

Who Me?...Pray with Her?

Down to earth questions and answers about praying as a couple

By Jim & Susan Vogt

➤ *Why bother?*

- As you probably know, 46-48% of marriages end in divorce (even among Catholics)

But did you also know that:

- For couples who **worship together** each Sunday **only about 20% divorce**

• For couples who also regularly **pray together at home** marital stability is even greater.

OK, so praying together can be divorce insurance but it sounds kind of awkward to me. Sure it's fine for priests and nuns or really holy people, but we're just a normal married couple.

➤ *But we go to Mass on Sunday and say grace before meals. Isn't that enough?*

That's great! Of course these prayer times are important and valuable, but they are different from couple prayer. There is a certain intimacy and vulnerability that comes from opening your heart to God in the presence of your spouse.

➤ *OK, we might give it a try, but where do we start?*

There is no wrong way to pray and the desire to try is prayer in itself. First some preliminary decisions:

1. Decide a time

Presumably both of you are very busy. Isn't everyone these days? So finding an agreeable, semi-reliable time is essential. After experimenting with several times of day my husband and I agreed on first thing in the morning (about 15-20 min. before the first child is expected to awake.) Since Jim is a morning person and I'm not, his job is to wake me and say it's time.

2. Decide a place

Anywhere will do, but it's nice to have a bible or whatever reading you plan to use handy. If clutter is endemic to your home at least find a place where you can cover it or turn your back on it. Personally, I like to have a window that I can look out of and see the sky. If it's dark, lighting a candle can be inspiring.

3. Decide how often

Ideally, daily is the way to go since there is a rhythm and regularity to it. In our own marriage, however, we have made peace with a less than ideal but workable goal. We commit to weekdays since that's more predictable than the weekends. We figure Mass takes care of Sunday. We also make exceptions for illness, being out of town, pregnancy (when almost any time felt nauseous), or unexpected interruptions like crying babies. It's not perfect,

but we feel we're doing OK if we meet our bottom line of "doing it more often than not". God wants our attention not our guilt.

➤ *So what do we do once we're sitting together?*

There are many ways to pray depending on your style and preferences. Here are a few:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Memorized prayers | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflection on today or tomorrow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reading scripture | <input type="checkbox"/> Guided meditation (from a book) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Writing in a journal | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading an inspirational book |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rosary or devotions | <input type="checkbox"/> Meditation on a spiritual theme |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Liturgy of the Hours | <input type="checkbox"/> Your own creation _____ |

Rank the above styles from 1 to 10 and find the ways that appeal to both of you.

➤ *Hey, we're not theologians. What do we do with the information above?*

Keep it simple. After trying to be creative and experimenting with a variety of styles my husband and I found that for regular couple prayer to work for us it had to be very simple. Eventually we settled on the following format:

One Model – 5 Easy Steps

1. Jim finds the scripture reading of the day (since he's more awake than I am)
2. One of us opens the prayer with a phrase like "Lord, we come before you at the start of our day."
3. One of us reads the scripture out loud.
4. We sit in silence for awhile. (We may think about the scripture, the upcoming day and how we will live it out, or perhaps put some thoughts in a journal). Inevitably for me, some time is spent daydreaming. I'm not proud of this, but I would do you no favor to suggest that you fail when not fully concentrating. Sometimes I just offer up the distraction and figure I'm honoring God by the effort I made just to show up.
5. At the appointed ending time, each of us makes a petition flowing from our silent prayer.

1. Can you simplify "simple"?

How about after the alarm goes off (before you get out of bed) hold hands and offer a prayer for a good day, help with a particular problem, or thanksgiving. Likewise, at night, after turning off the light, hold hands and offer a prayer of thanks for any thing that day.

➤ *What if my spouse just isn't into couple prayer?* (S)he is a good person and

we pray individually but we just aren't going to be able to do it together. Don't beat yourself up over this. Sure couple prayer is good and can bring you closer together, but God's love is bigger than any prayer form. Pray for each other in your own way. I know two women whose husbands did not want to join them in prayer so they called each other daily at an appointed time and prayed over the phone. Strange I suppose, but do what feeds you.

- *How do we find the scripture of the day or other books, after all we don't live in a church.*
- To find the scriptures of the day, check the Missalettes at church
 - Meditation books:
 - Daily Meditations (with Scripture) for Busy Couples by Dave Fortier and Patricia Robertson. ACTA Publications, 1-800-397-2282 \$8.95
 - Vision (or Action or Mission) 2000, Praying Scripture in a Contemporary Way by Mark Link, S.J., Tabor Publishing, Allen, TX \$8.95