

7 Ways to Pray With Your Spouse

Although my husband was a pastor for more than two decades and I continue to be heavily involved in ministry too, it took us 20 years before we started setting aside the time to pray together regularly.

And when we did, we realized it was the single most important factor in creating a closer connection between the two of us.

Why did it take us so long to prioritize this time together? The reasons, or maybe I should say *excuses*, abounded.

As my husband and I began researching and writing our book, *When Couples Walk Together*, we interviewed many couples on the subject of praying together and learned we weren't alone in our struggle. Nor were our reasons unique for finding it difficult to come together to pray.

The Schedule Dilemma

The No. 1 reason most couples cited for not praying together was conflicting schedules and the inability to find the time to do so.

For years, my husband and I cited this excuse too. He was up earlier and out the door for work while I was helping our daughter get ready for school, which made morning prayer together nearly impossible. And praying at night before bed was out of the question, as he would fall asleep much earlier than I would.

But we realized that we make the time to do what is most important to us, so we had to start getting creative. Other couples we talked to also struggled to find the time, but once they did, they found another difficulty arose.

The Intimidation Factor

In talking with many couples about why they don't pray together, the schedule is often the first excuse. But lying underneath that is the feeling that one's spirituality will be measured by the length or depth of one's prayers.

Many wives expect their husbands, as the spiritual heads of the household, to initiate prayer, to comfort their hearts through prayer when they are feeling misunderstood, to be their spiritual strength. And those kinds of expectations can be intimidating to any man.

Likewise, wives can feel intimidated too if they feel their prayers don't match the spiritual depth of their husbands. Some spouses tend to be verbose in their prayers, while others internalize their thoughts and pray silently to God. Prayer makes anyone feel vulnerable, especially if someone other than God is listening in.

The "Unseen" Battle

Praying with one's spouse is difficult because the enemy of our souls doesn't want us praying together. Anything that strengthens your bond with your spouse and causes you to come together in like-mindedness will be considered dangerous to Satan, and he'll do whatever it takes to prevent it—through distractions, misunderstandings, interruptions, feelings of intimidation, personal fatigue and so on.

That doesn't mean every time your prayer time is interrupted or needs to be postponed that it's the work of the devil. Nor does it mean each time your spouse needs to cancel or doesn't feel like praying, it's his or her fault, either. It just means that our battle "is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

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Just as there are many reasons why it's difficult for couples to pray together, there are equally as many ways to push through the barriers and incorporate a habit that will draw the two of you closer to one another and closer to God.

1. Talk to God first. Talk to God first about your desire to pray with your spouse. First John 5:14-15 assures us that "if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. So if we know that He hears whatever we ask, we know that we have whatever we asked of Him." So ask God for the time in your schedule, for wisdom in how to suggest it to your spouse, and that God will prepare the heart of your spouse to desire this time with you, as well.

2. Set a time. By setting an agreed-upon appointment for prayer with your spouse, both of you are more likely to keep it. But as with any appointment, there will be times you or your spouse will need to postpone or reschedule. That's life. So be flexible and extend grace.

3. Ease into it. There's a reason prayer is considered a spiritual discipline. And as with any habit or discipline, it will take work. So ease into it. You might even start with praying together once a week for a brief time, then gradually increase your prayer time to two or three times a week until it becomes a part of your daily schedule.

4. Keep it short. There is nothing wrong with limiting the time that the two of you can spend in prayer, especially when you're first starting out. Be respectful of each other's time and put parameters around how long your prayer time will be.

5. Keep it simple. You can keep it short and simple by limiting your prayer time together to the basic or most pressing needs on your heart. Respect his or her time and pray only about pressing needs that concern your family, such as job, health or financial issues, the salvation or spiritual

life of loved ones, the behavioral issues of your children and so on.

6. Keep it safe. Remove any possibility of intimidation by letting your spouse know that your prayer time together isn't an arena for judgment or assumption. In other words, anything that is prayed for is "safe" and won't be analyzed, critiqued, shared with others or brought up again in a nonsupportive way.

7. Keep it supportive. Praying with your spouse about sensitive issues in your marriage or situations in your past that may cause him or her to feel regret or remorse might not be best.

Save the heavier, deeply personal issues for God. He can handle them, and many times your spouse won't know what to do upon hearing prayers that might be directed at him or her and any trouble or anxiety he or she may be causing the marriage.

Aim for a goal of togetherness and encouragement as you pray. If your goal, after praying together, is that both you and your spouse emerge from that prayer time feeling more powerful and strengthened together, then you will know what to address with your spouse and what to keep for an extended prayer time with just you and God. As you begin praying together regularly, the Holy Spirit may impress upon your hearts to pray about deeper issues and, when that is the case, you both will simply be following His lead.

Finally, you can apply the principles of Philippians 2:1-2 as a guideline in praying together by being "like-minded, having the same love, being in unity with one mind." That one goal should be that each of you emerges from your prayer time together feeling stronger, more supported and more unified in order to take on the enemy of your souls.

Cindi McMenamin is a national women's conference and retreat speaker and the author of several books, including *When a*

Woman Inspires Her Husband, When a Mom Inspires Her Daughter *and* When Couples Walk Together, (which she co-authored with her husband of 27 years, Hugh). For more on Cindi's books and ministry, visit her website.

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