

## The Prayer Journal and Using Prayer in Marriage Education

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## The Relevance of Prayer in Marriage

### From Beach, Fincham, & Hurt

- Most people want to be married (95% will have been by age 50).
- Most people pray at least weekly (90%).
- Marriage and prayer are two intertwined, highly valued aspects of the lives of some (most) individuals.

### For those open to it. . .

- Prayer is deeply connected with motivational dynamics in the lives of individuals who believe.

### While very early in research on prayer and relationships, . . .

- Prayer enhances and fuels forgiveness.
- Prayer impacts relationship quality by stimulating the power of committed love (Agape).
- Prayer supports and fosters commitment.
  - Probable linkages between eternal perspective and long-term view

### Prayer as an Element of Marriage/Relationship Education

- How can prayer be helpful?

### How Can Prayer Be Helpful?

- Prayer can help people . . .
  - Communicate more effectively with spouse
  - Regulate negative emotions
  - See their spouse's viewpoint
  - Reinforce commitment
  - Promote positive, altruistic and sacrificial motivation

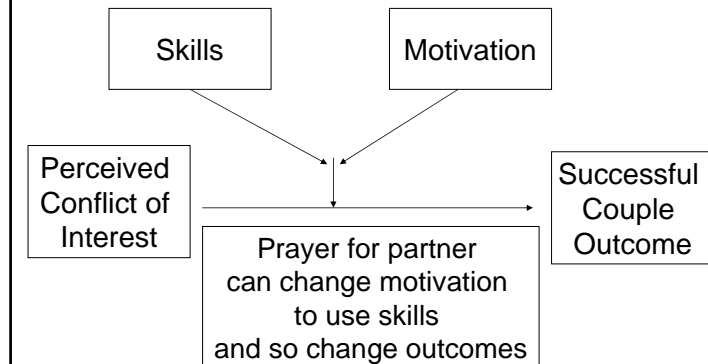
## Prayer Can . . .

- Highlight the View of an Important “Other”
- Tap New Sources of Motivation
- Prime “caretaking” motives
- These can all be seen as “Changing Motivation” in addition to “Changing Skills”

## Fincham & Beach: Negative, Emergent Goals

- Cooperation and connection: *We & Us*
- Conflict and differences highlight *Me vs. You* dynamic.
- The goal of winning emerges and overpowers cooperative sense.
- The right type of prayer can connect a person with God and transcendent perspective that better supports “we” over “me” and helps couple get back on track.

## How Can Prayer Add to Skills?



## Effective Prayer for One's Marriage

To Be Most Effective:

- 1) Prayer should focus on affirmation of core values such as love, compassion, and understanding.
- 2) Prayer should be practiced regularly.
- 3) Prayer should be used in the immediate context or aftermath of conflict, as well as when things are going well.

## The Best Motivation

- To pray for what is best for mate and marriage.
- To pray to be part of God providing what is best for mate and marriage.

## Lessons from ProSAAM

## The Worst Motivation

- Asking God for help in controlling or coercing or changing mate to better satisfy one's own desires.

## Prayer Help Build and Maintain Behavior Changes

- Prayer can strengthen implemental intentions.
- Prayer is reinforced in spiritual communities (though, often not in regard to marriage).

## Dangerous Pushy-ness

- Pushing people to pray who are not comfortable with it
- Pushing prayer on people who do not believe in it or God
- Pushing people to pray out-loud.
- Pushing partners to pray together

## Examples and Ideas from ProSAAM:

The research project studying the Program for Strong African American Marriages

## Methods of Teaching and Encouraging Prayer

- DVD training
- Suggested prayers
- Prayer postcards
- Group prayers and praying
- Prayer worksheets

- What sort of “ripple” effects have you see in the lives of families by teaching prayer in your classes for couples?

- What do you think is most important in understanding the role of prayer in this context of marriage education?

- What misuses of prayer have you seen in your work with ProSAAM?

- Regero: You used the phrase “praying at each other.” What does that mean to you?

- What have you seen that has touched you most about the use of prayer by couples who are participating in ProSAAM?

- How can prayer be useful in working with people who are married (or in serious relationships) but in a group of only men or women?
- Can you imagine, and have you tried, prayer for marriages in mens' groups?

- In classes for couples, where you are including an emphasis on prayer, what if one partner is a believer in God and prayer and the other is not? What have you done?

- What were you surprised by—or not prepared for—in your use of prayer in marriage education?

- What about interfaith couples? How does that work? How have you handled that?

- How have you seen prayer help people communicate better with their mates?
- Does prayer to God help people get clear on what they think or want to say to their mate?

- In the ProSAAM project, you wrote sample prayers to highlight examples and possibilities for people.
- Were people accepting of the samples?

## The (New) Prayer Journal

*a prayer  
journal  
for my  
marriage*

*like a tree  
planted by the water*



- Who can use this?
- How can it be used?

## Contexts

- Two partners working on it together:
  - Marriage education with couples
    - Woven in training
    - Ancillary to training, such as use in homework
  - Small groups of couples, meeting and encouraging one another
  - Couples in counseling
  - Couples on their own

## Contexts

- Individuals willing to pray for their marriages with or without partner involved in doing same
  - Individuals in marriage education
  - Individuals in counseling
  - Individuals in a couples' oriented service, but where couple is not focused together on prayer
  - Men's groups. Women's groups.
  - Individuals on own

## Features

- Journaling: deepens connection with themes
- Carefully chosen themes
- Scriptural teaching for background and sample prayers to guide
- Them of growth and change: seeds, roots, branches, fruit
- A major focus on prayer to
  - connect with God
  - remind one of higher motivations
  - prime implemental intentions

- How could you use this in your work to help couples?

- Information on the ProSAAM project:  
<http://www.uga.edu/prosaam/>
- The new ProSAAM curriculum (a video driven T.O.O.B. for couple workshops that does not require training) is available from Christian PREP, inc.
- The prayer journal is available from Christian PREP, inc.

[www.PREPinc.com](http://www.PREPinc.com)

**Selected References Related to Research on Prayer with Couples**  
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