

Never a Better Time for Family Prayer

MARCH 21, 2020 MEGAN HILL

A looming pandemic feels invisible to most of us. There's danger out there—lurking on grocery-store carts and wrapped in friendly hugs—but we can't see it with our eyes. We can wash our hands while singing “Happy Birthday,” but we can't be sure we rinsed away every germ. We can wipe down the subway seat, but we don't know which surfaces we overlooked. We can stay home, but the virus may have already moved in.

It's a great time to pray.

As families are stuck at home, we have an opportunity to together take up the largely invisible, outwardly unremarkable tool of prayer. We can't see the danger, but we know the One who sees everything. What's more, the excuses for prayerlessness—too little time, too much going on—are wiped from the calendar. Evening activities have been canceled, and morning routines rearranged by an unseen foe, leaving families with only time and togetherness. There's never been a better time to pray.

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During days of uncertainty, regular family prayer affirms four truths we can often overlook.

1. Reality of the Unseen Realm

Prayer—calling on God to fulfill his promises—is a largely invisible tool in the hand of an unseen God. With every head bowed and every eye closed, we ask God to do his holy will. Prayer itself is an act of faith: “For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” ([Heb. 11:6](#)). We cannot see God, but, by faith, we believe he hears.

His answers to our prayers also happen mostly in the secret places, beyond the gaze of the human eye. Hearts and minds change, the gospel goes out in power, the Spirit comes down—but we can't actually *see* anything.

The invisibility of a virus (at least to those of us without scientific instruments at our disposal) is a reminder to Christians that we have concerns beyond the visible world. When we pray with our families, we affirm that our priorities are not merely the things in front of our face. Our cry for mercy from “the pestilence that stalks in darkness” ([Ps. 91:6](#)) can move our hearts to seek God's help for all our other hidden needs, too.

James makes this point in his words to ill church members: “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him . . . and the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (5:14–15). Illness of the body reveals our dependence on God for the wellbeing of our souls. We come for healing, and we leave with salvation.

2. Spiritual Value of Children

Prayer is also important spiritual work that children can do. Often, ministry is out of the reach of our smallest family members. Their worlds are small, their bodies even smaller. They typically can't even turn on the stove, let alone organize a community-wide relief effort. In uncertain times, children may feel helpless or useless. Prayer, though, is work that children can do just as well as adults can.

[Psalm 8:2](#) (and, later, Jesus) affirms that the prayer of faith doesn't hinge on the age of the person praying, “Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger” (cf. [Matt. 21:15–16](#)). When children pray, God accomplishes his purposes. When children pray, Satan has to shut his mouth.

When we pray with our families, we acknowledge our children's spiritual value. We invite them to use their mouths to call on the name of the Lord, and we join our hearts to their petitions. Like the little girl who prodded great Naaman to seek the Lord's help in his sickness ([2 Kings 5](#)), our children's prayers lead us to the God who can heal us from diseases of both body and soul.

3. Connection to God's People

At a time when many churches have canceled their regular gatherings, praying in our homes affirms our fundamental connection to all of God's people. As we pray, we join our hearts to the cries of God's people across our communities and beyond. Throughout the world, in every language and among all groups of people, Christians are crying out to the same God for mercy.

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When the Israelites were sick and dying, scattered around their wilderness camp, they had a singular focus: the bronze serpent on a pole ([Num. 21:9](#)). Together, they lifted their eyes to seek help. Likewise, in every believing home across the globe, we look in the same direction for help: the Son lifted up for our salvation ([John 3:14–15](#)). We may be physically scattered, but we look together to our one Lord.

As we come together in family prayer, we join our hearts to the prayers of God's people in all ages and places. Our petitions rise before the Lord together, filling the "golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints" ([Rev. 5:8](#)). A family at prayer is part of a vast army engaged in a common cause. The weakest prayers from the smallest family don't go to heaven on their own.

4. Presence of Christ with Us

Our prayers are not isolated, and neither are we.

In one of the Bible's sweetest encouragements to prayer, Jesus tells us, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" ([Matt. 18:20](#)). On our knees, a mom and her daughter, a husband and wife, a family of four or 14, each has the certain promise of Christ's presence.

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As our families make time to pray together in our kitchens and living rooms, we have fellowship with Christ. We gather in his name, with his people, proclaiming his praises, and asking for things that please him. And, by his Spirit, he will be there too. In the face of uncertainty and illness, we are not alone. When a family prays together, Jesus will attend every time.