

HomeWord

Vol. 4, No. 6 A newsletter dedicated to household harmony & family faith

In This Issue

In this issue, we explore God's awesome yet subtle power. We tend to shy away from those who have power and exercise it. Somehow we don't trust people with power over us. That's because they are human, and we humans don't handle power well. God is different. God's love is so complete and full and unconditional that it can only be directed for our good. So we seek God's power because it is pure goodness, pure love.

The articles in this **HomeWord** issue encourage us to seek God's powerful presence in our daily family living. Jean Buell's article, "A Day Without Power," challenges us to rely on God's power in the same way that we rely on electrical power. Where would we be without it? In my article, "How Does Our Family Experience God's Power?" I reflect upon how God's power draws our family together in prayer.

We hope you enjoy this issue of **HomeWord**.

HomeWord is edited by Leif Kehrwald and is published monthly for parish bulletins and individual households by Family Faith-Life Resources of Saint Mary's Press.

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A Day Without Power

by Jean Buell

After the storm that weekend, over fifty-seven thousand households were left without power, and it was all my fault! I had just finished a list of projects. I had just sat on our deck to relax. I had just said: "I'm finally caught up. What a great feeling!" I was in my power—confident that all was right with the world. Perhaps I was a little too confident. Soon, some raindrops forced our family inside, and within moments, high winds and marble-sized hail forced us into the basement for safety. While we were downstairs, the lights flickered and the power went out.

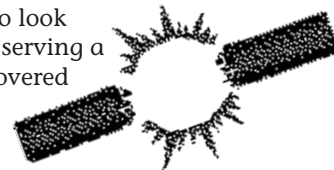
When we heard the storm subside, we went outside to look around. We were astounded! The street looked like it was serving a giant salad bar—on ice, no less. The entire ground was covered with hail and leaves, topped with broken branches, and garnished with toppled trees. Slowly, the neighbors came outside to survey the situation. Screens were torn. Windows were shattered. Shingles were broken. Siding was pitted. Cars were dented. Despite the damage, we were all grateful. It could have been worse.

Night came soon, so everyone went inside. It's amazing how much we depend on electricity. No matter how often my brain reminded me that there was no power, my hand reached for the light switch. We had only one flashlight, so I lit several candles. During a power outage, there's something reassuring about a candle that glows in the dark; it reminds me that God is present.

Saturday, there was nothing to do but start cleaning up the mess. So we got our rakes, we recruited our young sons, and we got started. Of course, they complained about the work. All day long. Of course, they were bored without the TV. All day long. Of course, they resisted my encouragement to survive a day without power. All day long.

Late in the afternoon, I ran an errand. When I returned, I found my boys and their friend sitting in the backseat of our car, watching a TV that was plugged in to the cigarette lighter! I gave up. They couldn't make it, not even for one day. Toward evening, I too grew weary. It had been a long day without coffee or curling iron.

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How Does Our Family Experience God's Power?

by Leif Kehrwald

At the risk of sounding trite and old-fashioned, I have to say that I'm discovering what Fr. Patrick Peyton really meant when he coined the phrase "The family that prays together stays together."

Though it's not as catchy, Father Peyton could well have said, "The family that prays together knows God's great power."

We are a typical American family with adolescents. The four of us are usually headed in four different directions. During any "normal" week, you will find one or more of us engaged in dance class, religious education, exercise classes, regular chiropractic appointments, and countless evening meetings, not to mention yet another injury or wound for our accident-prone sons.

But we do at least one wholesome and unifying activity together at home about every two or three weeks, and that is our family prayer.

Without fail, our family prayer binds us in love and care for one another. Through a simple ritual or reflection we rediscover God's great power that brings us back in touch with one another and with God. We take turns leading the prayer. The

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Here are a few practical suggestions for engaging in the three faith-building family activities mentioned in the article "How Does Our Family Experience God's Power?"

Family Faith Conversations

- Take time to listen and share. What's the talkative time of day for your child?
- Invite discussion on a provocative issue or controversial topic.
- Allow doubts and different opinions to be expressed.
- Be willing to be questioned about your own views and beliefs.
- Tell and read good stories together.

Family Ritual and Devotion

- Initiate at least one annual religious ritual in your family each year.
- Give your family rituals time, space, and planning.
- Share responsibility for ritual among all family members.
- Try this simple exchange when leaving the house in the morning:
Parent: "This is the day the Lord has made." *Child:* "I will rejoice and be glad."

Family Service and Outreach

- Expose your family to victims of injustice, their specific situations, and the advocates who are working for change.
- Look for family-friendly opportunities to engage in works of mercy and justice. When considering a particular opportunity, ask yourself, Is it something children can also do and learn from?
- Do *with* instead of *for*. Respect the dignity of others. Learn from those you hope to serve.
- Integrate fun whenever possible.

(*"A Day Without Power," continued from page 1*)

When the candlelight was too dim to do anything more, I started to wonder. Are we more dependent on God or electricity? What would it be like to live a day without Power?

Without Power, we would have no life. But let's assume we did. Without Power, the mountains would not move us. Stars would not inspire us. And new life would not amaze us. Without Power, we would have no Light. Sure, we could turn on lamps and bulbs. But no one would illuminate the way to love and forgive. And without Light, we would have no Fire. Sure, we could light a flame. But no one would ignite our hearts with passion for justice and truth.

On Sunday afternoon, our power came back. Once again, except for the repairs still needing to be done, all was right with the world. I'm sure there will be more storms, and more days without power. But even when life gets stormy, I won't expect to live a day without Power. I'll just light a candle instead.

(*"How Does Our Family Experience God's Power?" continued from page 1*)

leader can design the experience however he or she wishes, using song, nature, movement, a reading, or anything.

Some say that power is addictive. I think they are right. Even though we don't make our family prayer every week, before long a pulling sensation—not exactly like withdrawal, but more of a drawing-forth feeling—brings us to our family room to taste God's power once again.

What does God's power do for us? It gives us three things: strength, perspective, and accountability.

It gives us strength and energy to juggle all those activities mentioned previously, most of which really are healthy and important, and still maintain a sense of family.

It empowers us to say no on occasion when the family plate is just too full.

God's power also helps us keep one another accountable to the values we hold. These days, we're focusing on respect, friendliness, and safety.

I don't know about you, but my wife and I recognized early on that we weren't going to "succeed" in this venture of marriage and family life without some help. We're just not capable on our own. We need extended family, friends, and role models, and most important, we need God's gracious and active presence in our lives.

To tap God's power, we pray. We don't always pray well or often enough, but when we do, God's power is available.

Father Peyton's wisdom is also supported by research. A study from the Search Institute in Minneapolis concluded that three activities, above all else, empower young people to a sense of owned and mature faith. In fact, young people are twice as likely to live their own faith and participate in church when they do these activities. These activities, which I've mentioned in previous *HomeWord* issues, are as follows:

Family faith conversations. Hearing about their parents' faith journeys is one of the most important influences on the faith of children and teens.

Family ritual and devotion. Families who pray together . . . even when they don't do the rituals particularly well . . . tend to have higher faith maturity. Take some time to reflect on your daily, weekly, and seasonal routines, and you'll likely discover some opportunities for family ritual.



Family service and outreach. There is no more powerful influence of faith and family unity than working together to help others. (See the accompanying sidebar for some practical suggestions.)

God's power binds our family together. We had a family prayer the night before school started last fall. During the ritual, my wife chose to play an old song (it was actually on a vinyl record) called "Take Lord, Receive," with the words of an even older prayer by Saint Ignatius Loyola. The chorus of the song is this:

Give me only your love and your grace,
that's enough for me.
Your love and your grace are enough for me.

This is our theme-prayer for the year. How do you tap God's power in your house? "The family that prays together . . ."