

A MARRIAGE GIFT THAT LASTS

Instead of crock pots, pizza warmers, and crystal candy dishes, here's a permanent marriage gift you can give your spouse.

There's a precious gift that you can give your husband or wife every day of your life together. It only costs time, but is worth more than anything money can buy: the gift of prayer.

It is not only your bodies and minds that marry, but your spirits. To pray *with* each other is great, but for couples who want to love their Creator together the greatest spiritual discipline is to pray *for* each other. You can give this gift while you're shaving or blow-drying your hair, driving to work or school, or relaxing in a comfortable chair. Let me explain why this gift is so valuable.

SIX REASONS TO PRAY

1. Praying is a way of getting help for the relationship. When we pray for each other we cooperate with the ongoing intercession of the Holy Spirit. "We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Ro. 8:26). Praying for our spouse is like stepping on an escalator. The Spirit already prays for our loved one; we merely join in. Prayer is the most direct way to get help for our marriage.

2. Prayer gives us a new viewpoint—the mind of Christ. Even during courtship it is easy to focus on our partner's faults and weaknesses. But as we pray "we regard no one from a worldly point of view" (2 Cor. 5:16). We begin to see our spouse as God does, with strength and potential to be prized. We gain God's hope for our partner. Even if our spouse does not seem to change, *we* learn to change in a crucial area: our personal attitude. We accept because we have been accepted. We love less conditionally because we have been loved by God unconditionally.

3. Prayer invigorates our relationship. Praying for each other is like oxygenating the relationship. We discover that Christ is not only the glue of the marriage covenant but the joy of it. The famous marriage passage in Ephesians 5

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describes the relationship of marriage to Christ. Husbands are called to "love . . . as Christ loved" (v. 25). Wives are called to respect as to the Lord (v. 22). Both are called to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (v. 21). What we do to our spouse is what we do to Jesus.

4. Prayer keeps our relationship clean. We are compelled to keep short accounts, to seek and give forgiveness. Jesus said that if you offer your gift at the altar "and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Mt. 5:23-24). This remembrance of sin is inspired by being in the presence of God in prayer. In turn, making things right brings us into deeper intimacy with God.

5. Praying brings good results. God does not promise to do exactly what we ask on our schedule. But no one has ever prayed in the name of Jesus and had *nothing happen!* Jesus is the Mediator not only between God and mankind but also between husband and wife. The most direct way to our beloved is through Him. He is influenced by our prayers but "filters" them according to what is best and strategic at the moment. And He will make sure that the results will be beneficial and not destructive.

6. Prayer meets our deepest needs. "If God knows what you need before you ask Him, then why do you need to ask Him?" "What if God knows that what you need most is Himself, and your asking is His

best opportunity of giving you Himself? A husband and wife need God more than they need each other. Our spouse's deep needs will be better met partly through us if our deep needs are first met by God.

A SHORT EXERCISE

Any one of these six reasons to pray for your spouse would be sufficient to give this gift every day of your marriage. And you can start today.

Find a quiet place to pray alone. Using Eph. 3:14-21, pray in this way:

- Pray for *strength in the inner person*: that "He may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (v. 16).

- Pray for *authentic spiritual life*, a person-to-person relationship with God: "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (v. 17).

- Pray for *a deeper experience of being loved by God*: "that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power . . . to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (v. 17-18). You can pray about this in terms of relationships, attitudes, goals, vocation, and personal self-esteem.

- Pray for *an assurance of being loved that is deeper than mere head-knowledge*: "and to know this love that surpasses knowledge" (v. 19).

- Pray for *a continuous filling of the presence and power of God*: "that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (v. 19).

- Pray for *a meaningful relationship with God's people* so that all of the above will be "together with all the saints" (v. 18).