Praying together as a couple

by

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Most of the Christian couples that I know do not pray together. I know one Christian brother who flat out refuses to pray together with his wife. He says he prays by himself, but he won't pray together with his wife. Praying with his wife makes him feel too uncomfortable, so he won't pray with her. I hate to say it, but his views are not uncommon. Very few Christian couples actually take the time to pray together. Pollster George Barna recently reported his findings from interviews with 3,142 randomly selected adults, 1,220 of whom were born-again Christians. Here are the results of his poll:

- Of those who are non-Christian, 23% have seen their marriage go through the devastation of a divorce.
- 27% of those who call themselves born-again Christians have been divorced. (That makes the divorce rate higher among Christians than non-Christians.)
- Of those who label themselves “Fundamentalist Christians,” 30% have experienced a divorce.

FamilyLife® has surveyed of thousands of Christian couples and found that less than 8% pray together on a regular basis. That is a shockingly low percentage. However, according to the Southern Baptist Convention poll in 2001, (see note at the end of this article) of Christian couples who actively pray together, the divorce rate is less than one percent. Less than one percent! This begs the question: How often do you pray with your spouse? Don't include the mealtime blessing, that doesn't count. The response to the question is enlightening because most couples very rarely pray together, with the exception of the mealtime blessing. So why don't we pray with our spouses? I think it is because we just don't realize the importance of prayer to our marital relationship. Most people acknowledge that prayer is very important to them but they simply fail to do it on any regular basis. The fact of the matter is that if we don't pray very much, then prayer is really not very important to us.

Which do you believe?

1. Prayer important to your relationship with your spouse.

2. Prayer is just a formality at mealtimes.

Do you believe that prayer has any real effect on the depth of companionship within your marriage? In reality, whatever you actually do at present in your home is the clearest revelation of what you truly believe regarding prayer. You may say that prayer is important to your relationship with your spouse, but if you are not doing it, then it is not important to you. When I talk about praying with your spouse, I'm talking about the two of you sitting down together, holding hands, and seriously praying. You need to pray together daily if possible, in a place and
time when you won't have distractions. You may be wondering just why prayer is so important to couples.

Prayer unites you spiritually before God.

Matthew 18:18-20

(18) “Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
(19) “Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is heaven.
(20) “For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.”

I have not met a married couple yet that did not have problems of some type. Some couples have money problems, or in-law problems, or problems with each other, or problems with their children; the list goes on and on. If we as married couples are having this many problems, why aren't we praying together about them? Matthew 18:19 shows how much power a praying couple can have: that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is heaven.

How much do you think you and your spouse could accomplish if you prayed together daily? What would happen to the amount of problems you face as a married couple if you prayed together about them daily? What kind of adults will your children grow into if the two of you prayed together for them daily? Can you see why it is so important for a couple to pray together?

When you and your spouse hold hands and pray together, you are coming before God as a couple. It is not just you praying and it is not just your spouse praying, but the two of you praying together. You are united spiritually before God as a team. You are now operating on the level that God intended for couples to operate on. You are unified, joined together as one, partners together before God. Your prayer as a couple is sweet perfume to God.

John 17:20-26

(20) “I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;
(21) that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me.
(22) “And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as We are one;
(23) I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may
know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me.
(24) “Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world.
(25) “O righteous Father, although the world has not known Thee, yet I have known Thee; and these have known that Thou didst send Me;
(26) and I have made Thy name known to them, and will make it known; that the love wherewith Thou didst love Me may be in them, and I in them.”

Jesus prayed for unity among his followers. What kind of example does this give to praying couples? The answer is unity. There is strength in unity, and prayer is the glue that strongly bonds a praying couple together. When you pray together as a couple, it is the perfect time to pray for each other’s needs. I know that my wife loves me, but when I hear her pray for me, it reinforces that knowledge, and vice versa.

When Vickie (my wife) hears me pray as we pray together, it lets her know what aspects of my life concern me and it shows her how to pray for me. I also listen to what Vickie is praying about and I know better how to pray for her. We also get to pray together about issues that concern both of us. We draw strength from praying together. It is also enjoyable to watch how God answers our joint prayers.

Prayer encourages humility and honesty.

Luke 18:10-14
(10) “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer.
(11) The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer.
(12) I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all I get.'
(13) But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'
(14) “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”

Experiencing unity of heart with your mate is not automatic. It requires a special attitude by both partners. You have to be humble and honest not only with God but also with each other. Jesus taught that an honest and humble heart was an absolute essential for effective prayer when He told the story of the two men who came to the temple to pray. One man was very self-righteous and ended up praying with only himself because God would not hear him. The other man humbled himself and cried out, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” Only the second man was received and justified before God, simply because he honestly and humbly confessed his need.
One of the problems that couples have is pride. The result of this pride is the refusal to acknowledge any weaknesses, or needs, to one another. Most of the time we don't even realize how foolish or destructive this can be. However, praying together as a couple is a great way to solve this problem. It is important for you to remember that your spouse knows you and the problems you face better than anyone else in the world. For you to refuse to pray, or to whitewash your problems in prayer, only keeps you further from one another and the depth of relationship you long for. Therefore, when you pray together, you need to be honest and humble yourself before God. Allow your spouse to hear you confess your needs openly and let your spouse pray for those needs. You can't help but be drawn closer to God and closer to each other as a result.

Prayer develops and deepens your communication.

Good communication is a fundamental key to real companionship and prayer is the hand that turns the key to open this door. If you pray individually and not together as a couple, you tend say things to the Lord that you would never say to each other in casual conversation. But when you learn to pray together as a couple, your spouse will hear you say those intimate things that previously only God heard (provided you are willing to be humble and honest). For example, when a woman hears her husband praying earnestly about his situation at work, she may realize, Wow, I had no idea this was such a difficult issue for him. The wife now knows how to better pray for her husband.

After you pray together, it is often a good idea to talk about some the things the two of you were praying about. Use this as an opportunity to learn more about each other. As you learn how to pray with each other, you will also learn how to communicate with each other. You will find that sharing things with God and with each other deepens the level of trust and love that you already have with each other. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain by praying together.

Demonstrate your commitment to God by showing Him that you will pray together with your spouse. When you demonstrate your commitment in prayer to obey and follow Christ, you are communicating to your spouse that he/she can trust that you will be committed to fulfilling all your responsibilities in your marriage too. What a sweet fruit of trust and intimacy this will bear.

Your marriage will be built up because you will be built up.

You will never be the loser by giving yourself to pray with your spouse. Scripture makes it clear that when a believer prays he or she will be built up as a result. Jude declared: “Building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 1:20). As you pray and spend time petitioning and communing with the Father, He will build you up. What do you think happens when you pray as a couple? You are built up as a couple. Could your relationship as husband and wife use a little building up? Then pray together. Even if you already have the model marriage, pray together, and make it even better.
If you are one of the 92% of Christian couples who do not pray together, you may be wondering how to start praying together. I firmly believe that the husbands should take the lead in this matter. As the spiritual head of the family, it is your responsibility, husbands, to lead. So stop shirking your responsibilities and make the decision to pray together as a couple. Now that you have made the commitment to pray with each other, verbalize that commitment. Tell each other (out loud) that praying together is something that you are going to do and that you will start today. Once you have made that verbal commitment to each other that you will pray as a couple, you have taken the first step.

If you have never prayed together as a couple before, you need to learn how to pray together. At first it may seem awkward and uncomfortable, but it will pass. When Vickie and I first started praying together we were both extremely nervous and uncomfortable, but we managed to get past this stage so I know that you can too. Now that it has become part of our married life, we both miss it greatly when I'm away and we are unable to pray together daily.

**Tips on how to start praying together.**

*Find a mutually agreeable time.* This is the best place to begin your conversation with your spouse. Depending on your work schedule, whether or not you have children, and if you are a morning person like I am, or a night owl like my wife, you must determine the best time to pray together. Try to determine the most undistracted time of day possible that works for both you. Caution: if you don't make time for prayer, you will never find time for prayer. After all, you set aside specific time for grooming or eating everyday, so too you will need to set aside time for prayer with your spouse. I would suggest, if you are an early riser, an early morning rendezvous before the kids get up. Or if you are a night person, pray with each other just before bed.

*Keep the prayer time short.* One of the mistakes that you can make when beginning a prayer time together is that of trying to immediately pray for an extended period of time. Do not try to impress your spouse with your ability to pray. If your spouse is not accustomed to the practice of prayer, he or she can become turned off to praying with you if you insist on a marathon experience. Don't try to be so spiritual that you end up quenching your partner's desire to pray. If you want to successfully change your habits, begin with a short time together at first, possibly just a few minutes. This will keep your partner from becoming discouraged, impatient, or intimidated. Let the Lord slowly and naturally lengthen your prayer time together as a result of the Spirit drawing you forward, not by some external rule you have set up. I personally believe the husband should start the prayer and then taking turns going back and forth until one partner doesn't pray anymore. You will know when you are finished. Then the husband should conclude the prayer. Never forget that God wants to bless this time with your mate, and he will.

*Keep your turn to pray short.* Keeping your prayers short will accomplish several goals. First, it will naturally keep your prayer time short, as I just discussed. But it will also keep you more focused on what you are praying about. Think for a moment about the last time you heard
someone go on and on with some lengthy marathon prayer. Wasn't it difficult to stay focused on what the person was praying?

Therefore, get to the point and pray what you need or want to pray and then be silent. This gives your spouse the opportunity to add any postscript to your prayer that will bring further agreement together. Remember, if you pray everything there is to pray on any given subject, then why do you need your spouse to pray with you? Remember that this is a team effort.

To solve this problem you must deal with your selfishness and the desire to control the prayer time. Remember that we are to give “preference to one another,” not dominate or control others (Rom. 12:10). This attitude will keep you sensitive to your mate's needs and encourage effective prayer.

**Keep your prayer personal.** One thing that greatly encourages effective prayer together is acknowledgment of your personal needs in the presence of your spouse before God. Praying for your own personal needs also lets your spouse know how to pray for you during his/her individual personal prayer time. Whatever you don't pray about in your life you leave up to chance. Do you really want to do that?

Remember the difference between the prayer of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:10-14? The tax collector humbled himself and confessed his need and the Pharisee did not. Don't be like the Pharisee or you may end up praying by yourself. Intimacy in prayer encourages your spouse to be intimate and honest too. Don't wait for your spouse to start before you open up. You can start by asking for the most important things in your life. Then watch what happens to your mate as he or she prays. You will sense an immediate change.

**Pray for your marriage.** To encourage more honest and open prayer with your mate, take the next step of praying for your marriage. However, you must be careful here so as not to offend your spouse. Do not pray for a specific problem your mate has or where he or she has offended you. This can be perceived by your spouse as very condemning and arrogant. The best way to handle praying for your marriage is to first thank Him for your spouse and request God's help in the areas where you are personally failing. This is the “remove the plank from your own eye” principle that Jesus taught in Matthew 7:5. When you begin asking God for a greater love or a willingness and sensitivity to be a servant to the needs of your spouse, he or she will sense your humility. In the long run, this will draw the two of you closer.

In addition, ask God to bring healing and growth to your relationship. Regularly thank Him for the mate He has given you, and for the gift of your marriage. By doing so, you are recognizing the value you place on your mate and your marriage as you offer your praise to God. This is how prayer can build your marriage in a way nothing else can. Are you willing to commit yourself to God and your spouse? Are you willing to pray together as a couple? If you are, prove it. I challenge you to pray together daily as a couple. You will be so thankful that you did.
Answering your questions:

How do I get my wife to pray with me, I can sense she's very secretive?
Tell her that you would like for the two of you to start praying together. She will probably agree to that. You will need to start the prayer. Pray out loud for your marriage, your job and for your wife. Then ask her if she would like to pray. She will probably not want to. That is okay. Just keep praying with her everyday and asking her if she would like to pray. Eventually she will. Just be prepared for that to take awhile. Don't get frustrated with her, she will start praying with you, it just might take longer than you want it to.

My spouse doesn't want to pray with me, what do I do?
First off, don't do anything that would pressure them to pray with you and don't make them feel guilty for not praying with you. The best thing that you can do is to pray that God will soften their heart to the idea of praying together as a couple. Feel free to approach them periodically to ask them to either pray a short prayer with you or for you about a specific subject. If they say “no,” be nice, thank them anyway, and go about your business. Don't stop praying that God will soften their heart to the idea of praying together as a couple.

Do you have some resources that you recommend?
Stormie Omaritan has two books that are very good: “The Power of a Praying Wife” and “The Power of a Praying Husband.” She goes into not only how to pray, but what to pray. I found these books to be very helpful, and you may as well.

* (note) I got this statistic from a Southern Baptist Convention poll in the summer of 2001. Although I have queried them, I have been unable to find out how many couples were polled or their geographic locations. It is quite possible that they only polled Southern Baptists at the convention; I have never been able to find out. They have since taken this polling data off their website. Another interesting article on divorce statistics is on Christianity Today’s website entitled “Marriage, Divorce, and the Church: What do the stats say, and can marriage be happy?”