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AUTHOR OF *The Power of a Praying® Wife*

Praying
Through
THE
Deeper Issues
OF
Marriage



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CONTENTS



What Are the Deeper Issues and How Can I Avoid Them?	5
1. If Communication Breaks Down	29
2. If Anger, Rudeness, or Abuse Poisons Your Relationship	51
3. If Forgiveness Doesn't Come Easy	69
4. If Depression or Negative Emotions Spoil the Atmosphere	85
5. If Children Start to Dominate Your Lives	103
6. If Finances Get out of Control	117
7. If Addictions or Other Destructive Behaviors Manifest	135
8. If Outside Influences Pollute Your Sexual Relationship	149
9. If Hardness of Heart Causes Love to Die	167
10. If You Are No Longer Each Other's Top Priority	181
11. If the "D" Word Becomes an Option	195
12. If Infidelity Shakes Your Foundation	209
13. If One of You Decides to Leave Home	225
14. If Hope Seems Lost and You Need a Miracle	237
Plan to Be a Success Story	251

If COMMUNICATION BREAKS DOWN



The most difficult thing about a marriage is that there are *two* people in it. And we all know that the problem is usually with the other person. If we were just trying to work things out by ourselves, we could certainly do a good job of it, but we have to fit our dreams, desires, hopes, abilities, mind-sets, assumptions, needs, and habits in with those of our spouse. And that takes three things: Communication, communication, and communication.

Verbally, emotionally, and physically.

The foundation of a good marriage that will last a lifetime has to be built by communication. It is the way intimacy is established. Anytime communication is shut off, intimacy suffers greatly. And a marriage without intimacy is dying. You and your spouse must each be able to have a sense of closeness in your marriage—an assurance you are on the same team. Without good communication, you won't have that.

The closest relationship you will ever have is with your spouse because you share everything. Not being able to communicate with him (her)—or he (she) not being able to communicate with you—paves the way for an intolerable existence. Not knowing what your spouse is thinking or feeling makes building a life together impossible. If neither of you know what the other's internal plans and visions are for the future, how can you move into it together?

How can you show your commitment to the relationship if you never

share that with your spouse? How do you get the sense that you are always going to be there for each other if you don't talk? If you don't express your fears and inner turmoil, how can you receive the encouragement you need? If there isn't good verbal communication, then there isn't an emotional connection, and that means there won't be good physical intimacy, either. That part of your life together will then become an act without feeling or passion. If *one* of you believes that the communication is not good in your relationship, then some changes have to be made.

Time for a Change

Have you ever felt as though your life is stuck in one place? That you cannot move beyond where you are? Things can become that way in a marriage too. You can get into a rut. You can feel stuck in a relationship that isn't growing, isn't getting better, and isn't going anywhere. And only one of you—or perhaps neither of you—is willing to change anything in order to make it better.

God is a God of change. Although *He* is unchanging—*He* is the same yesterday, today, and forever—*He* doesn't want *us* to be like that. That's because *He* doesn't *need* to change. *We do. He is perfect. We're not.* He wants us to always be changing because He desires that we become more and more like Him. If we are resistant to being changed, then we are resistant to God because God is all about changing *us*.

If one or both people in a marriage are resistant to the changing, transforming, and perfecting work of the Holy Spirit, then there are certain to be bad habits that develop. Our flesh is like that—it's always headed toward the destructive. The longer these bad habits go on, the more entrenched they become. But the good news is that any stronghold of bad habits can be broken in an instant by the power of God, no matter how long they have been there. Even bad habits with regard to communication in your marriage can be completely eliminated. Anyone can learn to communicate better if they are willing to make the effort.

Marriage is not something you enter into to see what you can get *out* of it. It's something you ask yourself every day what you can put *into* it. Marriage is a covenant relationship, which means it is supposed to be a commitment until death parts us. Unfortunately, too often the *marriage* dies before the *people* in them do. *Getting* married is just the very beginning of

your relationship. *Being* married frees you to feel secure enough to let your true self show—for better or for worse—so you can see where you need God’s healing and transformation. *Staying* married depends on you both being able to communicate with one another.

The only way you can keep growing together and not apart is by good communication. What other way can love and respect be shown? How else can you really be on the same team? What would happen in a football game if the quarterback never communicated with the rest of the team? It would be a disaster. They would never reach their goal. They would never experience victory. It’s the same in a marriage. That’s why it is entirely selfish and destructive to refuse to communicate with your spouse for whatever reason.

Right from the Start

From the beginning God had the marriage relationship in mind. Even though Adam was able to communicate with God every day, God saw that this wasn’t enough. God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him” (Genesis 2:18). He could have created another man so Adam would have a golfing buddy, but He didn’t. He created a woman who was “comparable to him.” That means she wasn’t merely an airhead with a great body. She *complemented* him. She *helped* him. And he needed her *companionship* and *support*. He needed someone to *communicate* with him on his level. If Adam could have done it all by himself, he wouldn’t have needed Eve.

God made Eve from the rib He took out of Adam (Genesis 2:21-22). That means a man will always have something missing without his wife. She completes him. And, likewise, a woman has a natural sense of belonging at a man’s side as his support. I’ve known a number of single men and women for years who are now in their sixties and have never married, and no matter how many friends they had in their life, they still suffered with bouts of severe loneliness. And this only increased with age. I know there are exceptions to that, such as the men and women who have devoted their lives to God’s service and because of His grace didn’t suffer with that kind of loneliness. But most single people *do* struggle with it. Right from the start God recognized a man’s and a woman’s deep need to commune with one another.

I took a survey of women before I wrote *The Power of a Praying Husband*, and one of the most important things women wanted was that their husbands would talk to them more. This is a very big issue in a marriage. You may have been married 30 years to a poor communicator—or you may be one yourself—but God can change both of you. We *all* can learn to communicate better.

I know a couple who spend more time in silence than they do talking. They argue so much when they talk that they have chosen to not communicate at all. This is an unnatural way to live. If you have that kind of situation, you are not fulfilling the plan God has for your marriage. Communication is more about *servicing God's will* than it is your own. It's more about doing *what's right* than it is deciding *who's right*. If you want to glorify God in your marriage, pray that the two of you will have good communication. That takes two hearts caring enough about one another to refuse to be selfish.

If your husband (wife) doesn't want to change right now, then be glad that God can change *you first* while you pray for the Holy Spirit to work on *him (her)*. God can help *you* to not be so easily hurt by your spouse's poor communication skills. The Lord can give *you* such joy and excitement about *your* life in Him that you don't feel rejected when your husband (wife) is silent. If *you* are the one who has trouble communicating, ask God to give you a heart for your spouse that desires to express your love and thoughts openly.

You and your spouse became one in God's eyes the day you were married (Ephesians 5:31), but there is still a process of becoming one in your everyday lives together from then on. The day-to-day living out of this concept of total unity doesn't just happen; it takes time and effort. *Both* husband and wife have to compromise in order to do it. When one person stops putting forth any effort to talk things out or make the marriage better, it becomes a nightmare for the other. If only one is communicating and the other is not, the marriage is headed for serious problems. One person trying to carry the entire weight of a marriage relationship will work for only so long.

The Reason I Know How Important Communication Is

If you're like me and have already experienced divorce, you know the horrible pain of it and don't want to ever go through it again. You also know that when you are contemplating a divorce, you make a list in your

mind of all the things that will change, and you ask yourself, *Is it worth it? Do the gains balance out the losses?* If communication is bad—or if the only communication is negative—you end up thinking you don't have much to lose and everything to gain.

When I was married the first time, before I became a believer, there was no communication in our relationship at all. Not only were we not on the same page, we weren't even in the same book. I came to the point where I felt as though I were living in hell, and I was ready to give up anything in order to feel hope, relief, and some degree of peace again. I wanted out so badly that I walked away from everything, taking only the possessions I brought into the marriage in the first place, even though I worked for two years to support him while he stayed home and watched TV. I didn't want to live another day in that slow death, and I saw no way whatsoever that life could ever be any different.

In his culture, men did not lift a finger to help around the house—or anywhere else, for that matter. Nor did they work, apparently. I found that I could not physically work 10- to 12-hour days and then come home to do *all* the cooking and *all* the cleaning because that was what he demanded. He daily evaluated my performance and recited the ways I had not lived up to the standards of his mother. He wanted me to be her and I just couldn't. He spent hours every day at her house while I worked, and he would still be there when I came home at night. It was like living alone again, except not as much fun. And I wasn't strong enough to take the constant criticism without any encouragement or sense of being loved. In his defense, he was probably trying to make me into the wife he wanted, and I was not a whole enough person at that time to be able to be all that.

He wasn't a believer, and he became extremely angry when he found out I had become one. After we had been married less than a year, I started going to church by myself every Sunday, which he thought was a waste of time when I could be cleaning or working another job to support him. One Sunday afternoon I came home from church feeling especially uplifted in my spirit, and I tried to talk to him about the Lord. He became irate and told me in a loud and threatening voice that I was forbidden to ever speak the name of Jesus in *his* house again and never as long as I was with *him*. It was the final straw that broke the back of my thinly spined marriage. I had been hanging on to the edge of a cliff by a delicate branch and had

finally found hope and a reason to live, and now he was going to chop off the branch. It was like cutting off the air I breathed.

Soon after that I decided to do what he demanded and never speak the name of Jesus in *his* house or in *his* presence again. That meant, of course, I had to leave his house and his presence. After I left him I felt free to not only breathe, but to speak the name of Jesus whenever I wanted. It was liberating.

When I got married again, it was different. The most important difference being that my second husband, Michael, was a believer. We went to church together. We prayed together. We went to Christian marriage counselors together. So there was always hope for change in both of us. And I believed that any problems we had could be easily fixed.

However, we each came into the marriage with deep insecurities. He felt like a failure because he couldn't live up to his mother's expectations. I felt like a failure because my mentally ill mother had no expectations of me whatsoever. When she told me repeatedly that I was worthless and would never amount to anything, I had no reason to doubt her, even though I desperately looked for one. So my husband was *angry* and depressed. I was *anxious* and depressed. We were two damaged people, and hurting each other was easy. Although we communicated well in the beginning, there would be lapses where he would lash out in anger and I thought he was being cruel, so I would withdraw out of hurt, causing him to believe I didn't care. Communication became more and more difficult as time went on, and it was miserable.

When our marriage came to the ultimate crisis point after years like this, I wanted to leave. But in prayer about it one day, the Lord showed me that if I would pray for my husband every day the way God wanted me to, He would use me as an instrument of healing and deliverance for our marriage. I said yes to that and learned to pray the way the Lord was showing me. As I did, I began to see changes—especially in our communication. It wasn't an overnight transformation. It was more like a day by day moving into the territory God had for us to conquer and not giving up when there were times of setback.

The suffering that happens in an unhappy marriage is horrendous because there is no escape. Unless you get a divorce and dissolve the relationship completely, you are stuck there and have to work it out. If your spouse isn't

willing to do anything to make it better, it is a nightmare. That's why praying about having good communication is so important. Yes, it's very good to be reading the Word of God and attending church where there is good Bible teaching, but I've seen too many marriages in the church end in divorce. I've even seen too many people who were great Bible teachers leave their husbands or wives. I've also seen marriages between people who never go to church or read the Bible last a lifetime. So there has to be more to saving a marriage than any kind of pat answer like "read the Word and stay in church." Even though I believe these two things are a must, you still have to do more. You have to pray and pray. And you have to pray specifically about your communication, because without that your marriage doesn't have a chance. I want to share specifically some ways I learned to pray about our communication that made a difference in our relationship.

Pray That You Can Just Be Nice

How many marriages could be saved if both the husband and wife would just be nice to one another? It's called common decency. The Bible says, "Love edifies" (1 Corinthians 8:1). That means love builds up and makes stronger. Love doesn't speak mean-spirited and sarcastic words that tear down. *What* we say and the *manner* in which we say it can either communicate love or total disregard. Loveless words of criticism destroy a marriage relationship, so we have to ask ourselves if the satisfaction derived from saying them is really worth the hurt and destruction they cause. God doesn't think so. He says that real love "does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil" (1 Corinthians 13:5). There is no reason to treat your spouse badly. If you want to improve your marriage, just being nice is a good place to start.

When a person is not treated well by their spouse, it keeps them from feeling safe enough to share their deepest thoughts and emotions, and this shuts off an important part of their relationship. If you have already fallen into bad habits of critical and insensitive speech toward your spouse, repent of that now and ask God to change your heart. If your husband (wife) frequently directs negative and critical speech toward *you*, pray for an awakening in him (her). Pray that the grave consequences of such careless words will be revealed to his (her) understanding. I know it may seem pointless to do anything if *you* are the only one making the effort and your spouse

seems to be doing nothing, but I have found that when *you* do the right thing, even when your spouse doesn't, God blesses *you*. And that makes a big difference.

Have you seen couples who are married but seem like strangers? I used to know a couple who must have memorized the old saying, "If you can't say something nice, then don't say anything" because they never said anything. At least not to each other. Theirs was a lifeless marriage. When one spouse is emotionally distant or noncommunicative, it forces the other to have to endure all struggles alone. When there is no compatibility, there is no one with whom to share life. And when some people realize that they cannot rely on their spouse to come through with friendship and emotional support, it becomes too easy to turn to another person who will. If you can't be nice, you can't be friends, and your marriage will be an endurance test.

Friends enjoy being with one another. They don't act like strangers. They don't say words to bring the other down and destroy any hope or joy. If you and your husband (wife) have not been good in the friendship department, ask God to help you change your ways. If you have been friends all along, ask God to show you how to be better friends than you have ever been in the past.

God says our words have power. If "death and life are in the power of the tongue," then we must choose our words carefully (Proverbs 18:21). Pray that God will help you and your spouse speak words to each other that are kind, loving, positive, good, uplifting, encouraging, and life-giving. Ask God to be in charge of your marriage, and tell Him you will do whatever it takes to see that it becomes all it was intended to be. Even if it means being nice when you don't feel like it.

Pray That You Will Always Be Truthful and Honest

A marriage absolutely must be based on trust. If you can't trust each other, then whom can you trust? That's why lying to your spouse is one of the worst things you can do to damage your relationship. The Bible says clearly, "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds" (Colossians 3:9). Every lie has dangerous and far-reaching consequences. "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies will not escape" (Proverbs 19:5). The worst consequence is that lying distances you from God. "He who tells lies shall not continue in my

presence” (Psalm 101:7). Lying also distances you from one another and stops the flow of good things God has for you personally.

In a marriage, it’s important to be both *truthful* and *honest*. And there is a difference between the two. When you tell a lie, you are not truthful, but it is possible to tell the truth and still not be honest. That happens when you are not forthcoming with the *whole* truth. You may not have actually told a lie, but you didn’t reveal everything you needed to reveal. Now, you don’t need to reveal every single thing to every person you see, because then no one would want to be around you. But you do need to be forthcoming with your spouse, because he (she) will be with you for the rest of your life.

You know if you have told a lie or not, but sometimes you can inadvertently be less than honest about your true feelings because you don’t know how to express them fully. You are not entirely honest if you haven’t shared your feelings and thoughts. *A person who never communicates with their spouse cannot be completely honest because total honesty requires good communication.* Of course, it’s not good to be expressing every thought you have every moment you have one even with your spouse, because then he (she) won’t want to be around you either. But God will give you discernment about that too, if you ask Him for it.

Here are some things to remember about being honest:

1. Be honest about how you feel regarding the things your spouse does. You have to express your feelings when something seriously bothers you about your spouse’s actions. If you are not honest with him (her) about this, nothing will ever change. Then bitterness and anger will build up in your heart and lead to resentment and unforgiveness. You not only have to know *what* to say, but *when* to say it. And God will always be the best judge of that. So anytime you need to say something important to your husband (wife) that may be hard to hear, ask God to show you the right time to say it. Ask Him to prepare your spouse’s heart to receive it and give you the perfect words to say so you can speak “the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). The Bible says that there is “a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Ecclesiastes 3:7). Ask God to help you know the difference between the two.

2. Be honest about the way you see things. It’s important for each of you to share your thoughts, plans, fears, concerns, hopes, and dreams for the future. You have to get these things out of your heart and into the open. Job said, “I will speak, that I may find relief” (Job 32:20). And that’s exactly

what you will find too. If your husband (wife) is the kind of person with whom it's difficult to communicate, ask God to break down that barrier in his (her) heart. Outside of going to a counselor who will be able to help you both open up and talk, you need a move of the Holy Spirit to do that, so pray for one. A husband and wife are constantly adjusting to each other in their marriage because no two people *are* the same or *stay* the same. (Even though at times it may seem as though nothing ever changes.) But they can never adjust properly to each other if they don't know what adjustments to make. If you are not honest with your spouse about these things, you can easily make wrong assumptions and incorrect adjustments.

3. *Be honest about your past.* When I first realized that Michael and I were getting serious, I knew I couldn't go any further in my relationship with him without being completely forthcoming about my past. But before I told him everything, I prayed that God would prepare his heart to receive it and give me the right words and time to say it.

He already knew about my mother, even though he didn't fully comprehend the seriousness of her mental illness until after we were married and we went to visit my parents for a weekend. But there were other things I had to tell him, and I didn't know whether he would totally reject me because of them. But he was completely accepting of what I told him and said it didn't change his mind about me at all. It was a great relief to get it out in the open and off my shoulders.

I've known other people who had secrets from their past that they never revealed to their spouse until well after they were married, and this late revelation shook the level of trust that had been established early on. Being totally honest about your past helps you to live more successfully in the present. It helps you to better move into the future God has for you. You don't want to always be looking over your shoulder to see if something is coming back to haunt you. The sooner you are forthcoming, the better.

4. *Be honest about everything you are doing.* I know a man who is constantly lying to his wife about the things he does. They don't have a close relationship, and his dishonesty could very well lead to a divorce in the future. Every lie breaks down trust. And when a husband or wife loses trust, the foundation of their marriage crumbles. Of course, trust can be restored again when the one who is lying confesses and truly repents. If you have to lie about what you are doing, then your priorities are completely

out of order. You are not putting God first and your husband (wife) second above all else.

TEN THINGS THAT ARE TRUE
ABOUT TELLING THE TRUTH

1. ***Truth is what you must choose to think about.*** “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true...meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).
2. ***Truth is a decision you make about the words you speak.*** “My mouth will speak truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips” (Proverbs 8:7).
3. ***Truth is the way you choose to walk.*** “I have chosen the way of truth; Your judgments I have laid before me” (Psalm 119:30).
4. ***Truth liberates you.*** “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).
5. ***Truth protects you.*** “Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness” (Ephesians 6:14).
6. ***Truth purifies your soul.*** “Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:22).
7. ***Truth pleases God.*** “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:4).
8. ***Truth can be branded in your heart.*** “Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart” (Proverbs 3:3).
9. ***Truth brings you into God’s light.*** “He who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God” (John 3:21).
10. ***Truth in your heart invites a greater sense of God’s presence when you pray.*** “The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth” (Psalm 145:18).

Pray That God's Love Will Be Poured into Your Heart

The best way to have good communication with your spouse is to first be in good communication with God. If it's true that "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34), then you have to ask God to fill your heart abundantly with His love every day so that the words you speak are loving. The Bible says that "no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (James 3:8). Left to ourselves, we will naturally say hurtful and destructive words. The Bible also says, "The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD" (Proverbs 16:1). We can prepare our heart by being in the presence of God in prayer, in worship, and by reading His Word.

When truth is hard to hear in a marriage, ask God for a greater portion of His love with which to communicate it. Whenever you speak from a bad attitude or a loveless heart, it cuts off your spouse's ability to hear what you're saying. Ask God to give you wisdom to say the right things the right way. "The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips" (Proverbs 16:23). When you make an effort to speak words that communicate love, it pays off. It pleases God, and there is always great reward in that.

Don't let animosity swell up and become a flood pouring over your relationship. Dam up arguments with honest communication and loving words. "The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts" (Proverbs 17:14). Ask God to make your heart so filled with His love that your words will be like healing waters of encouragement and restoration instead of an open floodgate that produces serious water damage.

Pray That You Can Understand the Signs

We have a little white long-haired Chihuahua. He is actually my daughter's dog, but she wasn't able to take him with her when she moved out because of her work and travel schedule. I guess that makes him our grand-dog. His name is Wrigley, but Michael and I call him "The Great I Want." That's because unless he is sleeping, Wrigley always wants something. Wrigley communicates his wants by sitting up on his hind legs and putting his paws together as though he is praying, and he waves them up and down while relentlessly squeaking. He can balance that way for longer than you

ever dreamed possible. You can ignore the sitting up and the praying hands, but there is no way you are going to ignore the squeaking. It will drive you crazy. The only way to get him to stop is to ask him simple questions about all the things he usually wants and see how many times his paws go up and down. Because he always wants *everything*, his paws will go up and down at least one or two times for anything you say. There are key words we have to speak, such as “Outside?” “Dinner?” “Hold you?” “Bed?” “Blanket?” “Bone?” “Biscuit?” “Toy?” “Walk?” “Ride?” He understands all of these perfectly.

Do you want to go *outside*? Do you want *dinner*? Do you want me to *hold you*? Do you want a *biscuit*? Do you want your *bone*? Do you want to go for a *ride*? Actually, we’ve learned not to say “ride” unless we are committed to taking him on one. Because no matter how much he needs to go “outside” or how hungry he is for “dinner,” a “ride” takes precedent over everything. And once you said the “R” word, if you didn’t follow through you would be squeaked to death.

When you ask Wrigley these questions, you have to be very discerning as to how many times his praying paws go up and down. One time for “bone,” two times for “dinner,” two times for “hold you.” And so on through the entire cycle because all his wants are relative. The word that gets the greatest up and down movement of the praying paws indicates what he wants most. The only word he doesn’t respond to is “bath.” I tried throwing that word in a couple times, and Wrigley was frozen in silence with a look on his face that said *Don’t see me. Don’t see me.* One time when he desperately had to go outside, he waved his paws at least six times in the space of two seconds and we knew it was an emergency.

The thing is, the expression on Wrigley’s face never changes when he is doing his praying paws, so you cannot tell by looking at his face what he wants. And his squeaks all have the same intensity. It’s the subtle signals in his body language that you have to take into consideration in order to discern what it is he is after.

The point in all this is that sometimes we have to look very carefully at the body language of our spouse in order to figure out what he (she) wants and what is going on inside him (her). We have to ask the right questions and be able to discern his (her) reaction to them. We have to read between the lines. Ask God to enable you to recognize the vital signs in your husband

(wife). Ask God to help *you* communicate so clearly that your husband (wife) doesn't have to search for helpful signs in your body language.

Pray That You Will Enjoy Doing Things Together

What do you and your husband (wife) like to do together? If you can think of something, that's good. But if you are struggling to think of even one thing, then this is a problem for your relationship. In order to have good communication you must have things you enjoy doing together, even if it's something as simple as sitting together watching the sunset or reading books or taking walks or going out to eat. If you work together, you still need something to do together outside of work.

My husband and I tried golfing together for a short period of time. We tried tennis too. But my husband's goal was to win at all costs and mine was to just have fun. I didn't like risking my life trying to have fun. So we gave that up.

At this stage in our lives, due to a miraculous answer to my husband's prayers, we both like football. (Watching, not playing.) He bought me a book called *Football for Dummies*, took me to games, and was willing to explain the same thing over and over and over until I got it. Not an easy task for an impatient type A, but this was important to him and so he persevered. And it paid off because I love the game. Now we watch football games together on TV and attend them in person when our team is in town. If you knew how much I used to think that this was the biggest waste of time, you would realize how miraculous this is. Michael and I had *both* been praying that we would have something we like to do together. And *he* won. I still have to shop alone.

Pray That You Will Grow Closer with Each New Stage of Life

There are many stages of life and marriage, and you need to pray that you and your spouse will grow together through them instead of apart. You don't want to wake up one morning and find that you're in bed with a stranger and realize that he (she) is the person you married. Sometimes situations change. Perhaps your spouse was originally the main wage earner in the family, but then for one reason or another, *you* became the main wage earner. Or when children arrived on the scene, the perfect husband didn't turn out to be the perfect father. Or what used to be the perfect wife

suddenly becomes the perfect mother *instead*. Or the children leave home. Or they come *back home* after they have finally left home. Or there are job changes, health changes, or financial changes. All these things can affect communication or cause serious miscommunication.

The proof of love for your spouse is the willingness to make changes as your lives progress together. Ask God to enable you both to always be sensitive to what is going on in the other in each stage of life, and to make any adjustments necessary in how you communicate. That way you'll continue to grow together.

Pray That You Will Honor One Another

Don't you hate it when you are with another couple and one of them says something critical, demeaning, or dishonoring about the other? Nothing causes people to feel more uncomfortable than a husband or wife making unkind jabs at one another in front of them. And it can force *you* into the awkward position of having to take sides in the matter, which you really can't because no one knows the inner workings of someone else's marriage. Sometimes the one who appears to be the charming and wonderful person is actually the offending person who is nice to everyone but their spouse. And the spouse who appears bitter or nasty has actually been pushed to the edge of what she (he) can take.

Husbands are especially exhorted to give honor to their wives, and the consequence of failing to do so is not having their prayers answered. "Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving *honor* to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, *that your prayers may not be hindered*" (1 Peter 3:7, emphasis added). This consequence is about as serious as it can get and should not be taken lightly.

Husbands are also admonished to *love* their wives, and wives are to *respect* their husbands and *submit* to them (Ephesians 5:22-33). For wives, godly submission is something you willingly do. It's not something your husband forces you to do. That's slavery. Submission is communicated in a godly way by showing respect to your husband. But a wife finds submitting to her husband far *easier* if he is submitted to God, which is the way God wants it. She finds it *harder* to do if he is not submitted to God or if he has disrespected her in any way. Ask God to help you and your husband

(wife) to unfailingly show honor, respect, appreciation, and love to one another—*especially* in front of other people.

TEN THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT THE WORDS YOU SPEAK

1. ***Choose your words carefully.*** “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29).
2. ***Gentle words have more power than harsh words.*** “A gentle tongue breaks a bone” (Proverbs 25:15).
3. ***You have to think before you speak.*** “The heart of the righteous studies how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours forth evil” (Proverbs 15:28).
4. ***Don’t talk too much.*** “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise” (Proverbs 10:19).
5. ***Your words can cause you to stumble.*** “We all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body” (James 3:2).
6. ***Kind words are life-giving.*** “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24).
7. ***Your words can bring about great destruction.*** “The tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!” (James 3:5).
8. ***If you want a good life, watch what you say.*** “He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit” (1 Peter 3:10).
9. ***Your words can be inspired by the enemy.*** “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (James 3:6).
10. ***Your unkind words hurt you more than they hurt your spouse.*** “By your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:37).

Pray That You Both Will Have Ears to Hear

A big part of communicating is learning to listen. That means not doing all the talking. It means asking God to give you ears to hear and a heart that is willing to receive what your spouse is saying. Often you can “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” by simply *listening* to your spouse talk about what his (her) burdens are (Galatians 6:2). If you are married to someone who is too self-absorbed to listen, or refuses to listen because it might give the appearance of not being in control, or doesn’t value what you have to say, pray that God will give him (her) ears to hear. Believe me, there is a greater impact when God convicts someone of not listening than there is when *you* try to do it.

Sometimes we *think* we know what the other person is saying, but God says not to answer too soon before you fully listen. “He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him” (Proverbs 18:13). Listening means not talking while the other talks. How can you “rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” if you don’t listen well enough to know if they’re weeping or rejoicing? (Romans 12:15). If it seems your spouse never listens to you—or if your husband (wife) is always saying that *you* don’t listen to him (her)—ask God to give you both a heart to hear. He loves answering that prayer.

Pray That the Enemy’s Plan to Disrupt Communication Will Not Succeed

Always keep in mind that the enemy of your soul is also the enemy of your marriage, and therefore the enemy of your communication. Have you ever had something come between you and your spouse just when everything seems to be going well and break down the lines of communication so that you suddenly find yourselves completely missing each other? Suddenly there will be confusion or an argument or a distortion of what is being said, and you can’t understand the reason for it. Disrupting the lines of communication between a husband and wife is one of the enemy’s most common tactics. This can happen in even the best of marriages and in subtle ways so you think it’s you. Ask God to keep you both aware of the enemy’s hand trying to stir up strife and misunderstandings between you. Don’t allow it to happen. If you see that it already has, declare that because *God is for you*, no one can be against you—not even the two of you.

PRAYERS FOR MY MARRIAGE

Prayer for Protection

LORD, I INVITE YOUR PRESENCE to dwell in our marriage. I pray that You would protect my husband (wife) and me from any kind of breakdown of communication. Enable us to always share our thoughts and feelings and refuse to be people who don't talk. Teach us to trust each other enough to share our deepest hopes, dreams, fears, and struggles with one another. Help us to spend time communicating with *You* every day so that our communication with each other will always be good. Teach us how to openly express love for one another, and keep us from any laziness or selfishness that would cause us to neglect to do that. Help us to refuse to speak words that tear down, but only words that build up (Ephesians 4:29).

Deliver us from any temptation to lie to each other about anything or deal falsely with one another (Leviticus 19:11). Help us to be totally honest and open about everything. Teach us to speak with truth, wisdom, instruction, and understanding. We don't want to be "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7).

Teach us to listen to one another and recognize the signs in each other that give us greater understanding. Help us find things we enjoy doing together so that we will grow closer and not apart. Enable us to be able to communicate love, appreciation, and honor to each other at all times. Teach us to recognize the enemy's plan to steal, rob, and destroy our marriage. Enable us to understand his methods and see his attempts to stir up strife and miscommunication between us. Help us to take instant authority over any attack he brings against us—especially in the area of communication. Help us to settle all matters of disagreement between us in a loving, compromising, and considerate manner. Enable us to always be in unity with You and with each other. In Jesus' name I pray.

Prayer for Breakthrough in Me

LORD, I INVITE YOUR PRESENCE to dwell in me and change me where

I need to be changed. Reveal any times where I have not said the right words or communicated the right things to my husband (wife) and I will confess it as sin, for I know I fall far short of Your glory (Romans 3:23). Teach me how to communicate openly and honestly so I will speak excellent, right, and truthful words (Proverbs 8:6-9). I know I cannot live in Your presence if I don't speak the truth in my heart (Psalm 15:1-3). Take away any deceit in my heart and any perversity in my mind so that evil will be far from me (Proverbs 17:20).

I pray that Your love will be so much in my heart that it comes out in everything I say. Give me the right words for every situation. Help me to remember to show appreciation to my husband (wife) for the good things he (she) does. Open my eyes if I am not seeing all of them. Give me ears to really hear what my husband (wife) is saying so that I can bear some of his (her) burdens by simply listening. Make me quick to hear and slow to speak (James 1:19). Give me the wisdom to have a good sense of timing.

Lord, You are greater than anything I face and stronger than all that opposes me and our marriage. Thank You that You have given me authority over the enemy. I pray I will always recognize his hand in our lives so that I will not allow any of his evil intentions to disrupt us. I pray that "my mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall give understanding" (Psalm 49:3). I thank You in advance for the answers to my prayers. In Jesus' name I pray.

Prayer for Breakthrough in My Husband (Wife)

LORD, I THANK YOU FOR MY HUSBAND (WIFE) and pray that You would open his (her) heart to all that You have for him (her) and for our marriage together. Help him (her) to know You better, to understand Your ways, and to see things from Your perspective. Help him (her) to view the two of us the way You do. Make changes in him (her) that need to be made so that nothing will hinder him (her) from fulfilling the purpose and destiny You have for his (her) life and our lives together.

Lord, fill my husband's (wife's) heart with Your love so that it overflows in the words he (she) speaks. Help him (her) to understand the consequences for any careless or hurtful words. Help us both to

be more discerning about what wounds the heart of the other. Speak through us so that our words to each other will be *Your* words. Help us to be instruments of Your peace and grace every time we speak to each other. Convict my husband's (wife's) heart of times he (she) has said words that have hurt me and did not glorify You. Enable him (her) to speak words of life and not death, words that build up and not tear down. Increase his (her) knowledge of Your ways so that he (she) will refuse to speak negatively. Help him (her) to communicate openly, and not allow a cold silence to exist between us.

Lord, help my husband (wife) to be honest about everything. Convict his (her) heart about any lies he (she) has told me or anyone else, and break down any thought in him (her) that lying is acceptable, or that there are different versions of the truth. Strengthen him (her) to resist the father of all lies and refuse to fall into any temptation to lie (John 8:44). Help him (her) to stop all deceit (1 Peter 2:1). May he (she) refuse to be snared by his (her) own words (Proverbs 6:2). May there be no division between us, because we are of the same mind and have the same good judgment (1 Corinthians 1:10). Where he (she) has not communicated well in the past, help him (her) to do so now. Thank You that You are our rock and our Redeemer, and You can redeem all things (Psalm 78:35). In Jesus' name I pray.

TRUTH TO STAND ON

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

PSALM 19:14

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love,
I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-3

We all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word,
he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.

JAMES 3:2

Husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies;
he who loves his wife loves himself...
and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

EPHESIANS 5:28,33

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord...Husbands love
your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her.

EPHESIANS 5:22,25