

Spiritual Tip

Benefits Of Praying For Your Spouse

By Julie Baumgardner

Research by Frank Fincham, Director of the Florida State University Family Institute, showed that those who prayed for their partner showed a greater willingness to forgive their partner for a transgression, and other surveys of couples married 25 years or longer found that forgiveness was one of the top three most important characteristics of their relationship that allowed them to stay married.

Also, researchers looked at behavior changes. They took a group of college students and randomly assigned them to either keep a daily journal or pray for their partners. For those students who prayed, their partner's alcohol consumption was reduced by 50 percent. Lest you wonder if this was a one-time outcome, the study has been replicated.

Mr. Fincham and his group knew this was an important finding because alcohol is associated with bad things in relationships, including intimate partner violence and unfaithfulness. They even found that college students who were in committed dating relationships who prayed for their partner saw a decrease in infidelity.

But what about marriage?

It is basically inevitable that conflict will occur when two people come together in marriage. Initially, the couple is focused on shared goals, such as building a life together, but as time goes by, those goals may fall to the wayside as individual opportunities arise for each person, creating stress on the relationship.

Focusing on being grateful is one way to relieve that stress, and studies similar to Mr. Fincham's have shown that prayer increases gratitude. Mr. Fincham noted that being more grateful in life is associated with better mental health and better mental health is associated with better relationships.

"Our research shows that praying for your partner can bring you back to the common goals," Mr. Fincham said. "When people pray, they become one with their spouse. A subtle shift occurs. Praying regulates your emotion and it never leads to anger. 'Knee-mail' is social support available 24/7. We know that couples who have access to social support tend to negotiate their relationship affairs better than anyone else."

Incorporating prayer for your spouse into your life can be done in small steps. Start by taking a few minutes to focus on the things you like about your spouse, ask for help in relating to him or her, and be specific about what you would like to see happen in your relationship.

Be willing to forgive and to realize your need for forgiveness.

Try praying together and watch what happens in response. You just might be surprised.

* Julie Baumgardner is the Executive Director of First Things First, an organization dedicated to strengthening marriages and families through education, collaboration and mobilization.

Parenting Tip

(Here's a good one to teach your kids that will help them all their lives. Ed.)

The Best Tip Ever for Ending Procrastination

By Leo Babauta

Your first thought as you look at this article will be, "I'll read this later."

But don't. Let the urge to switch to a new task pass. Read this now.

It'll take you two minutes. It'll save you countless hours.

I've written the book on ending procrastination, but I've since come up with a very simple technique for beating everyone's favorite nemesis.

It is incredibly easy, but as with anything, it takes a little practice.

Try it now:

Identify the most important thing you have to do today.

Decide to do just the first little part of it - just the first minute, or even 30 seconds of it. Getting started is the only thing in the world that matters, so pick the tiny first thing to do.

Clear away distractions. Turn everything off. Close all computer programs. There should just be you and your task.

Sit there, and focus on getting started... Not doing the whole task, just starting.

Pay attention to your mind, as it starts to have urges to switch to another task. You will have urges to check email or Facebook or Twitter or your favorite website. You will want to play a game or make a call or do another task. Notice these urges.

But don't move. Notice the urges, but sit still, and let them pass. Urges build up in intensity, then pass, like a wave. Let each one pass.

Notice also your mind trying to justify not doing the task. Also let these self-rationalizing thoughts pass.

Now just take one small action to get started. As tiny a step as possible.

Get started, and the rest will flow.

Marriage Tip

How To Deepen Your Empathy For Your Spouse: Three Key Skills

By John Yzaguirre Claire Frazier-Yzaguirre

It's easy to fall into the trap of taking each other for granted or just putting up with each other.

One husband described this bluntly: "When I get home, my dog is the only one who seems excited to see me!"

Make this year a break-through year in your relationship by trying three powerful empathy skills to deepen your love for each other.

(1) Make your partner feel welcome in your heart.

Focus on those qualities and strengths that you honor and respect in your partner.

This simple focus will restore your partner's value in your heart. Joe, a successful physician, and Sylvia, a marketing executive, complained about their unfulfilling marriage and stressful lives. The more they talked, the clearer it became that they were living parallel lives. Their first challenge was to switch the focus away from themselves and onto each other. They acknowledged that they were taking each other for granted and that their jobs got the best of them. They ended up giving each other the leftovers.

They decided to switch their priorities and focus first on each other's feelings and needs and to practice daily the art of welcoming each other into their hearts. Today they are far more emotionally connected and happier.

Try this: Each day greet your partner with a genuine smile and some expression of affection.

(2) Become interested in how your spouse is feeling.

Remember when you were dating? You had an insatiable interest in each other's feelings and what would make each other happy. Over the years you may have shifted focus away from your partner and more towards yourself. Perhaps now you've come to expect that he or she should always be there to support you or you've gotten too task-oriented, hoping he or she will not interfere with your plans.

When you disregard your partner's feelings as unimportant, however, you are actually disregarding your partner.

Understanding your partner's feelings opens the door into his or her intimate emotional life and finding out what makes your partner happy is crucial. You don't have to be that insightful or sensitive to notice what makes your partner angry, sad, or worried - but what may be more elusive is what makes your partner happy.

Mary and Robert had been married for seven years. She complained that Robert liked to run the household as if it were his office. He was caring and responsible but always placed tasks

before people. He was convinced that he was a good husband because he worked very hard to provide for his family and had never cheated on his wife or done anything immoral or illegal. He couldn't understand why Mary was unhappy with him. After all, he thought, wasn't he hardworking, loyal, honest, and responsible? Mary eventually confronted him: "Yes, Robert, you have all those qualities, but you don't give me what I want." Throughout their marriage he played the role of the good husband, according to himself.

Finally he realized that he was a good husband only if Mary felt loved by him. Mary wanted a husband that focused first on loving her and the kids and then on completing tasks. He also discovered that Mary felt loved by him when he understood and valued her feelings.

Try this once a week: Ask your partner what you could do during that week to bring him or her joy.

(3) Validate your partner's feelings.

Validating your partner's feelings means valuing what he or she is feeling and showing it through supportive feedback. You don't need to analyze or judge the validity of those feelings but simply appreciate that he or she shared them.

Mark and Tiffany had difficulty validating each other's feelings. Their attempts to communicate with each other usually followed a predictable pattern of failure. When Tiffany shared anger, worry, or sadness, Mark tried

to help her by offering advice on how to solve or prevent the situation that caused those negative feelings. Tiffany wanted to feel understood.

Whenever Mark gave her unsolicited advice, she became upset with him. Mark, in turn, felt upset that she didn't appreciate his genuine desire to help with her problem and began to withdraw emotionally. Tiffany felt his detachment and began to resent and criticize his emotional insensitivity and shared her feelings again only with reluctance. Fortunately they broke this negative cycle by learning to validate each other's feelings. Mark began to validate Tiffany by saying, "I can see how upsetting that was for you. Is there anything that I can do to help you now?" Now their sharing leads to greater emotional intimacy.

Try this: When your partner shares feelings with you, value what he or she shared, without offering solutions or unsolicited advice.

(From "Thriving Marriages" by John Yzaguirre, Ph.D., and Claire Frazier-Yzaguirre, M.Div., M.F.T, New City Press, 2004.

<http://www.thrivingfamilies.com/>)

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