

# **A Picture for These Times: Medical Staff Praying on Hospital Rooftops**

*The Wired Word for the Week of April 12, 2020*

## **In the News**

In hospitals across the country, nurses, doctors and other health-care workers on the front line against the pandemic are working to exhaustion. Many have contracted the disease themselves, and some have died from it.

But among those working, when they do get a break, many are praying, and not just for themselves.

"When you have a few extra minutes at work you take the time to go to the helipad and pray," wrote Angela Gleaves, a nurse from Vanderbilt Health in Tennessee on Facebook. She posted several photos of herself and some colleagues on the hospital roof.

"We prayed over the staff in our unit as well as all of the hospital employees. We also prayed over the patients and their families during this trying time. We also prayed for all of our colleagues around the world taking care of patients. It felt good to do this with some of my amazing coworkers. We could feel God's presence in the wind. Know that you are all covered in prayer," Gleaves wrote.

Danny Rodriguez, a senior ER tech at Jackson South Medical Center in Miami also posted a photo of eight health-care workers on a hospital roof, all kneeling in prayer. "This is how we started our morning today," he wrote. "Our team said a prayer, asking God for guidance and protection while we are at work, and to keep us and our families safe."

At Cartersville Hospital in Georgia, an online video shows a line of workers on the roof with their palms outstretched toward the sky.

According to nurse Janett Perez, before each shift at Maimonides, a hospital in Brooklyn's Borough Park neighborhood, the staff on Tower 8, the surgical ICU floor, comes together to pray. With staff members representing various faiths, the group prayer is led by a Jew one time, by a Christian other time and by a Muslim yet another time. But no matter who is leading, the prayer is for all.

"Every single morning, we pray together as a team, whether they're religious or not religious," Perez said. "We pray in Islam. We pray in the Christian faith. We pray in the Jewish faith. We include everybody, and we pray every single morning. As a team."

With the high contagion of coronavirus patients, their family members aren't permitted to visit them in the hospital. Instead, doctors, nurses and health-care workers offer not only medical care, but also comfort and support.

They need to keep going and keep giving, they know, and prayer is part of their strength.

"At the end of the day, it has to be done. Somebody has to take care of these people," said Omar Taha, a pulmonary and critical care specialist. "There's no time to be too concerned for ourselves. We take the proper precautions, and we do what we have to do for the patients."

It's not just medical personnel who are praying during this crisis, of course. A just-released Pew Research Center survey found that more than half of all U.S. adults (55 percent) say they have prayed for an end to the spread of coronavirus. It is not surprising that large majorities of Americans who already pray daily (86 percent) and of U.S. Christians (73 percent) have prayed about the outbreak. But 15 percent of Americans who say they seldom or never pray have prayed for the pandemic to end, and 24 percent of people who say they do not belong to any religion have done so as well.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Nurses and Doctors Stand on Hospital Rooftops to Pray Over Patients and Families.](#) *CBS News*  
[Most Americans Say Coronavirus Outbreak Has Impacted Their Lives.](#) *Pew Research Center*  
[A Brooklyn ICU Amid a Pandemic: Patients Alone, Comforted by Nurses and Doctors.](#) *The Washington Post*

### **The Big Questions**

1. Have you prayed about the pandemic, and if so, for what and/or whom did you pray? Why?
2. If you have prayed about the pandemic, how, if at all, has that changed how you view this health crisis?
3. Does prayer ever cause God to intervene in human problems when he otherwise might not have? If prayer does not cause God to intervene, what is the purpose of prayer in such circumstances?
4. What effect, if any, does the life of the person praying have on how God hears that person's prayers?
5. How, if at all, is praying as a group different from praying by yourself? How, if at all, is praying in a group where participants are from various religions different from praying in a group where all participants are from the same religion?
6. If you are in health care in whatever capacity (doctors, nurses, technicians, hospice workers, maintenance staff, cleaners, EMTs, etc.), who or what are you praying for? Family? Patients? Coworkers? All of them? Are you too tired to pray? How can the rest of us help you?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **James 5:15-16**

*The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; ... The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.* (For context, read 5:13-18)

James makes these statements in the course of speaking about prayer within the community of faith. And as an example of prayer's power, James cites the example of the Old Testament prophet Elijah. Referring to the drought recorded in 1 Kings 17 and 18, James said: "Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest."

However, it's not clear in the Old Testament account whether Elijah's prayers actually caused the rain to stop and start or whether Elijah simply announced what God was doing. Nonetheless, James' point is that we should set no limits on the power of prayer, for it is far more powerful than people commonly think. He says to his readers: Are you suffering? Pray for help! Are you sick? Pray for healing! Are you a sinner? Pray for forgiveness! After all, he says, look what Elijah was able to accomplish with the weather through prayer!

**Questions:** What things have you witnessed that seem to be direct answers to the prayers of a specific faith community? To the prayers of a multi-faith group? James said that the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective. What do you think he might have said about the effectiveness of prayers by the *unrighteous*?

### **Matthew 7:7-8**

*Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. (For context, read 7:7-11.)*

These are words of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount, and taken out of context, they sound like the wording of a guarantee: Follow these instructions faithfully and you will get the results you desire. The words seem to promise that we can receive anything we pray for if we pray with enough intensity and persistence.

Yet that is not the intent of Jesus' words. In the Sermon on the Mount thus far, Jesus had already asked his hearers to live righteously, to forgo anger, to shun retaliation, to avoid lust, to love their enemies, to forgive those who injured them and to not be anxious about the future. We can imagine that some in the audience that day were thinking something like, "Well, Jesus, that's all very nice, but how am I going to do all those things? I can't even forgive my neighbor for making too much racket, so how am I going to love my enemy? And then there is anger and lust. I don't want those things, but they just overtake me. You might as well ask me to give up eating or breathing!"

Jesus, however, anticipates those questions, and so he makes his comments about prayer. He tells his audience to just ask God. Ask for the ability to live righteously, to love one's neighbor, to forgive those who hurt them, and so on. Those are the behaviors praying affects. In other words, Jesus tells them that the answer to prayer for themselves most often comes in the form of spiritual graces in their lives, not in God changing the course of events.

**Question:** What spiritual changes have you experienced because of praying that helped you deal with a difficult or painful course of events? When have you received the answer "No" to your prayer that made better sense much later?

### **Psalm 65:1-2 (CEB)**

*God of Zion, to you even silence is praise.*

*... you listen to prayer --*

*and all living things come to you.*

(For context, read 65:1-8.)

We've quoted these verses from the Common English Bible because our default version, the NRSV (along with a few other Bible versions), renders the third line as "O you who answer prayer," and it's not clear in the underlying Hebrew that "answer" is the intended meaning. The Hebrew word, *shama*, is more often used in the sense of "hear" or "listen." The difference may seem to be mere semantics, but at least in modern English, there's a difference between someone attentively listening to us versus giving an answer.

In his book *The Five Festival Scrolls*, TWW team member Frank Ramirez and coauthor Robert W. Neff note in the chapter on Lamentations that the difference between a complaint and a lament is that we expect a response to a complaint. With a lament, however, we do not expect that anything can be done about our situation, but we want to be heard, nonetheless. In similar fashion, the verses above are a good statement for a time of death when we don't expect God to undo the death but to be near so our lament will be heard.

**Questions:** Are all sincere prayers answered in some way? How do we know? What does it mean that a loving God listens to us? If your prayer does not alter the circumstances about which you are praying, what other worthwhile effect can it have regarding those circumstances? What worthwhile effect can it have on you to know that God is listening to you?

Compare and contrast this Old Testament view with the New Testament view expressed by Jesus in Matthew 7:7-8 (see above).

### **2 Samuel 24:24**

*But the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will buy them from you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing. ..."* (For context, read 24:15-25.)

This verse comes from a bad time in Israel. A plague had killed thousands, but it halted before touching Jerusalem. King David wanted to sacrifice to God on the very spot where the epidemic stopped, which was ground owned by a farmer named Araunah. David approached Araunah, asking to buy the land for an impromptu altar. But Araunah, humbled by the request, offered to give David the land, as well as his oxen for sacrifices and his farming implements for firewood. David, however, insisted on paying Araunah for all of it, speaking the words of the verse above.

This is an example of a leader stepping up to the plate not only to take responsibility for what had happened (David understood the plague as punishment for his own sins), but also to invest himself in the solution: "I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing."

Certainly, today's hospital staffs are personally invested in bringing about the solutions they are praying for. When *they* pray, they are offering to the Lord that which has cost them plenty!

**Questions:** Are answers to prayer an *essential* component of a life lived with faith in Christ? Why or why not? To what extent do you think God expects us to be partners in healing?

David understands there's a price and a process for healing or cure. In the current situation, what factors, past and present, keep us from having a quick fix?

**Luke 24:1-5**

*But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in, they did not find the body. While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen."* (For context, read 24:1-12.)

On the first Easter, says this text, the women who'd come to the tomb and found it empty were terrified, and our emotion this Easter may be something similar because of the threat to our health and the number who have died because of the virus.

**Questions:** How does the Easter message relate to our world's circumstances today? How might it address our fears?

**For Further Discussion**

1. What might we learn from the prayers of other religions?
2. Someone has said that prayer is not so much talking to God or with God, but talking in God's presence. If that is the case, how might prayer help you to become different?
3. Does the prayer of someone who prays regularly have a different effect from a person who prays only in times of crisis? Why or why not?
4. What is the most difficult prayer for you to pray?
5. Christians believe that God will never act in any way contrary to his divine nature. What implications does that belief have for how we should pray?
6. Are you more accustomed to formal prayers written by others, or to spontaneous prayers you create on the spot? Does that make a difference, and if so, how?
7. Respond to this prayer from a ministry in Germany. On April 8, Christians of all major streams of the faith -- Catholic, Evangelical, Eastern Orthodox, Messianic Jewish -- and Orthodox Jews from all over the German-speaking world prayed it together in public. The event was called "Germany Prays Together," and you can read about it [here](#) (click on the English translation).

The translation of the prayer from the website:

*In solidarity with the many who are suffering and those who are performing such indispensable services for us in our society right now, we stand before you, the God of Life, as believers. We confess: We need your help. Only by trusting in you will we find in the current crisis any chance for a new start that will bring lasting change. Jesus Christ says: "Come to me, you who are weary and heavily burdened and I will give you rest." We pray for our nation and say:*

*We bow before you the triune God and confess our guilt. We have not thanked you for your daily goodness and your great faithfulness. In our everyday lives, we have not sought your will.*

*We have shown contempt for your commandments, inverted your ordinances and ignored the suffering of our fellow man. We are well and deeply sorry.*

*We hear the word you spoke to your people Israel: "If my people, who are called by my name, humble themselves in prayer and seek my face and turn from their evil ways, I will hear them from heaven and forgive their sins and heal their land" ( 2 Chronicles 7:14). We believe that you have plans of healing and hope for us.*

*We ask you: For the sake of Jesus Christ, Lord, forgive us our guilt. We seek you and we repent of our corrupted ways. We reject antisemitism, racism and hopelessness. Heal and restore this world, your church, our lives and our society. Come, Holy Spirit and renew the face of the Earth. Open our souls to your person and your word. Fill us so that we live lives that honor you, bless others and fulfill us. Use this crisis as your opportunity to bring many people back to you, the source of life.*

*We pray specifically:*

- *For the sick, for healing and consolation*
- *For the dying, that they would know your presence*
- *For those who mourn and those who are afraid to know hope and faith*
- *For strength and protection for all those performing indispensable services for our society*
- *For wisdom for those working in public policy, medicine and research*
- *For inner strength and comfort for all those going through existential crises*
- *For all people of whatever faith in Germany and all over the world, that they know your blessing and experience your love*

*Our Father...*

*Amen*

## **Responding to the News**

Pray for all those involved in the battle against the coronavirus: medical personnel, government officials, people who stock grocery stores, truckers who keep the supply chains connected and the many others who contribute to the common good at this time.

Cooperate with efforts to avoid the spread of the virus. Love your neighbor as yourself.

## **Prayer**

Watch, and pray with [A Prayer for a World Facing the Coronavirus](#).