



Praying Together

Adapted from “Family Power” series by Wayne Murray

We live in a time when we have unique challenges in our relationships. This is particularly true in the home. In a recent article “Families That Pray Together, Stay Together”, one can see shared family religious practices used for the good.

The family that prays together really is more likely to stay together. A study conducted by the University of Virginia has found that prayer leads to intimacy and helps couples get closer and can help end disagreements. "The closer you get to the home, the more powerful the beneficial effects," W. Bradford Wilcox, a sociology professor and director of the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia, said in a press release. "It makes sense that those who think about, talk about and practice their beliefs in the home, those who bring home their reflections on their marriage, derive stronger effects from those beliefs, especially compared to those who simply attend church weekly."

The ability of forgiving each other was also found to lead to higher levels of quality in a relationship. "I think forgiveness is probably a pretty key dimension to the link between shared religious practice - prayer in particular - and success in the relationship," Wilcox added. "In past studies, forgiveness has been found to be a key influence on the success of relationships, home life and even workplace happiness."

The study also found that African American couples are more likely to have a strong spiritual unity. "Without prayer, black couples would be doing significantly worse than white couples. This study shows that religion narrows the racial divide in relationship quality in America," Wilcox said. "The vitality of African Americans' religious lives gives them an advantage over other Americans when it comes to relationships. This advantage puts them on par with other couples."¹

¹ “Families that Pray Together, Stay Together,” CBN News US, August 13, 2010, <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2010/august/families-that-pray-together-stay-together-/?mobile=false> (accessed July 26, 2017).

“Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. May not copy or download more than 500 consecutive verses of the ESV Bible or more than one half of any book of the ESV Bible.”

In a story recalled by John Trent in the book, *The Blessing*, one can see religion in the home used badly.

I first met Lynda on a blistering summer's day in Arizona. The temperature outside was over 105 degrees and most people wore shorts or cool cotton clothing – but not Lynda. A tall, attractive, 20 year only, she had on a heavy, long-sleeve black dress. In Arizona, people avoid wearing black during the summer because it soaks up the already scorching heat. Yet in talking with her in counseling over several weeks, I found out that summer or winter, day or night, black was the only color Lynda would wear. Lynda grew up with a cruel, abusive father, who was addicted to alcohol and watching horror movies. As early as the age of 5, Lynda was forced to stay in the family room and watch gruesome films. Then her father would laugh hysterically when she cried in fear. As the years passed, he continued exposing her to other aspects of the occult. Finally, when Lynda was in high school, her father died and the horror stopped, in part. As we talked, it wasn't the pictures of terror that had covered Lynda's heart with such darkness. They were terrible without question. But it was her father's **words** that had done the most damage. For all the hurtful things he did, what haunted her the most was his favorite nickname for her. It came right out of his horror films: "**demon daughter.**" That nickname burned its way into her heart, and even affected the way she dressed on a summer's day.²

² John Trent and Gary Smalley, *The Blessing*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), 44.

COURAGE

C1: After reading the previous stories, what does a family prayer time and spoken words mean to you?

C2: Read the following and answer the questions.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (ESV) Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

- What do these verses speak to you?
- According to these verses, who is responsible to train their children?
- What steps have you implemented to ensure the spiritual development of your children? If none, sit down and write out a plan including when you will begin their spiritual training.

C3: David Stoop stated in his article, “not very many Christian couples read the Bible together or pray together. The number I’ve heard is that only about 4% of Christian couples pray together daily. The reason might be related to the fact that not many Pastoral couples pray together daily. Their percentage is only about 6%. But the important take-away from both this study, and the Gallup study, is that if you want to strengthen your marriage—and even “divorce-proof” your marriage—develop a consistent pattern of reading the Bible together and praying together in your home.”³

³ David Stoop, “The Couple that Prays Together,” August 6, 2012, <http://drstoop.com/the-couple-that-prays-together/> (accessed July 26, 2017).



- Why do you think it is difficult for families to pray and study the Bible together?

- Write out your plan to ensure that your family is one that will pray and study the Bible together.

STRENGTH

S1: A family altar is a plan where one intentionally and strategically provides a regular opportunity for their families to pray and learn God’s Word together. Training one’s family cannot be done via spiritual osmosis.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (ESV)

- Do these verses sound like a suggestion or a command? If it is a command, are you fulfilling the command? If not when will you begin to fulfill the command?

S2: The Hebrew word for teach is a verb which can be translated to “sharpen”. The verb *šānan* is used of the sharpening of swords and of arrows (Deut 32:41; Isa 5:28; Ps 45:6; 120:4; Pr 25:18)⁴

- List the practices you have currently in place to sharpen your family.
- What is your plan going to be to ensure your family is fully prepared for warfare?

S3: In an article written by David Stoop he states:

I want to report the results of a fascinating research project led by Christopher Ellison at the University of Texas, San Antonio and reported in the “Journal of Marriage and Family”. But first, I want to look back to the late 1980’s when the Gallup people did a similar study on how personal faith impacted marital satisfaction. The results of that study were reported in a book written by a priest named Andrew Greeley. It was titled, *Faithful Attraction*.

⁴ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999) 943.

One of the outcomes of that study led to the National Association of Marriage Enhancement, in Phoenix, Arizona (www.nameonline.net) to report that when couples prayed together on a daily basis, less than 1% of those couples would end up getting a divorce. The numbers were 1 out of 1156. Pretty amazing when the divorce rate in the general population is reportedly around 50%.⁵

James 5:16 (ESV)

- Coupled with the data, what does this verse speak to you regarding the power of prayer?

⁵ David Stoop, "The Couple that Prays Together," August 6, 2012, <http://drstoop.com/the-couple-that-prays-together/> (accessed July 26, 2017).

ENDURANCE

E1: Read and answer the following questions.

Numbers 6:24-26 (ESV)

- What do these verses say to you about a priestly blessing?

- What should be your response?

E2: Genesis 49 shares the account of Jacob blessing his children. Read the words of Jacob in Genesis 49:1-29.

- What do these verses say to you about the importance of a generational blessing?

- What importance do you place on speaking words of affirmation to those in your family?

E3: People have many reasons why they do not want to have a family prayer time. Here are six reasons why some men feel they cannot do so:

1. We do not have time.
2. There is no regular time where we can all get together.
3. Our family is too small.
4. Our family is too young.
5. I am not good at leading a family prayer and/or altar time.
6. Some of our family members would not participate if we did have a prayer and/or altar time.

- Look over the list of the six objections for a family prayer and altar time. Is there an excuse you use that is not listed? What is it? Now, write out in your own words a response to each objection. Include the reasons why you can have a family prayer and altar time. Be careful not to put hard goals on yourselves. Begin small like once a week and make it fun, make it about God's Word, let everyone participate, and keep it short.