idle; they're just not occupied with productive purposes like work, worship, service, prayer, learning or relationships. Instead, an "idle" mind soon runs rampant with unproductive thoughts. Unfortunately, for most of us, when our minds run rampant, we don't start actively focusing on positive outcomes; we chase after negativity.

We tell ourselves negative stories about the past, complain

about the present, and establish a mood of resignation and despair for the future. The outcome is what a sales manager of mine used to call “stinkin’ thinkin.’” You know what I’m talking about. It’s that treacherous path that leads us into a nasty, stinking pit of self-pity, blame, victimhood, anxiety, depression and hopelessness. That’s the disease we must guard against.

Antidote: Guard Your Mind

Be careful what you read, what you listen to, what you watch and how you allow people to speak in your presence. Everyone knows that the news media feeds on negativity, yet we read and watch TV and social media posts religiously. Stop it. You might be stuck in the house with Negative Ned, but you don’t have to listen to a stream of negativity. Establish boundaries. Here’s a great way to guard your mind: Start each day in prayer and meditation. If you are a person of faith, read and contemplate spiritual things. Consider meditating on the ancient wisdom literature of Proverbs and Psalms. This is not the first time of trial, and we can learn from how people have navigated wars, plagues, poverty, betrayal, abuse and persecution through the ages. If you do not hold to a particular faith, then read and contemplate inspirational and uplifting things to launch your day. Plant positive seeds in the morning and they will grow throughout the day.

Symptom: Bitter Words

Idle lips rarely turn to gratitude, encouragement and affirmation. The default is negative talk and gossip. That’s why stinkin’ thinkin’ is much more infectious and fast-moving than the coronavirus. The incubation period is about 30 seconds. You get sprayed with ugliness and you can almost instantly be infected and sickened. The tragic thing is that those it attacks the most are the people nearest to us, our family and closest “safely” sheltering in place with us. Bitter words quickly contaminate a whole household and

neighborhood. The next thing you know, everyone is hooked into a downward spiral of griping, blaming, judgment and victimhood. Coronavirus does not infect everyone, but all of us can be sickened by negative talk.

Antidote: Guard Your Mouth

The words that come out of your mouth reveal your heart. They also inform your own mind and affect everyone else who hears. Although most people would agree Jesus was a masterful teacher, many haven't heard or don't know much about His brother, James. However, James was also a man of great wisdom. Here's something he had to say about the power of words: "Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring yield at the same opening sweet and bitter water? Can the fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a vine, figs? So no spring can yield both salt water and fresh water" (James 3:10-12). So, guard your mouth. Don't spread bitterness. Always speak life.

Symptom: Acting Out

Have you noticed we abhor a vacuum? When we're bored, frustrated, anxious and fearful, we are going to do something to fill the space. Unfortunately, rather than taking positive action, often people (not just kids) "act out." For adults, acting out looks like: temper tantrums, lashing out, anger, criticism, sarcasm, alcohol, drugs, pornography, abusive behavior, gambling, overeating and binge TV watching. I'm sure you'd agree that sheltering in place with someone who's "acting out" is neither fun, nor safe for anyone. Don't you be the one acting out. Make better choices.

Antidote: Attend to Your Emotions

Emotions are a part of life. They come and go. Ironically, the less you pay attention to them, the more control your emotions have over you. Be aware of how you're feeling, good or bad, so you can capitalize on the positive emotions and not get

trapped in the negative ones. Share how you're feeling with others, not to bring them down when you're feeling low, but to alert them and to request their help. Then control your emotions. You do not have to be a victim to your own emotions. Controlling your thoughts and speech is a great start. Then take positive action. Work. Learn. Create. Clean. Fix. Build. Invent. Exercise. Find a positive outlet. Your actions must lead your emotions. Don't allow your emotions to lead your inaction.

Symptom: Self-Focus

Isolation and quarantine often leads to self-focus and self-indulgence. We think about our situation, our problems and what the current situation might mean to us. We worry and fret about ourselves, as we hear the instructions from everyone to "stay safe" and "take care of yourself." We act out. However, there's no true joy in self-focus, and self-indulgence leads ultimately to despair.

Antidote: Serve Others

Pay attention to those around you. What's going on with them? What are they feeling? Invest time in listening. Ask good questions. Build your relationships. Care. The apostle Paul wrote: "Beloved ones, God has called us to live a life of freedom in the Holy Spirit. But don't view this wonderful freedom as an opportunity to set up a base of operations in the natural realm. Freedom means that we become so completely free of self-indulgence that we become servants of one another, expressing love in all we do. For love completes the laws of God. All of the law can be summarized in one grand statement: 'Demonstrate love to your neighbor, even as you care for and love yourself'" (Gal. 5:13-14, TPT).

Fortunately, the coronavirus will eventually go away, a vaccine will be developed and COVID-19 will cease to be a problem. However, as long as we're alive, we'll always be at

risk of infection from disease of the mind, and the current situation requires us to guard against this more rigorously than we do the virus. {eoa}

Michael Sipe is a serial entrepreneur, mergers and acquisitions adviser, and executive coach to CEOs and business owners, many of whom are in the top 1% of income earners in the country. He is the founder of 10x Catalyst Groups (), which helps entrepreneurs grow profitable and thriving businesses organized on a foundation of biblical principles.