

Spiritual Tip

The Power of Grateful Prayers

By Rick Warren

In Philippians 4:6-7 we find one of the most difficult verses in the entire Bible to obey: “Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace” (NLT).

It's not easy to stop worrying about the often-scary, everyday parts of our lives, but God tells us how in the next part of the verse: “Pray about everything ... and thank him for all he has done.” Grateful prayer brings peace. God says, when you start to worry, pray.

Parents understand the power of grateful prayers. Most parents wouldn't appreciate their children always making requests without saying “thank you” for what they've already received. God sees it the same way. He wants us to ask him for what we need and want. More than 20 times in the New Testament, we're told to “ask” him. But he wants us to ask with gratefulness.

The Bible urges us to be specific in our requests — and our praises. Instead of a simple “thank you for everything,” he wants us to tell him what we're grateful for. When I say to my wife, “I'm so grateful for you,” she tells me to be specific. She likes to hear what I appreciate about her and what I'm grateful for about her. God does, too. So when you pray, tell God what you're thankful for. Prayer is one of the most important ways we tell God “thank you.”

Thanking God in advance is a big step of faith. When we have the faith to thank God ahead of time, miracles happen. The more thankful we are, the more God works in our lives. The Bible says that God inhabits the praise of his people. He uses our thanksgiving as an instrument of power in our lives.

So, what are you thankful for?

Talk It Over

- Why do you think gratitude is so important for our spiritual lives?
- Being as specific as possible, for what are you thankful to God? Spend some time in prayer thanking God for those things.
- What are some ways you believe God will bless you in the future? Thank God for those things — even before they happen.

Parenting Tip

Child Argues With Everything

By John Rosemond

Question: What suggestions do you have for disciplining a 7-year-old girl who argues with every single thing her parents say? We don't try to reason with her and we frequently say “Because I said so” but she seems absolutely incapable of simply doing what we tell her to do. This is driving us to the brink of insanity! Thank you for any suggestions.

Answer: I don't have suggestions. I have a solution. But first, children argue because parents explain. This is slightly different from trying to reason with a child, so bear with me.

Today's parents — and of course I speak generally — feel some need to be egalitarian with their children. One unconscious symptom of this is the habit many parents have of stooping down to child-level when they give instructions. The position suggests that parent and child are peers. It also looks as if the parent is pleading with the child as opposed to speaking authoritatively. Why do parents do this? Because parenting “experts” have said that is the right and proper position from which to address children. I say it's nothing short of stupid. To properly claim your natural authority over your child, you must look and act the part. Stooping doesn't get it.

A second symptom is the tendency of today's parents to give passive instructions along with explanations, as in (after stooping and grabbing one's knees), “Honey, it would really be helpful if you would stop what you're doing and pick these toys up for Mommy so I can vacuum this room.” In this example, the instruction isn't an instruction at all. It's a suggestion.

Furthermore, the explanation invites push-back, also known as argument. The child shouts, “I was here first and why can't you vacuum later and you always want me to move my stuff!” And the mother makes another attempt to be nice and the child pushes back again and she is suddenly, as you so vividly put it, “on the brink of insanity.” Giving explanations is another example of stupid advice from parenting “experts.”

Train yourself to give instructions (a) from an upright, authoritative position and (b) without explanations, as in, “I want you to pick up these toys and move them to another room.” When the child whines, “But why?” answer with “Because I said so.” Not “frequently,” but every single time. Calmly, mind you, as if you're answering “What's the weather like outside?” And then turn and walk away. Pull the plug on the power struggle.

As for your daughter's arguing, she's going to need a consequence to help her focus on and remember the new way of doing things. Tell her that a parenting expert told you that arguing means she's too tired to remember her manners, and so every time she argues during the day, she has to go to bed thirty minutes earlier that evening. Enforce this dispassionately and within a couple of weeks, you should be further back from the brink of insanity than you have been in several years.

Marriage Tip

Sometimes Sex is Just Sex

By Mark Gungor

Many married people are not having an active sex life for no other reason than they "don't feel like it" - meaning they think they have to feel this great desire and/or a huge emotional connection at the front end or sex isn't going to happen. Now, I'll dispel this myth regarding the requirement of a huge emotional connection.

Women, more often than men, get hung up on this one and think they have to have all these warm and fuzzy emotions to feel like they can get physical with their husbands. I'm not saying that you always have sex with no emotion or connection - that would not be a healthy relationship. But what I am saying is that sometimes sex can just be sex. The joining together of a husband and wife to get close to each other, relieve stress, enjoy the release and just have a good time enjoying one another - no romance novel level of desire or surge of emotions required! Again, much of this thinking comes from the media - with chick flicks being a huge culprit.

There are a couple of things that you must understand about Hollywood sex... first, it is not real; they are actors and they are being paid to act! Second, and probably most important, a very high percentage of the time (probably like 98%) movie and TV sex is not in the context of marriage - it is either extramarital because it is an affair, or it is premarital sex. In both cases the emotions and desire

typically run very high and strong. I hate to break the bad news to you, but what Hollywood shows us is not real, everyday married sex.

After you've been together for a bunch of years, not every time is going to be the "ground shaking, heaven bending down to kiss the earth, lights exploding from the sky and angels singing the hallelujah chorus" encounter! Yet that is exactly what so many people foolishly expect and require.

When we are talking about the emotional component of sex there are a couple of different situations to consider here - first time married sex and sex outside of marriage. First, when you experience sex in the early stage of marriage, you are typically filled with high levels of desire and emotional connection - that's just the way it is. The buzz and rush are there because of the newness and excitement, and it should be that way.

All that desire and emotion go a long way in bonding a brand new husband and wife together. The thing to know and remember is that it just doesn't stay that way, and when you set that as your standard, you are in trouble. After a while the honeymoon does wear off and you eventually grow into a stage where it is more of the safe, comfortable married sex that is still very enjoyable, fun and pleasurable. It just isn't going to be the Fourth of July experience with fireworks and bombs bursting in air every single time.

But for people who experience premarital sex (which so many people do, though they should be waiting until marriage) or extramarital sex through

affairs, it can become a real problem because the desire/emotion component is especially strong and potent due to the forbidden and naughty nature of that type of sexual encounter.

Often men and women go from relationship to relationship, and move from one highly charged sexual tryst to the next. People actually condition themselves to the euphoria and the high level of desire and emotion if all of their sexual experiences are this context. Therefore, when they get married and the initial high and excitement is no longer there, they don't want to have sex, think it's boring or they go looking for that buzz elsewhere in an illicit relationship or pornography. It is another important reason why sex outside of marriage is such a bad idea.

Whether or not you start your marriage as virgins or have had sexual experiences outside of marriage, when you think the emotional rush that you feel in a new sexual relationship is the norm and then combine that with the nonsense of the media telling us what sex is "supposed" to be like, it's a recipe for disappointment and difficulty.

In a long-term, committed, marriage sometimes one or both of you will experience all those great feelings when you engage in sex, but it's certainly not every time. If you become reliant and dependent on that desire/emotion cocktail, and if one or both ingredients are not there consistently, you'll end up believing there is something wrong with you, your spouse or your love life.

The truth of the matter is there is nothing wrong. As I said, sometimes sex is just sex; it's what you do when you are married. Just like cleaning the toilet is what you do to keep your house clean...and I bet you don't have this great desire or huge emotional connection to scrubbing the porcelain! You do it because it needs to be done and that's the way it is with married sex... it does need to be done! It's the glue that God gave us to bond us to one another. The Bible is very clear that it is your responsibility as a spouse.

Understand that there is no need for all this desire and emotion nonsense. Don't feel badly if you aren't overwhelmed by all the over-the-moon feelings and passion ahead of time. There is nothing wrong with you. If you can enjoy sex once you start and have a good time, that's all that matters.

Just break the mindset that you won't do it unless you feel like it. Let not your hearts be troubled. Just enjoy the deal without all the fuss and worry over the desire and emotion. It's actually a trap, that if you aren't careful, you can get caught in and you, your spouse and your relationship will suffer.

Compliments of the District 1 Marriage and Family Ministry, FFWPU

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