The Prayer Journal
and
Using Prayer in Marriage Education

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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.

The Relevance of Prayer in Marriage

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

How can prayer be helpful?

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Prayer as an Element of Marriage/Relationship Education

- 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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Conflict of Interest</td>
<td>Prayer for partner can change motivation to use skills and so change outcomes</td>
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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?

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

• 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 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
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

Features

- Journaling: deepens connection with themes
- Carefully chosen themes
- Scriptural teaching for background and sample prayers to guide
- Themes 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

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
• 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
Selected References Related to Research on Prayer with Couples
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