

Caring for One Another: Share, Play, Pray, Love*

During this time of COVID-19, we have been given a special opportunity – **Some unexpected family time.** The human tendency is to make it a time of frustration, complaining, boredom and getting on one another's nerves. Instead let's make it quality family time. Let's make it Godly time by sharing God's story, playing as God created us to, praying, and loving on one another. These four spiritual practices can provide order to our interrupted routines. Here are some ways to turn this time into Godly time.

Sharing God's Story: During this time, we certainly can share God's story, those Biblical stories of hope and love and strength. But we are part of God's story as well because God continues to work in the world. This then also is a good time to share family stories.

- Each family member can tell a favorite Bible story.
- Pick a new Bible story to read.
- Read a favorite Bible story.
- Tell the story of how your family came to this community or church.
- Call/skype grandparents and hear a story of how God worked in their lives.
- Older children can write these stories down and younger ones can draw pictures.
- Attend the virtual worship service and have a family discussion following it.

(Academic skills are being reinforced as children learn vocabulary, reading skills, writing skills, speaking skills and some history.)

Play as God Created us to: Play is becoming understood as the way humans learn at all ages. Engaging in play gives us opportunity to practice skills, learn social skills of sharing and turn taking and explore the world. Play leads us to laughter which relieves stress and anxiety and provides healing. This is something we all need at this time of uncertainty.

- Play Bible trivia.
- Have a family game night.
- Explore the world around you – study a tree in your yard, watch the ants on your sidewalk.
- Go outside and run around the yard.
- Tell each other jokes.
- Make believe – you are in Jericho or in a galaxy far, far away.
- Play "Name that Hymn"

(What is happening academically? Observation and listening skills are being developed. Science is being learned.)

Praying: Time has been given to us to spend with God. Pray together as a family. Help your children develop some individual prayer disciplines.

- Create a basket of names as you hear of someone who is sick. Pick a name from the basket and pray for that person.
- Practice silent prayer times with your children.
- Let your child offer a prayer.
- Sing a prayer or color a prayer.
- Find prayers in the Bible and pray them.

- Have one member of the family make a prayer request and another pray that request.

(Academically your children are developing language arts skills but more importantly, they are learning impulse control and finding their voice while learning how to talk with God.)

Loving on one another: Most importantly this new time gives us opportunity to show grace, mercy and forgiveness to one another. As we are confined with limited activities the human tendency is to get on one another's nerves. But we can choose love instead.

- When a child is getting cranky, say "I know you are tired of being in the house and you do not want to be cranky. I forgive you."
- Encourage children to use those words back to you when you get frustrated and short tempered.
- Express feelings accurately, "Please forgive me, I am not mad at you, I am just tired of not being able to go out."
- Take a picture of yourself and send it to cheer up a family member or church friend.
- Send a text of encouragement.
- Call a friend and say you miss them and can't wait to be able to play again.
- Help one another joyfully do a chore at home you have been putting off.
- Offer self-forgiveness when routines don't go as planned.

Our daily routines have been totally disrupted and turned upside-down, but these four spiritual practices can help provide a family routine again. While each family's routine may look different, focusing on God can provide order to chaos (After all, God made order out of chaos before and with God it will happen again.) So as a family take these four practices and make them the framework of your daily family routine. It might look like this –

Breakfast

Sharing Time Activity

Everyone does their own thing (household chores, lessons assigned by schools, free play or morning nap for the youngest)

Prayer time

Lunch

Nap or quiet time

Loving Time Activity

Dinner

Play time

Prayer time

Bedtime

*This article is the joint effort of Lynne A. Pabst, Director of Christian Education, Grove Presbyterian Church, Danville, PA and Lynace Veit, Director of Children and Family Ministries, First Presbyterian Church of Shreveport, LA. While COVID-19 seems to be isolating members from Christ's body, it is bringing Christ's body together as its members struggle with common issues.