

ACHIEVING INTIMACY IN MARRIAGE

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The word intimacy is tossed around quite a bit these days. Often when we describe a couple as intimate, we mean the two appear extremely familiar with each other — so familiar that the spouses often finish each other's sentences. But having the familiarity to predict the other's reactions does not necessarily indicate intimacy. Intimacy is used to describe a couple's sex life. Though indispensable to an intimate marriage, sexual activity is not the lone factor in experiencing intimacy.

Jesus tells us in Mark 10:7-8 that marriage creates an intimacy of one flesh.

Mark 10:7-9

7 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

NIV

The phrase one flesh teaches us a great deal about how real intimacy develops and is cultivated in marriage relationships. If we become one flesh with our spouse, then we must open all aspects of our emotional, spiritual and physical lives to that person to the point that we are not unknown in any dimension.

Sadly, even among Christians, intimacy is rare. Many husbands and wives wonder why they chose to marry their spouse in the first place and wish they could escape what feels like a prison instead of a loving and intimate relationship. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Intimacy is close familiarity or fellowship. It is nearness in friendship. Intimacy is emotional attachment. The word intimacy comes from a Latin word that means "innermost." In the marriage relationship, this translates into a vulnerable sharing of our inner thoughts, feelings, moods, and true self. Both men and women need to feel secure in this sharing and confident of their spouse's support. This support is achieved through listening, empathy, prayer, or reassurance. Generally, this sharing and support must be in place before a woman will share herself physically in sexual closeness.

God wants you to experience that one-flesh intimacy described by Jesus. But many go about it the wrong way by failing to realize the three dimensions of an intimate marriage.

Emotional intimacy means couples share facts, feelings, opinions, dreams, fears and frustrations. They experience happiness and sadness together as if the two were one person. They live their lives openly, without secrets or fear of condemnation from their spouse. Conversations are frequent and expected because sharing is vital to building and maintaining this dimension of intimacy.

If emotional intimacy is not achieved in marriage, a person may seek it with someone outside of marriage. Emotional intimacy with someone other than your spouse is dangerous because it often leads to physical intimacy.

Spiritual intimacy can take place only between two people who share Jesus Christ as their Savior. All Christians have the potential to share a part of this dimension with one another. But, when a husband and wife share their spiritual lives, they pray and study God's Word together, talk about spiritual issues and encourage and challenge one another in their faith. By doing this, they grow together in their relationship with God and walk together in His light.

Physical intimacy is equally important. Mates who think that spiritual and emotional intimacy are enough only fool themselves. God placed powerful sexual drives in us and intended for husband and wife to fulfill each other (1 Corinthians 7:2-4). Though one spouse might become convinced that sexual fulfillment is unnecessary, that doesn't make it so. Especially in our cultural climate, sexual intimacy in marriage is important to cultivate and protect.

While we can share some sense of emotional intimacy with others, our deepest intimacies should be reserved for our spouse alone. That means I share my emotion, my spirit and my body with my spouse. If I withhold any dimension of myself, I am preventing us from becoming one. Yield yourself to your spouse. Let down the walls in every area of your being to experience the kind of intimacy God intended for you.

Men and Women Are Wired Differently

Men define intimacy as S-E-X, and women define it as T-A-L-K. How true is that for you? If you are like most men, when you hear the word intimacy, you think of a passionate physical experience. But when your wife hears the word intimacy, she thinks about emotional connection and communication.

God has wired men and women quite differently. Your sex drive is connected to your eyes; you become visually aroused. Your wife's sex drive is connected to her heart; she is aroused only after she feels emotional closeness and harmony.

Men disconnect sex from everything else in their life. While women see everything connected to everything else.

You feel less masculine if your wife resists your sexual advances. Your wife feels like a machine if she doesn't experience emotional intimacy before sexual intimacy.

For Ngozi, pursuing intimacy with John is a rich experience when they truly open up with each other and share their deeper thoughts. The first ten years of their marriage were rather rocky because John didn't understand how Ngozi was wired. He thought she looked at intimacy the same way he did. It's only recently that John has noticed how fulfilling talk time is for his wife.

Anne is a strong personality, and extrovert. She thinks of intimacy as sex with her husband, and it upsets her that Philip always wants to talk. Anne can easily come across as controlling and critical. That's why Philip has a strong need to talk as preparation for times of intimacy; communication with her creates safety in the marriage, softens her control, and gets them on the same page. The way Philip thinks is representative of how most women view intimacy, which may help you better understand your wife's own needs.

Men are by nature compartmentalized creatures. Figuratively speaking, you view your work, your family, your hobbies, and your recreation in separate boxes. You eat breakfast in one box. You have disagreements with your wife in another box. You spend your work day in a box. Men go through their

entire day with each box standing alone, unconnected.

Women are totally different! We go through the same activities, but each box has an invisible, emotional thread connecting them all together. And all those boxes are open at the same time. For example, if your wife has had a rough day with the kids or a co-worker, her emotional tank will be depleted. As a result, her physical energy may be shot, and she may need to withdraw to regroup. Her parenting or workplace box is connected to her emotional box, which is connected to her energy box, which is connected to her relational box.

Have you noticed how quickly your wife can recall a disappointing event that happened three years ago? That's also why she can remember exactly when you last gave her a gift. A woman's life events are carefully threaded together.

When the question "How does it affect you when your husband doesn't recognize your need for emotional intimacy?" was asked in a seminar,

One woman offered an answer, *"when my husband walks in with that "look of love" in his eyes-*

"Look of love or lust?" another woman interjected.

Everyone giggled to release the stress of talking about this delicate topic. Then the first woman continued. *"My initial response is disappointment: oh, all he wants is sex. I feel disappointed because I know my emotional needs won't get met."*

Emotional intimacy is so rich, so fulfilling for a woman. It doesn't replace the need for sex, but for her, the emotional need is as intense as the physical need. And when that need is fulfilled by her husband and sustained through thoughtful T-A-L-K time, it is much easier for her to move more quickly into a sexual mode.

Conclusion

This story told by Barbara Rosberg illustrates in detail how a husband's understanding of the wife's feelings and his selfless attitude makes intimacy possible.

Ken is a former Air Force pilot. He knows what he wants and maps out a plan to achieve it. Today is no different. On his way home from work he is driving along, feeling pretty good, whistling and dreaming about his "love pilot" plan.

I'll pull into the garage, walk into the house, and loosen my tie. I'll drop the briefcase, unwind a bit, have sex with Debbie, change into sweats, shoot some hoops, grab the remote, catch some news, and then a close my eyes for a few minutes before dinner.

When Ken got home, he walked in the back door, Debbie looked up, and their eyes met. His eyes pierced hers with "the look".

All day long Debbie had been chasing to keep up with two preschool boys. Her conversations had centered on a fictional purple creature named Barney, and she had dealt with several catastrophes: the belt on the washer had broken, the boys had spilled grape juice on beige carpet, the cat had scratched one of the boys, and Ken's mother had called to say she was coming to visit for a week.

That "look" in Ken's eye was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. It put Debbie over the edge! Ken was no longer the companion and confidant she had look forward to all day. He was now...the enemy! His look, that twinkle in his eyes, send any number of possible messages to her: "let me have every bit of the energy you have left." "Let me take everything you have - and leave you with nothing." "Let me be like everyone else and stand in line and take, take, take."

Debbie threw her hands into the air and yelled, "no, not now!" Then she stormed out of the kitchen and went to the living room to sit alone for the first time all day. Normally she was a strong and resilient person, but today she winced back tears. Her fuel tank registered way below empty.

In the air goes the ultimate plan of the love pilot, thought Ken with a sigh. But instead of accusing Debbie of overreacting, he walked into the living room and sat down beside her on the sofa.

"Tell me about your day, Debbie," he said as he gently reached over and put his arm around her.

"I had no idea that parenting the kids would be so hard, Ken. I am so tired of Cheerios and applesauce. I miss talking to adults and having a conversation that isn't interrupted by arguments and coloring books. The house is pitted out. I go from room to room picking up, but I am barely out of sight when they pull out more stuff. I never feel on top of it."

What Debbie needed at that moment from Ken was the safety of being able to unload some of the stress that had been building within her during the day. And because Ken knew his wife so well, because he knew that at that moment she needed connection with him, he sat and listened. As she unloaded, he focused totally on her. Then, after she had talked most of it out and was quieted, he kissed her on the forehead and told her to relax. Then he went into the kitchen, rolled up his shirt sleeves, unloaded the dishwasher of clean dishes, and then reloaded it with the dirty dishes sitting on the counter.

When he was done, he peeked out from the kitchen and said, "Debbie, I know you've had a full day. Just sit for a while. I'm going to take the kids outside to shoot some hoops."

Ken's keen sensitivity and willingness to step in and share the household chores not only validated Debbie's need but also lightened her load. She got some time to herself to refill her empty tank.

After dinner, Ken was still tender, making sure she was doing better. "How are you feeling? Can I get you anything?" he asked at one point. He took her hand and said, "I know how hard you work for our family, and I want you to know how much I appreciate all that you do for the boys and me. You may not think this, but I know that you are the best mom in the world to our boys. I love to watch you with them."

Debbie hugged Ken and said, "thanks, honey."

When the ten o'clock news came on later that night, Ken shut off the TV, got out of his recliner, locked the door, turned off the lights, and plowed up the stairs to crash before another day of work. But as he opened the door to their bedroom, he saw the glow of soft candlelight and Debbie smiling at him from beneath the sheets.

"The night is young, Ken," she said.

Ken wasn't tired anymore.

So, do I have your attention, guys? While men listed sexual intimacy as their number two love need in marriage, women indicated that emotional intimacy was their second most important love need.

WORDS OF WISDOM

- 1. The atmosphere you create determines your experience.**
 - 2. Don't give your ears to gossip. What you hear repeatedly, you will eventually believe. Please read proverbs 26:20-28.**
 - 3. Never allow what people say about your spouse to form your opinion about him or her.**
 - 4. Never allow what people say about you to change your scriptural opinion of yourself. You are who God says you are. You have what God says you have. You can do what God says you can do.**
 - 5. Never allow what people say to change your godly principles upon which your marriage and relationship is built.**
 - 6. What you think of your partner is more important than what people think about him or her.**
 - 7. Like the soil to seeds, so also the mind to words.**
 - 8. Give your mind to what will enhance love, unity, happiness and celebration in your home.**
 - 9. Guard your mind with all diligence.**
- "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the well spring of life". (Prov.4: 23)**