

## All the Prayers of God's People August 25

Today would have been my grandmother's birthday. If one believes in any form of astrology, she was a Leo like me, and there are many things about our shared time together that I cherish. Her ability to cook a mean meal, her fearlessness, her stubbornness in doing what is right, her ability to love with her whole heart even amidst heartbreak are just a few.

One thing in particular I remember as she aged and became more fragile, was sitting next to her on the sofa and rubbing her back. The simple act of touching was something she did not receive nearly enough in this world. I think we find ourselves here, especially during this pandemic. Even if you are blessed enough to have a family to reach out and hug or touch, it is not the same as embracing our church family, friends, and loved ones with abandon. Perhaps this is in part why the world feels so at odds with one another at our present time. There simply is no touch to unite us.

The need for touch is so crucial that it defines humanity from the other creatures of God's creation. We need and crave touch because it does many things, a few of which are below, taken from a recent research article with studies done in our virtual age<sup>1</sup>. Touch:

1. **Decreases violence.** Less touch as a child leads to greater violence. More touch as an adult leads to greater feelings of unity.
2. **Greater trust between individuals.** Touch helps to bond people together. Physical touch is shown to activate the part of the brain linked to feelings of reward and compassion.
3. **Economic gain.** "Touch signals safety and trust; it soothes. Basic warm touch calms cardiovascular stress. It activates the body's

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.khca.org/files/2015/10/8-Reasons-Why-We-Need-Human-Touch-More-Than-Ever.pdf>

vagus nerve, which is intimately involved with our compassionate response.”.

4. **Decreased disease and stronger immune system.** Physical touch may also decrease disease. According to research conducted at the University of North Carolina, women who receive more hugs from their partners have lower heart rates and blood pressure. Research at University of California's School of Public Health found that getting eye contact and a pat on the back from the doctor may boost the survival rate of patients with complex diseases.
5. **Stronger team dynamics.** Paul Zak, author of *The Moral Molecule*, argues, “We touch to initiate and sustain cooperation.” He conducted a “neuroeconomics” study from which he argues that hugs or handshakes are likely to cause the release of the neurochemical oxytocin, which increases the chances that a person will treat you “like family,” even if you just met.
6. **More non-sexual emotional intimacy.** Studies have shown that a gentle brush of a woman's arm can boost a man's chances in love; another study showed that two-thirds of women agreed to dance with a man who touched her on the arm a second or two before making the request.
7. **Greater learning engagement.** When teachers touch students platonically, it encourages their learning, and are three times as likely to speak up in class. Another recent study has found that when librarians pat the hand of a student checking out a book, the student likes the library more and is more likely to return.
8. **Overall wellbeing.** Adults require human touch to thrive. Keltner says, “In recent years, a wave of studies has documented some incredible emotional and physical health benefits that come from touch. This research is suggesting that touch is truly fundamental to human communication, bonding, and health.”

As we get ready to regather for worship, it will be our perfectly natural tendency and desire to touch and be touched. *It is important, however, that we keep in mind the reasons why touch at this time is also not safe.* There is much we do not know about the Covid Virus. We do not know who carries it, we do not know why some get terribly ill and others remain relatively asymptomatic. We do not know the long-term effects Covid will bring, to name a few.

During our current pandemic, the Regathering Task force is requesting that you simply do not touch one another until it is safe to do so. When we enter the worship space, the covenant we are asking each of us to take is to do everything within our power to keep one another safe, including not touching. It will be difficult. We have missed one another and have missed all of the gifts that touching brings into our lives. And yet, together, our hearts are reaching out to the Lord that God may in turn touch us with love and passion and joy (dare we say healing) and the many benefits of knowing that our God will provide our needs.

Let us pray.

Lord we come to you in need of touch. In need of basic humanity to sustain our hearts, minds, and connectedness. We need you, Gracious supplier to meet our needs during this time. We do not wish to bring harm to one another in your church. And yet it will be hard to resist sharing your loving embrace with our brothers and sisters. When we come together, God, wrap us in your warm embrace, may the power of your Holy Spirit fall upon us afresh, that Your warmth and loving embrace will sustain our faith during this time. In Christ we pray, Amen.