



Family Wellness Ministry Reflection "Prayer Rules" – An Invitation to Sanctify Time

by Jennifer Hall

"God called the light Day; the darkness He called Night and there was evening and morning, one day." Genesis 1:5

Paraphrased from Blueprints for the Little Church, by Elissa Bjeletich and Caleb Shoemaker:

So, what is a prayer rule, anyway? It sounds stiff and uncomfortable. Simply put, a prayer rule is a commitment to praying certain prayers throughout the day. We set aside specific moments of our day as holy and we redirect our hearts to pause before God. We give Him our time. For each Orthodox person, and family, this will look a little different. A rule could be shorter or longer depending on whether you are praying alone, with a spouse, with children or even depending on where we are in the liturgical cycle.

Making time in our daily routines for prayer can be a challenge for Orthodox Christians. We juggle children's activities, weekly church services, careers and more. Many of us struggle to connect with our children patiently and establish a time for prayer. Certainly praying with children often feels short of holy or sanctimonious! It's no surprise, then, that we often throw our hands in the air and say, "skip it!" in the name of slimming down our list and not dragging our children through the motions.

With the creation of light and the naming of Day and Night, God created order and time; he gifted us with a rhythm of life and routine. Time was holy and the rhythm of life sanctified. What an incredible truth!

With such busy modern lives, how can we step into God's sacred time and sanctify our rhythms of life?

Challenge your family to sanctify evenings by keeping a nightly prayer rule. Light candles, lower the lights, stand before our altar and pray aloud together. Truthfully, at first it might feel a bit awkward and forced. Before prayers are memorized we might stumbled on the words. Overtime, your prayers will grow into holy friends. Soon you will look forward to the day's end and the pause before the icon of Christ and the Theotokos.

The moments spent in prayer will become a natural part of the rhythm of life as a family. Sometimes kids will be grumbly, but try to stick to the schedule and remember the words of St. Ambrose of Optina:

"The Holy Fathers say that prayer with force is higher than prayer unforced. You do not want to, but force yourself. The Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force (cf. Matt. 11:12)."

Great Lent is a perfect time to experiment with a prayer rule in your life! If you already keep a prayer rule, perhaps Great Lent is the right time to expand it or add in another rule.

For more insight and ideas on how to create and keep a prayerful rhythm of life, the Family Wellness Ministry recommends Blueprints for the Little Church by Elissa Bjeletich and Caleb Shoemaker.



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