

**A STUDY TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF FAMILY DEVOTION AT HOME IN
INCREASING FAMILY ONENESS AMONG THE FIRST-GENERATION
CHRISTIAN COUPLES OF BERACHAH FULL GOSPEL CHURCH IN THE CITY
OF BANGALORE**

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ABSTRACT

This research is an impact study of family devotion in first generation Christians couples to enhance family oneness. This research study is on the impact of family devotion on first generation Christian couples to increase their spiritual, physical and relational intimacy in their marital life and their ability to lead a Godly legacy.

The initial study conducted by the researcher before family devotions were introduced revealed lack of united decision making, unforgiveness, lack of understanding of sexual desire. But after the family devotions study, the couples shared their prayer concern and they started to use family prayer in their decision making. These couples learned to forgive their spouse and utilized the family altar as a prime place for conflict resolution. Couples were able to understand each other's love language and accept their differences to work towards leaving a godly legacy.

INTRODUCTION

The researcher observed that in Berachah full Gospel church is located in Yeshwanthapur in the city of Bangalore mostly only women were attending church and there was a preconceived notion among the first-generation Christians that Christianity is only about

attending church. It was also observed that many families had issues due to their limited understanding of the church, marriage, and the role of husbands.

This researcher first surveyed the families about their physical, spiritual and relational intimacy and then conducted a family seminar regarding the biblical understanding of marriage, God's purposes of marriage, applying and practicing the teachings of the Bible and the importance of passing on the faith to the next generation. Post training and practice the same questions were asked and the difference studied.

Definition of terms

First generation Christians

This is a person whose parents were not Christians, or who grew up in a "Christian" home. They are either from another faith or did not identify with any faith before they followed Jesus Christ.

Christian Family Devotion

Family devotions are a set time when husband and wife, or parents and kids, sit down, read the Bible, and pray together. It is a time designed to build up each individual and establish a sense of unity and direction within families. (Are family devotions important?)

METHODOLOGY

This quantitative research was done among the members of Berachah church. Berachah church is located in Bangalore is a Pentecostal church in doctrine and they mostly depend on pastors for all spiritual matters. These families are economically from an average lower-middle-class family working in garments factories.

Thirty first generation Christian families who were not exposed to family prayers or aware of its benefits were chosen as participants. They were also not aware of cultural practices of Christianity, the role of a Christian husband or wife or about God's heart on parenting. Among these couples 11 men were irregular to church and limited in their understanding of their roles in faith formation. Closed-ended questionnaire with a demographic sheet and 20 survey questions with a five-point Likert-scale were used and translated into three languages – Kannada, Tamil and Telugu.

The researcher prepared lessons for 60 days to be followed in their family devotion. Before teaching the devotion, to assess their current status of family oneness in the area of spiritual relational and physical intimacy, the researcher gave the closed-ended questionnaire to be filled by the 30 couple participants. The same was repeated after the devotions were conducted in their own homes led by the couple to understand the impact of the family devotion. To help the couples who were illiterate, the question was asked orally and then filled in.

The following questions guided this research study.

Research question # 1

What is the state of spiritual, relational and physical Intimacy of the family before regular Family Devotion?

Research question # 2

What is the impact of family devotion on the spiritual relational and physical intimacy of the couples after regular Family Devotion?

The challenge to get the family devotion scheduled with both spouses working outside of time, illiterate parents, ignorant of the importance of family devotion, existing family problems and unresolved conflicts was itself a humongous task for the researcher. Families were asked to set aside a time every day to do family devotion.

After taking permission from the pastor, the researcher invited all these 30 couples to church and gave them a training program on God intended family, Christian marital intimacy, passing the faith to the next generation and God intervention in marital issues. A curriculum for 60 days was developed for participants to be followed on a regular basis in their homes. The researcher formed a team of 22 lay leaders to help with the research. A voice note was sent on WhatsApp with each day's lesson for the illiterate. After 60 days, the participants were called back to church and their responses to the same questions were recorded.

Research question 1 helped identify the state of marital intimacy in couples before and to introduce the planned curriculum and daily Family Devotion in their family. Research question 2 assesses the impact of daily family devotion on the marital intimacy of the first generational Christian couple.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher researched books and articles on theology of Christian marriage, physical, relational and spiritual intimacy in marriage and the role of church to build families. The importance of love languages in communicating to each other and the importance of family prayer to strengthen communication lines and family oneness was studied.

Relational intimacy in a marriage includes open communication, love and respect, conflict resolution, giving priority to marriage and spouse, understanding the difference and meeting the needs of the spouse. If these areas are made strong, the family will become a lighthouse for others. If couples are able to understand their own differences and accept one

another really it is easier to deal with the issues. Building up and strengthening one another's self-esteem is one of the greatest needs of the individual. (Rainey 87). Dealing with conflict resolution and finance management is also important for relational intimacy.

Understanding each other also involves knowing the partners love language. If a couple is able to pour out their love by speaking their spouse's love language there will be a strong emotional bond between them. Love is the most powerful weapon in the world for good. It can thaw the coldest of winters and bring the blossoms of spring to marriage. (Chapman 105)

In marriage at any time, there may be problems, difficulties, misunderstanding and hurts but everything can be shared together in prayer time, and can pray for each other in crisis situations. (Omartian 85) This spiritual intimacy helps the couples to nurture their relationship by praying together and helping one another by "nourishing and cherishing". Not only nurturing the spouse but also nurturing the children by involving them in ministry, sharing the burden, training them in spiritual ways, having an intentional spiritual talk, spending quality time with them. Sharing the call of God in their family, pursue God's purposes to the spouse and to the children. (Raichur 35)

If couples pray together and read the Bible together more consistently it can strengthen their marriage. The Holy Spirit can have a huge impact in the marriage of Christian who lives constantly, movements by movements, under His gracious direction. If spiritual intimacy is high, the other types of intimacy will have some natural resiliency. (John Piper 22)

Family Devotion & Challenges

Challenges faced by first generational couples of Berachah Full Gospel Church to practice family devotion on a daily basis

- Shortage of time, increased money demands, a high cost of living, both the couples work outside for earning money. Sometime they may have to work overnight.
- Some of the husbands are not interested in Family Devotion. They think that attending church on Sunday is more than enough.
- Around 11 men are illiterate, they can't read the Bible so they don't sit in family prayer
- In a few couples they are facing some of the marital issues within the family, so there is no interest to participating in the family prayer
- Some couples are having unresolved issues, not able to forgive their spouse, or losing trust in their spouse.

The researcher provided training on how to set aside time for family prayer and creative ways of doing it. Worship, bible study, scripture memorisation, reading the Bible, applying the scripture and praying together was suggested to these couples.

FINDINGS

According to the research, it was observed that before family devotion, Couples never shared their burden and sought prayer for one another on a daily basis. 77% of the couples were not seeking God while making decisions. 67% of participants found it difficult to love and forgive their spouses. 53% of participants never felt that they need to resolve conflicts during family altar since they were not aware of the importance of rebuilding the relationship.

83% of the participants did not perceive that sex is holy and were uncomfortable in talking about it. Most of the couples didn't know about love languages or were not able to communicate and discuss their differences in parenting and regarding leaving a Godly legacy.

It was observed that after the family devotion training, 83.3% couples began to share their burden and challenges to seek prayer for one another in their family prayer time. Children also started to share their own prayer concerns in family prayer. 90% of the couples started to seek God in family prayer while making any decision. For 83% of the families, family prayer time became a prime place to resolve their conflicts. After the family devotion, 66% of participants were able to understand the Godly purposes of creating sex in marriage. After family devotion 70% couples were able to understand the concept of love languages and they were able to discuss with the spouse. The couples were able to communicate and discuss the differences in parenting styles and focus on leaving a Godly legacy.

After the family devotion there was a marked change in these couples. 70% of the couples were convinced that the parents are responsible to discuss spiritual aspects and pray for their children. In the lesson for family devotion, Deuteronomy 6 was included for parents to know the importance of passing on their faith to their children. The couples were able to make their home as a faith centre. Couples began to share and discuss the differences in their parenting styles and pray about it. The couples were intentional about their own choices to make sure they line up with the Bible regarding the legacy they hope to create and be in prayer for their family and journal about their successes and failures. Home became the centre of faith formation helping the family to put steps to enhance the family oneness.

The surprising findings : Before starting the family devotion 47% of couples were not doing the family devotion but when the family prayer series started 77% of couples started family devotion on a daily basis. Couples continued their family prayer. Secondly, leadership skills

were improved while taking sixty lessons on family prayers. Thirdly the devotions helped the couples to improve their communication. Fourthly conflicts have reduced after the family devotion. Fifthly spiritually the couples started to grow, faith increased. The couples changed their home to a faith formation centre. The couples developed a ministry/ service mindset, as families they took part in church activities. Sixthly, the new object lesson in family devotion to the creative way of worship created an interest in teenagers at home. Seventhly the family prime time was taken before the family devotion study by T.V shows including spiritual programs, mobile and extra duty hours, but after the family devotion, the family prime time was spent by couples along with God.

This research recommends family devotion as the agent which will strengthen the marital and parental relationship in first generation Christians. Refined and detailed research can be done exclusively to find out how this family devotion study has impacted the church and its growth. The researcher encourages to educate the first-generation Christian couples in biblical and practical teaching and help them in marriage and parenting. Awareness could be given on the fundamental beliefs and disciplines of Christianity. The researcher recommends regular house visits and follow-up to be done by the pastor and leaders to nurture spiritual growth of the couples. Frequent marriage seminars and marriage enrichment programmes can keep the families encouraged and supported. The church needs to avoid evening time programmes that separate family members and encourage family-oriented activities.

CONCLUSION

This was the impact study on the first generational Christian couples in Berachah Full Gospel church on the effects of daily family devotion in marital intimacy. This study gave an insight towards the vital roles of the family devotion on the marriage. Family Devotion is the

spiritual glue which binds the relationship together very strongly. After the study, it could be seen that marital relationships strengthened. Devotional time is essential to growing in faith and trust. This family devotion helped the couples to increase their faith and it became stronger.

Family devotions are a great way to encourage couples and teach spouse and children about the importance of studying the Bible and its practical applications. This devotion helped couples to understand their roles and responsibility in faith formation, and the importance of leaving a godly legacy for their children.

The family that prays together stays together. The more it is practiced regularly, the couple will start to pray together and strengthens their communication lines within their family, protects each other from outside attacks, releases hurts and fears, share deepest feelings, and strengthen family ties. It was observed that communication improved, leadership skills were improved and marital intimacy became better as they began to pray. The family spent quality time with themselves and also, with God.

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