

What Has “Quarantine Hell” Taught us?

What started out like a nice extended weekend has mutated into a family siege. After the initial quarantine shock though, many have found the best of times.



By Tim Kimmel

A month and a half ago, life moved along at a predictable pace. Your kids had school and extracurricular demands—along with a demanding list of social and emotional expectations.

The Dow was behaving like it was on crack. Which made the marketplace feel like one huge slam dunk. Most businesses were winning without having to try hard.

Church was on a roll, too. Children’s programs, youth group meetings, mission trips, retreats, and small-group studies all took turns bouncing into each other.

A month and a half ago, our [homes were primarily houses where our families started and finished their days](#). Parents and children did their best to have civilized relationships within parameters dictated by a consuming culture, antagonistic world views, and overscheduled lives.

Married couples found their relationship defined far more by their role as parents and their work than as heart-connected lovers writing a love story.

Then, out of nowhere, a microscopic virus with a symmetric network of suction cups and the ability to kill with a vengeance raced its way around the world, leaving massive death in its wake.

When a quarantine orders you home ... to stay

Equally out of nowhere, leaders of the largest and most powerful nations in the world agreed the best way to deal with this nasty threat was to bring the mainstream marketplace and life as we know it to a skidding halt.

The response started with admonitions to wash hands 200 times a day and maintain social distance. But overnight, it morphed into orders to go home and stay home until you hear otherwise.

And just like *that*, the busy schedules, social demands, and ships-in-the-night relationships families accepted as normal were over. Now converted into a new “deal-with-the-ones-you’re-stuck-with” dynamic that most families hadn’t contended with for a couple of generations.

- Parents who preferred getting their gums scraped over homeschooling their kids, were suddenly the principal, homeroom teacher, and lunch lady.
- Teenagers who would have chosen to be duct taped to anything anywhere over being stuck with their parents, reluctantly found themselves with nowhere to run.
- Adult breadwinners who wore a different outfit to work each day were now cherry-picking the same ensemble out of the hamper morning after morning.
- And couples who had resigned themselves to a “this is us and this is it” kind of relationship found themselves under a confined marital microscope.

After the initial shock and forced adjustments to being quarantined, many have discovered—like people during another dark chapter in history—*the best of times* hiding in the shadows of these *worst of times* (to paraphrase, sort of, Charles Dickens).

Not all bad

It’s amazing the good that can grow out of the awful.

For instance, back in the 1660s, England was dealing with a massive outbreak of the bubonic plague. Universities were closed and young Isaac Newton was quarantined on his mother’s farm. But, while he was sitting around in boredom waiting for the plague to run its course, his mind fixated on derivatives of continuous function and such and, boom, he invented calculus¹.

See what I mean?

Except that’s not quite what I had in mind regarding the whole “good can grow out of the awful”—especially if you’ve ever taken calculus. I was thinking of something a bit more ... *practical*. Relationally practical. In fact, I’m thinking of two things.

1. How do you define yourself?

One thing the hurried life did for you was give you lots of ways to fake out people (and yourself) as to who you really are. Your identity might be in being a great provider, the best PTO mom, the busy sport parent, or the we-never-miss-our-weekly-date-night couple. Suddenly, these artificial identities were taken away.

With the quarantine, what started out like a nice, extended weekend has mutated into a family siege. You realize you love having these people in your life—just not in your house! Patience has left the building ... along with joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

And in the process, you also realize you aren’t the easiest husband or wife, father or mother to live with. (And you thought you had these roles nailed.)

So how is realizing my gaping shortcomings a good thing? Well, if you look at this from the right perspective, the realization that you fall short of who you thought you were is pure gold—at least, it is if you’ve put your faith in Jesus.

It frees you to finally accept, enjoy, and *leverage* the true identity you have through your relationship with Him. His love for you and joy in you was never based on status, personal skill set, or good behavior. It wasn’t because of *who* you are but *in spite* of it.

Once you realize how deeply loved you are by God—and that it's not based on your performance—you're in a much better position to bring that kind of love center stage in how you love your family.

Accepting God's forgiveness frees you to be an ambassador of it to your family. And in the process, you welcome one of the most wonderful guests to your shelter-in-place dynamic—God's grace!

[MORE HELP NAVIGATING THIS NEW COVID-19 NORMAL](#)

2. How are you connecting with your family?

By default, this quarantine has forced us to seriously reflect on the lives we've been living. More so, the level of heart connection we actually had—or more realistically, didn't have—with the people in our family picture.

This hurried lifestyle has too often been the pace of choice for families. It's been promoted by our culture, encouraged by the marketplace, sometimes expected by our church, and consistently demanded by our egos.

The false importance that comes with having “tons to do” makes it easy to feel like we have something—when we don't.

Most would think that to steal the joy and intimacy from a family you have to introduce something toxic or evil. Nope. All you have to do is make life too busy. To do legitimate—even good—things but do them out of proportion.

Being stuck together in the confines of quarantine has been a wake-up call.

When the distractions are gone

Among other things, parents have seen how

- overscheduled their kids were.
- dependent they had become on man-made distractions.
- little time they actually had (before the quarantine) for their kids on a personal and individual basis.
- cluttered their marital life had become with external activities.
- routine and shallow their interaction and communication as a couple had become.

When it comes to the values and priorities of your family, forget what culture dictates. It's never been a friend of families or ally to married couples. Although there are many legitimate things within it that may have their place. Just make sure once you're back out there, you enjoy these things on *your* terms.

You may wonder if you'll ever be able to escape home-school hell, Zoom meetings, and watching church in your underwear. You will. Things are already moving in that direction. You could well come out of quarantine better off than you went in. Less hurried. Better paced. Maintaining healthier heart connection with the people you love most.

And enjoying the presence and power of Jesus in your life like never before.

1. Although German mathematician, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, claims to have invented it, (they were thinking stuff up around the same time), Sir Isaac Newton had a better PR firm working for him and usually gets the credit.

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About the author

Dr. Tim Kimmel is a thinker, writer, and speaker on how to have thriving family dynamics. He's is the executive director of Family Matters. Tim has authored over a dozen books and spoken throughout the world on how to turn God's grace into the defining feature of your closest relationships.

Some of his most popular books are [Grace Based Parenting](#), [Grace Filled Marriage](#), [Grace Based Discipline](#), and [Little House on the Freeway](#).

Tim and his wife Darcy have four grown, married children and nine grandkids. They reside in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Tim Kimmel and Family Matters have a lot of great encouragement for you: excellent [video studies](#) that are available for streaming free for the duration of this quarantine [at familymatters.net](#).