

COVENANT KEEPERS

“Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles”

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How does prayer build your marriage?

Quite often when I counsel couples concerning their marriages, I first try to determine the depth of their spiritual relationship. To do this, I will ask an all important question such as, *How often do you pray with your spouse?* The response is enlightening because most couples tell me that they very rarely pray together, with the exception of meal-time. Some have declared to me that prayer is of little importance to their relationship. Others acknowledge that prayer is very important to them but they simply fail to do it on any regular basis.

Which do you believe? Is prayer important to your relationship or is it just a formality at meal time? 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.

If you are unsure about the benefits of prayer with your mate, let's look at how it can actually build your relationship.

1. Prayer unites you spiritually before God. One of the greatest reasons God wants couples to pray together is stated by Jesus when He said, *“If two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them...”* (Matt. 18:19). Prayer naturally brings you into agreement with one another as you hold your petitions before the Lord. In fact, you can't pray wholeheartedly and in a unified manner without agreeing together. By

coming before God you are naturally uniting your hearts for one common end. This unity was the fruit of collective prayer in the early church. When the apostles were persecuted, the believers came together and *“raised their voice to God with one accord...”* (Acts 4:24). The testimony of Scripture reveals that when this group finished praying together that they were *“one heart and one soul”* (Acts 4:32).

Now is there anything that couples need more than to be of one heart and one soul with each other? How different this attitude is from the independence that many couples experience. However, the agreement indicated in these passages describes a depth of relationship that is truly satisfying. If you desire this level of spiritual unity in your marriage, begin to pray together and watch your oneness grow. This is God's design for prayer in your marriage.

2. Prayer encourages humility and honesty. Experiencing unity of heart with your mate is not automatic. It requires a special attitude by both partners. 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!”* (Luke 18:9-14). Only the second man was received and justified before God, simply because he honestly and humbly confessed his need.

In the same manner, if you want to grow in your prayer life together, it is necessary to honestly bear your soul before your mate as well as before

God. As you humble yourself and acknowledge your personal needs before God, you are communicating a special message to your mate. You are declaring that you are open, vulnerable, and sincere. And remember, God gives grace to the humble. All marriages could use God's grace to smooth off the rough edges.



Pray with one another!

One of the greatest problems that I observe as a marriage counselor is pride and the refusal to acknowledge any weakness or need to one another. However, praying together is a great way to solve this problem. It's 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

She is your companion and your wife by covenant Mal. 2:14

further from one another and the depth of relationship you long for. Therefore, when you pray together, be honest and humble yourself before God. Allow your spouse to hear you confess your needs openly. You can't help but be drawn closer together as a result.

3. 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. How does prayer help your communication?

Allow your spouse to hear you confess your needs openly.

First, read some of the prayers that are recorded in the Bible and notice what happens. Don't you gain a deeper insight into the heart of the one praying because this person is communicating something honestly from the heart? One such example is when Solomon prayed to the Lord at the dedication of the temple. There were multitudes who heard him that day and who were drawn to an agreement of heart as they heard his communication with God. Scripture declares that when he had finished praying that the people "*bowed their faces to the ground...and worshiped and praised the Lord*" (2 Chron. 7:3). We too are blessed and encouraged because this prayer is recorded for us in Scripture. Our hearts become stirred because Solomon honestly communicated the depth of his soul before God. He declared his humble praise, his faith in God's great ability, and his commitment to giving God his whole heart. As we read this prayer, it still communicates today a powerful message. We know Solomon's heart because he communicated it in prayer.

The great thing about prayer is that you say things to the Lord that you

would never say to each other in casual conversation. 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.* Likewise, when you describe your commitment in prayer to obey and follow Christ, you are communicating to your spouse that he or 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.

4. Prayer establishes deeper companionship. Think with me for a moment. What are the key issues that hinder real companionship with your partner? Are they not independence, pride, and a lack of communication? If you will notice, these problems are naturally addressed by my first three points. As you humbly pray with one another, communicating your needs before God, you will automatically grow in a spiritual unity with one another which results in a deeper companionship. And remember, companionship is the most important reason that you are married. Malachi made this clear when he specifically called your marriage partner your "*companion*" (Mal. 2:14). If you lack companionship in your marriage, prayer is one very important way to deepen it. If you refuse to unite with your partner in prayer, there will always be a depth to your companionship that will be lacking. Remember, the closer we get to God, the closer we get to each other.

5. 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. Jesus promised that the

Holy Spirit will come to fill your heart because of prayer: "*How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*" (Luke 11:13). If you and your spouse are filled with the Spirit, your lives will manifest the fruit of His Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23). Isn't His love, longsuffering, and self-control what every marriage needs? As you are built up personally with these qualities, your marriage will be built up too, and your home will be wonderfully strengthened.

Beloved, don't miss what God wants to do in this area of your marriage because of your independence, pride, or fear. Open your heart and ask the Father to work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). You won't be sorry!

How can you make the practical changes needed?

It is not enough to know that you should be praying with your spouse; you must practice it. But you may be thinking, *What should I do to begin? Where should I start?* Let's look at some of the practical ways to change things.

1. Find a mutually agreeable time. This is the best place to begin your conversation with your mate. Depending on your work schedule, whether or not you have children, and if you are a morning person or a night owl, you must determine the best time to pray together. Try to determine the most undistracted time of day possible. I often hear, *What is that? My life is always distracted.* Of course, most of us have very full lives with many daily commitments. But, be assured, you will never *find* time for prayer, you have to *make* time. In the same way you set aside specific time for grooming or eating everyday, you will want 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. This may entail some sacrifice, getting up earlier or turning the television off in the evening.

2. Keep the prayer time short. I have found that one of the greatest mistakes that people make when beginning a prayer time together is that of trying to immediately pray for an extended period of time. 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 lack companionship in your marriage, prayer is one very important way to deepen it.

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. Simply pray by taking turns back and forth until one partner doesn't pray anymore. Then conclude the prayer and be thankful for the time that you have had together. Never forget, God wants to bless this time with your mate, so be careful not to force or impose your will upon your spouse. Remember, the "*servant of the Lord must not strive but be gentle to all...*" (2 Tim. 2:24).

3. 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 prayer. Wasn't it difficult to stay focused on what the person was praying?

Therefore, get to the point and say what you need to say 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? Often I hear this as a specific complaint from one spouse: *He (or she) prays for everything and I can't even get a word in on the subject!*

To solve this problem you must deal with your selfishness and the desire to control the prayer time. Remember, 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.

4. Keep it personal. One thing that greatly encourages effective prayer together is acknowledgment of your personal needs in the presence of your mate before God. So often in group prayer meetings I hear people using very impersonal words such as *we* and *us*, never confessing personally *I need*. Yet, what happens in your heart when someone does confess a personal need? Doesn't your heart go out to that person as you agree with his or her request? Don't you sense a knitting together with this individual? The same result will occur if you will become very personal with your spouse by acknowledging your individual needs.

Remember the difference between the prayer of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18:9-14. The publican 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 others to be 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.

5. 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. Don't pray for a specific problem your mate has or where he or she has offended you. This, of course, would 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. This can only draw two people closer.

In addition, ask God to bring healing and growth to your relationship. Regularly thank Him for the mate He has given you, stressing his or her strong points. By doing so, you are recognizing the value you place on your mate as you offer your praise to God. This is how prayer can build your marriage in a way nothing else can.

What are some other issues you should pray about?

The subject matter to be prayed over is also another issue that some struggle with. This is a subject that Jesus also covered in His ministry while He was here on earth. In Matthew 6:9-15, Jesus taught His

disciples the manner in which to pray. The word *manner* means “to pray in this way” or “in this fashion.” By teaching them this prayer, He revealed some of the most significant things that we should pray about and He placed them in an order of priority.

As you read this model prayer you first realize that Jesus wants us to pray directly to our Father in heaven. He doesn't want us using another person as an intermediary, but to come directly to Him. The Lord spoke through the prophet Jeremiah: “*Call upon Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know*” (Jer. 33:3). Therefore, come directly and boldly to His throne of grace.

Open your heart and ask God to work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure.

As you pray, make it your primary motive that His Name be glorified and that His will be accomplished here on earth as it is in heaven. Begin by worshipping Him together, being thankful for what He's already done and is doing in your lives. Let this be your priority before you ever begin asking for anything.

Then ask Him for His provision for all your needs ranging from your daily bread to forgiveness for your sins, both in general and in your marriage. Lift up to Him areas where you sense yourself being tempted and ask for strength and deliverance.

Remembering throughout all your prayer time that it is His kingdom and power that rules and reigns over all. Fix your eyes upon His ability to work in your life and in your marriage to answer all of your needs. Never forget Paul's exhortation, “*Now unto Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that*

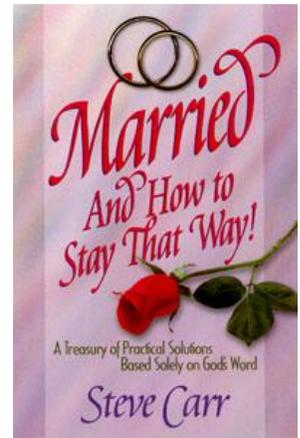
we ask or think, according to the power that works in us...” (Eph. 3:20). When you pray with your spouse with this kind of assurance and boldness, believing that He is able, you will get answers. The answers you receive will also bring you into a closer and more intimate companionship with your mate than you have ever had before. What are you waiting for? Share this publication with your loved one and may you both be encouraged to begin a prayer life together. Be assured that “*the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man (or woman) avails much*” (James 5:16). He has much to give if you will but ask. Begin today by taking your partner's hand, go before the Father's throne together, and watch the fruit of effective prayer abound. Your marriage will never be the same!

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