



Safe when exposed to contagion

By Janet Clements

My Neighbor Had Just Called To Tell Me that her daughter had chickenpox. Their doctor said that the day she spent playing with my children was the day that she was the likeliest to infect others. There had been lots of physical contact, as all the children played together in a small playhouse mixing up "concoctions" of seedpods and water and grass. They'd also eaten lunch together.

That medical prediction began to weigh on me heavily, and I was concerned that my children would come down with chickenpox. But prayer was there to help us all—not unlike the way it had helped people in Bible stories I knew, which teach important spiritual lessons for all time. There are comforting instances in the Bible of people who were directly exposed to communicable illness and, despite physical contact, never became sick, because of prayer.

The Israelites, for instance, were protected when a fast-spreading, deadly plague surrounded them. Moses, their leader, apparently did not see illness as God's will for the people. He made an immediate atonement of prayer and intercession for the people. His prayer was so effective that the plague stopped (see Num. 16:43-50).

Like Moses, I mentally refused to consent that my children should suffer infection. Instead I accepted the spiritual fact that God was their only dwelling place. His presence included nothing harmful. It was a safe place. I prayed to see that not only my children were there, but also that everyone was safe in God's presence.

The predicted time passed for the children to contract chickenpox, and the disease never touched them.

Whether it's flu season, a community epidemic, or the threat of biological warfare, people are seeking safety from the fear of being random victims of disease. But even if they've already been exposed to a contagious disease, there is something they can do. They can pray.

The healing power behind prayer, which proved so totally effective in protecting entire nations in Bible times, is no less available today to bring freedom from contagion. It is spoken of in Psalm 91 as offering complete safety from illness of every sort: "Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

This psalm explains that physical protection comes from affirming and understanding that God is our "habitation" or dwelling place—the place where our thoughts reside. In the atmosphere of God's presence there can be no plague, nothing that harms or destroys. In fact, we can never dwell outside the protective presence of God, because God is everywhere. Realizing that we live and breathe in the pure atmosphere of Spirit, and not in a disease-infected atmosphere, takes away fear. This is spiritual thinking, which governs the body mentally so that nothing can harm it.

Freedom from physical contagion has everything to do with one's being watchful as to what he or she does and does not accept into the universe of thought. In *Science and Health*, Mary Baker Eddy illustrated this point, citing the experience of a man who died from cholera because he believed that he had slept in the same bed as someone who had suffered from that contagious disease. In fact, it was later discovered that no cholera patient had ever slept in that bed. Her point was that it had been the man's thought alone that caused the disease (see p. 154).

Because mental consent is ultimately what makes disease catching, and not physical contact, we can withdraw our consent and find safety from contagion.

Even if your school or your whole community is faced with the threat of contagion, your prayer can be helpful to others. While I was studying at a university, one group that I belonged to hosted a special all-day event in which a group of 200 students and parents participated. We

held the event in very close quarters, and there was a lot of physical contact and sharing of food throughout the day.

On the following Monday, we were told that one attendee had contracted a particular type of measles—and that her most contagious day was the day of the event. The university health center predicted that there would be widespread illness among those who had been exposed.

On hearing this, I remember acknowledging that the activity itself had been filled with joy, happiness, and the recognition of work well done by everyone. I thought, "Hasn't this good activity taken place in the presence of God? And isn't God good?"

In the words of Psalm 91, we had all been "dwelling" in goodness and joy, which had their source in a God of love. By expressing pure, unselfish love, we had been in "the secret place of the most High," so to speak—a holy place where no plague could be. I prayerfully withdrew my consent that anyone could have been outside of God's protection.

As it turned out, everyone was untouched by measles. I was not the only one who recognized this fact, and any outbreak would have been noted at our meetings, as we met weekly and were in close communication.

When there is individual or collective fear about being the random victim of contagious disease, there is something you can do. You can pray by watching the thoughts you think, keeping them steadily on the fact that God is the only power. It's a way to help yourself and everyone.

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