

Messeh Family Nighttime Routine

By Fr. Anthony Messeh

This past weekend, as I was preparing to preach on the story of the demon-possessed man who was healed by Christ in Matthew 12:22-28, someone asked me a question: “have you ever seen someone possessed by the devil?”

Hmmm.... had I? I couldn't think of any. I mean, some people might be a little rough around the edges, but I don't think I'd go so far as to label them “possessed by Satan.” So I guess my answer would be no...

...and then it hit me. Maybe I have. This is what is said:

“I've never met a PERSON who was possessed by the devil; but I've definitely visited FAMILIES and been to HOMES that seem like they are ruled by Satan.”

In other words, you don't need to be a foaming-at-the-mouth maniac to be demon-possessed; there are other ways. And the way I see most common today is not Satan invading a person's body and dwelling there; but instead I see him invading a family/home and dwelling there instead.

What do I mean? I'm mean:

- Homes where everyone believes in God, yet are void of family prayer.
- Households filled with electronic devices – TVs, laptops, video game systems, etc. – but no Bibles or spiritual books anywhere in sight.
- Families/marriages where people spend more time blaming one another vs praying for one another.



That is a recipe for demon-possession.

“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF will not stand.” Matthew 12:25

Regardless of the size of your family (old kids, young kids, no kids, you’re the kid, etc.), every family needs to have a plan to make sure that God stays front and center in their home – if not, you’re at risk.

So today I’m going to share about how my family – Marianne, Michael, Lizzie and myself – do our family night time routine. This is where we come together nightly, connect to one another, and keep God at the forefront of our family.

And this is how we do it...

STEP 1: SCHEDULE 45 MINUTES WITH NO INTERRUPTIONS

If something is important, it get scheduled. So why not put family time onto your calendar as well? We set aside 45 minutes of distraction-free time every night (8:00-8:45 pm). Homework is done. Dishwasher is loaded. Dinner is put away. Everyone’s showered and in their PJs and ready for family time. No answering calls or responding to text messages or checking email. Everyone is together and fully present; no distractions allowed!

STEP 2: EVERYONE SHARES

After a long/busy/hectic day, we reconnect as a family by everyone sharing something. It can be anything – something that happened at school or work, or something they read in the Bible or daily devotional. It can be just something that’s on someone’s heart. Whatever. It doesn’t matter what it is, but everyone has to talk and share something.

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STEP 3: READ & DISCUSS BIBLE

Everyone brings their own Bible and we read a short passage – right now we're going through The Story Bible (which I HIGHLY RECOMMEND!), and then we answer the discussion questions from the back of the book. The goal of our discussion is to go beyond information and to find a lesson to apply.

Now here's the key to successful family Bible reading if you ask me: **DON'T LOOK FOR A KIDDIE LESSON TO APPLY.**

Too often, we (parents) try to dumb down the Bible to our children's level and in the process we water down God's Word. Don't do it! Resist the urge! Your children are a lot smarter than you think and they are definitely more spiritually inclined than you'd imagine.

So don't try to dumb it down to "their level" and come up with a phony application that applies to them only and not you. Be real. Be personal. Be honest. Share what you really think of that passage and how you actually apply it in your own grown-up life. Trust me, that'll make a much bigger impact than some generic cliché that you remember from Sunday school 20 years ago.

Don't tell your kids what the Bible should mean to them; show them what it means to you. Trust me. That is how they (and all of us) learn.

STEP 4: WE PRAY

The same way we shouldn't water down our understanding and application of the Bible, we DEFINITELY shouldn't water down our prayers as well.

Something happens to all adults when we stand to pray with our children. For some reason, we go into "Sunday school teacher" mode and start saying things like:

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“Thank You God for this day, and for the sun and moon and the nice weather, and for mommy and daddy and brother and sister and auntie and uncle and teacher and mailman...and help us ALL (nodding head towards one child in particular) to obey You better tomorrow. Amen.”

Why do we do that? All we’re doing is teaching our kids that prayer is insincere and meaningless and that they shouldn’t speak normally in prayer. We’re teaching them that in order to have a “good prayer”, they need to learn all the proper buzzwords and key phrases.

STOP IT! Pray sincerely – like you would if no one is around except you and God. Teach your child to be real in prayer and to “cast all their care upon Him” – their joys, their fears, their concerns, their anxieties and whatever else is on their heart.

Don’t teach your children to pray. Show them how YOU pray.

We use the **Coptic Book of Hours (agpeya)** to pray an abbreviated version the 12th hour prayer. That takes about 10 minutes and then we conclude with one or more people saying a personal prayer.

And that’s pretty much it! That’s the Messeh family night time routine. Sounds like fun huh?

Believe me, I honestly believe that if you ask all four members of our household, every single one would say that this has become our favorite time of day. And I’m pretty sure that if you gave God a vote, He’d say the same thing.

And that’s all that matters in the end.

“But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15

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