

# Couple Prayer: The Great Untapped Resource

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The phrase, “The family that prays together, stays together” is a well-known adage, but one that demands more attention than it gets. There is often an assumption that Christian couples pray with and for each other on a regular basis, but according to research and anecdotal evidence, this is a false assumption. Some estimates place the numbers as low as between 3-10% of Christian couples who engage in daily intimate prayer with one another.

Marriage was designed by God as a spiritual institution in which two individuals are bound together by their faith in Him. Solomon asserts, “. . . a threefold cord is not quickly broken,” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). Couple prayer is like the glue, which binds a marriage together as we are bound together by God.

Marriage statistics make disturbing reading with the divorce rate in the UK around 40 per cent. That statistic is compounded by research conducted by George Barna, which indicates that Christian couples are just as likely to divorce as non-Christian couples ([www.barna.org](http://www.barna.org)).

However, significant evidence is demonstrating that married couples who pray, study scripture, attend church, and otherwise jointly participate in spiritual activities enjoy significantly higher levels of marital happiness and satisfaction. A national research study in the United States (1980) cited in Retrouvaille’s International Handbook 2005 established that married couples who attend church together weekly and read the Bible or pray together daily have a divorce rate of approximately 1 in every 1,105 marriages.

In his book Faithful Attraction, researcher Andrew Greeley reports that of all the factors known to contribute significantly to marital happiness, praying together as a couple is “the most powerful correlate of marital happiness that we have yet discovered” (p.292).

Couples who pray tend to experience better mental health; greater ability and willingness to forgive each other; show greater gratitude toward their spouse; more willingness to sacrifice for the relationship; greater sexual intimacy, and a higher level of unity and trust with their spouse.

Increasing evidence of the value of couple prayer begs the question, “Why don’t Christian couples pray together?” The main reasons and excuses include feelings of awkwardness or intimidation, lack of time, failure to prioritize and lack of leadership in the home.

However, I suspect that the primary reason has to do with the nature of prayer itself. In her book Steps to Christ, Ellen White describes prayer as the, “opening of the heart to God as to a friend” (p.93). In other words, prayer is a very intimate experience.

Sincere individual prayer involves saying things to the Lord that we would never say out loud to others in casual conversation. But when we learn to pray together as a couple, our spouse will hear us say those intimate things that previously only God heard. That requires a willingness on our part to be open and transparent with each other.

Sadly, many couples shrink from this kind of self-revelation because their general relationship does not constitute a “safe place” to lay their hearts bare. God states in Genesis 2:24, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” This indicates a relationship that goes beyond simply the physical. The “one flesh” unity God requires of us involves physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual openness.

In his book, *The Spiritually Intimate Marriage*, Don Harvey defines spiritual intimacy as, “Being able to share your spiritual self, find this reciprocated, and have a sense of union with your mate” (p.101). In Romans 12:15, Paul urges us to, “<sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.” There is no place where this willingness to enter into each other’s experience is more important than the marital relationship. Spiritual intimacy is crucial in order for Christian couples to experience all the blessings God intends, yet too often spiritual beliefs are practiced individually and not integrated into the couple relationship.

So where do a couple begin? In their book *Couples Who Pray*, Rushnell & Duart present couples with a practical guide and a 40-day prayer challenge. They assert that, “Those who bare themselves before God in prayer for a minimum of five minutes a day for forty days have achieved extraordinary results” (back cover). It has been said that, “Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly until we learn to do it well.”

Couple prayer does not need to be perfect in order to be affective. Jesus assures us that, “. . . where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them (Matthew 18:20). So just do it!

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#### Ten Tips for Couple Prayer

1. More prayer, more power
2. Make time to pray
3. Have an attitude of gratitude and vulnerability
4. Confess and request forgiveness
5. Pray out loud with your spouse
6. Keep it short
7. Use everyday language
8. Pray for your marriage
9. Pray for others and for self
10. Expect God to answer your prayers