

How Social Distancing Can Lead to Vibrant Spiritual Growth

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Reading Time: 5 minutes

The novel coronavirus has dramatically shut down so many fruitful face-to-face human interactions. The virulent pathogen calls for significant distancing measures to protect life, health, and wellbeing. We do this to love and protect our neighbors while not harming them (Matt. 7:12). But we also do this to honor our authorities (Rom. 13:1-7).

With the absence of in-person human interaction, we quickly realize that for the moment, something essentially human is missing. Indeed, this has given new meaning to “a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing” (Eccl. 3:5). We quickly long for human interaction and touch—a necessary fiber of face-to-face fellowship. While we might be okay with putting the firm (but potentially contagious) handshake on the shelf for a good long while, there is spiritual fuel to be found in the hugs, the smiles, the humor, the body language, and so many personal words that are now missing from our mandated minimized assemblies (1 Thess. 5:11).

Maybe for you, social distancing has left you hollow for the moment. Maybe cabin fever has set in. In fact, maybe all the initial exuberance for that Netflix binge-watching marathon has resulted in brain boredom or body numbness. If it is time for something more spiritually refreshing, join us as we contemplate spiritual growth from social distancing.

Social Distancing can Help Families Tighten the Spiritual Base

Pandemics help us to focus on what is essentially indispensable in this life. They help to distance our minds from the transient and focus on the eternal (Col. 1:18). Pestilence cannot destroy the spirit, the blood of Christ, the glory of Christ's church, or thwart His coming again. Pestilence reminds us of our heavenly citizenship where God and the souls of brethren, neighbors, and family are of immense worth (Phil. 3:20).

Our children are genuine treasures from heaven given to us by God (Psa. 127:3). As such, Christ is the best gift we could hope to give them. Moments of social distancing allows fathers to gather and drawdown with family, laying up treasures in earthen vessels by instilling Biblical truths in pliable hearts (Matt. 6:19-20, Deut. 6:1-9, 1 Tim. 2:8, Eph. 6:4). Likely, these occasions won't go undisturbed. The phone might ring. The basset hound might be hungry. The doorbell might ring. That's okay. Press on. Since your usual routine is likely altered, this is prime time to prioritize spiritual moments to the top for God's children.

Recently, the *American Economic Review* published a paper entitled, "The Welfare Effects of Social Media." This study had 2,743 Facebook users stop using Facebook for one month and researchers studied the effects. Researchers reported several interesting results.¹ Upon deactivating:

- People freed up an average of 60 minutes per day (normally spent on social media), and they spent more time socializing with friends and family.
- People reported improvements in well-being, happiness, satisfaction, depression, and anxiety.
- People planned to use Facebook much less.
- People were less engaged in politics and news (news that might polarize people).

Certainly, Facebook can be used to drop an encouraging comment (Col. 4:8), to connect and aid in fellowshiping with a congregation (Acts 2:42), or to pray for loved ones who need God's power permeating their lives (3 John 1:2, 1 Thess. 5:17). But it can also steal valuable time from our children. God help us to use social distancing moments to minimize digital chatter while planting and watering spiritual seeds in our children (1 Cor. 3:6). This is prime

time to open a feast of praise, petition, and vibrant home worship to the one God (John 4:23-24, 1 Thess. 5:17).

Social Distancing can Widen Your Resource Base and Deepen Spiritual Insight

The church is blessed with immeasurable riches because of the abundance of excellent resources in writing, preaching, and teaching. Many are available free and online. Brethren can connect to abundant, rich Biblical counsel from across the globe (Prov. 11:14, 15:22, 24:6). From live internet workshops, to archived riches from Polishing the Pulpit (PTP), to archived gospel meetings or lectureships from schools of preaching or universities, there are so many venues for spiritual depth and study. Of course, nothing replaces deep reflective meditation in reading, contemplation, and application of the Word (2 Tim. 2:14-15, 3:14-17). Repetitively cycling the Word through the heart and mind can lead one to live like the psalmist: “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psa. 119:97).

Social distancing can allow time for sincere reflection and probing questions. Jesus, after praying alone, asked His disciples “Who do the crowds say that I am” (Luke 9:18)? Social distancing can afford us moments of honest, open, and frank spiritual inventory. Why not ask a close confidant to give you some honest constructive feedback on your spiritual weaknesses or vulnerabilities you might have in your Christian armor (Eph. 6:10-18)? In Christ, only the whole armor will suffice against evil (Eph. 6:13). Moments like these afford us a chance to compare our lives with Paul’s detailed description of love (1 Cor. 13:1-8, 13), on the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:19-23), the Christian graces (2 Pet. 1:5-10), and the beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-11).

Social Distancing can Deepen Your Prayer Life

Few instances send people to their knees like intense trials. When flies were swarming Egypt during the fourth plague, Moses prayed that God would do something to make them go away (Exo. 8:30). When the military might of Assyria was advancing in an unspeakable array against Judah, Hezekiah prayed for God to help (2 Kings 19:5). When the Israelites were humiliated because their native land was plundered, Nehemiah wept, mourned, and prayed for God’s intervention (Neh. 1:4-5).

In each of these instances, the cries of the faithful moved heaven to act for some benefit in keeping with the will of God. In Moses’s day, the flies ceased (Exo. 8:31). In Nehemiah’s day, the wall was rebuilt in merely 52 days (Neh. 6:15). In Hezekiah’s day, the angel of the

Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrians in one night. Man prayed. God heard. God answered. God acted.

At this moment, every urban area in the world needs our prayers. These areas stand to be impacted and perhaps even ravaged by this novel disease. It is time for intense supplication! Why not stop, pause, and go into your room, fall to your knees and fervently plead with God for Italy, China, Spain, Iran, and the United States (Matt. 6:6)? The Bible says of Jesus that “in the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears” (Heb 5:7). God help us to use social distancing to pour out our souls in earnest pleading on behalf of our fellowman with all faith and boldness (Heb. 4:16).

In conclusion, social distancing for the moment is lawful and advantageous (1 Cor. 10:23). We don’t have to let isolation turn to harmful isolationism where judgment is skewed (Prov. 18:1), spiritual neglect sets in (Heb. 10:25), people limit their love (Luke 6:30-32), or people are overwhelmed by despair (Psa. 37:7-8, Rom. 11:3). Let’s use these moments for edification and vibrant spiritual growth. The hysteria concerning COVID-19 may seem like it’s overcoming the world. But remember that role belongs exclusively to Christ (John 16:33). And it always will!

Footnotes

1. https://www.calnewport.com/blog/2020/02/29/top-economists-study-what-happens-when-you-stop-using-facebook/?utm_source=join1440&utm_medium=email&utm_placement=etcetera, accessed 3 March 2020.