

INTIMACY

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(India Outreach, Spiritual Warfare, Family Ministries, Counseling, World View)

EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

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First in a series of articles about emotional, spiritual and physical intimacy in marriage, which is all based on our intimacy with God. These messages were first presented at a Marriage Retreat held by Christian Training Organization and Main Street Baptist church at Bird-In-Hand, PA, on March 13-15, 2015. For more information contact Jerry Schmoyer jerry@schmoyer.net.

How many times have you been asked, “How long have you been married?” The implication is that the more years you have been married the better and stronger your relationship is. But we all know that isn’t true. Just living in the same house with someone for ‘x’ number of years doesn’t guarantee you are growing closer together. In fact, often the opposite is true. For many, the more years they spend together the further they drift from what they had when they first got married. If years don’t measure the depth of a relationship, what does? One little commonly used but often not really understood word describes it – intimacy!

DEFINITION OF INTIMACY: Intimacy. It’s a strong word with many connotations and implications. The dictionary says it is “showing a close union or combination of particles or elements: an intimate mixture.” For our purpose in these articles I will use a more common but descriptive definition of intimacy: “into-me-see.” At its root it refers to allowing another to see into us, to reveal who we really are inside. We draw back our defenses and let them ‘see’ into us. Basically intimacy means closeness, something we both desire and fear.

DESIRE FOR INTIMACY: “Our souls crave intimacy. ... We are most alive when we find it, most devastated when we lose it, most empty when we give up on it, most inhumane when we betray it and most passionate when we pursue it” (Erwin Raphael McManus). We pursue intimacy. We lie in wait for ‘true love’ with out ‘soul mate.’ Our culture tells us in its movies and music that real intimacy will find us. But it doesn’t, not without our reaching out for it and being open to it. Real intimacy doesn’t come along and sweep us away, it’s something that takes work and effort. Intimacy is not a black and white thing – you have it or you don’t. It’s a lifelong process, something we move towards, with others as well as with God.

DESCRIPTION OF INTIMACY: Intimacy is defined differently by men and women. For young on up, girls are encouraged to recognize and express their emotions. They seek and cultivate

close friendships with like-minded females with whom they can intimately share their feelings and emotions. Men, on the other hand, are discouraged from sharing their emotions. Their competitive nature dominates and leaves little place for exploring and labeling the emotions inside them. They are just turned into competitive energy.

For most men, close friendships do not come easily. When they happen, it is usually with men at work with whom they share a common work goal. Men work together much better than they relate emotionally. Men will turn up for a work day at church who would never come to a men's meeting where problems are shared and needs discussed.

This difference is seen from young on up. You can watch a group of young girls running around and playing. If one falls down everyone immediately stops and gathers around her, soothing and comforting her. They change what they are doing to accommodate the one who fell. But if boys are running around playing and a boy falls they just keep on playing, even jumping over him to keep the activity going. Unfortunately that doesn't change much as boys and girls grow older.

In Genesis 2:18 we read, "the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" The word for 'helper' in the Hebrew is 'ezer.' It has been defined as "filling up the empty spaces" in man. It is used of God in Psalm 118:7: "The LORD is with me, He is my helper." The fall in Eden left mankind with a God-shaped vacuum in his heart, something only God can meet. Only an intimate, personal relationship with God fills the empty spaces within man, and part of the way God does that is through intimacy with another human being in marriage. The husband-wife relationship is a small picture of what our relationship with our Savior is to be (Ephesians 5).

DIFFICULTIES IN INTIMACY: We all sense that 'empty space,' that 'God-created vacuum' within, but we don't know how to meet it. Most of us haven't seen it our parents' relationship, and the world around us doesn't have a clue as to what it really is. To many in the world, intimacy is a synonym for sex, but in truth it goes far beyond that. That is a culmination for it, not a starting point. It's often been said that men give love to get sex and women give sex to get love, but that isn't real intimacy. Sex isn't intimacy, just an expression of it. In fact, if there isn't real emotional intimacy before sex then sex isn't going to produce it!

While we crave intimacy, we also fear it. We fear rejection or criticism from those whom we allow to see into us. We fear getting close to and needing someone, only to have them back away. We fear having to share inner feelings which we often don't understand ourselves.

DEVELOPING INTIMACY: Somehow we got the idea that intimacy is dependent on how others treat us, but the truth is that intimacy starts with us. We must let another "see into me" for it to take root and grow. Our intimacy with others is limited by us, not just by them. We learn intimacy with God first, and from there it expands to others as well. So how do we develop intimacy with others, especially with our mate?

1. 100% Acceptance: There are keys that open doors, cars, boxes or whatever may be locked. The key to unlock intimacy is acceptance. In order for someone to allow us to see into them they must know they are totally, unconditionally accepted by us. No one will let someone who is critical, controlling, judgmental, sarcastic or self-centered see into their hearts. It has to be safe for one to be open and vulnerable. This doesn't mean we need to agree with everything we see in another person, but we must be accepting of them. We must acknowledge all they are the way we want them to acknowledge us. The Golden Rule is still in effect!

Love isn't love until its vulnerable. Accepting someone assures them that it is safe to be vulnerable with us. When two people respect and accept each other as they are, the ability to

be vulnerable and reveal hurt feelings can create a powerful emotional connection that is the source of real intimacy and friendship.

Cameron Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators, translated the New Testament into the Cachiuel language in Guatemala in the early days of the organization. He was having a hard time understanding their word for 'friend' when he learned that it literally meant, 'your companion in cookie cracking.' A good friend, Bac, explained it referred to one who will pick your cooties without pulling your hair! That is a good description of the acceptance and trust needed for intimacy as well!

We need each other, but we need each other in a safe, accepting environment. "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17). That only happens between people who have respect and acceptance of each other.

2. Know Your Own Emotions: Many people have a hard time identifying and labeling their emotions. They recognize one positive emotion ('happy') and one negative one ('angry'). In fact, we have hundreds, even thousands of emotions with various shades of each. If you can't label your own emotions you can't share them with another, in fact you will hide them so no one else can see them. A word label means we can handle them subjectively, analyze them rationally and let our mind explain reality to our emotions.

If you struggle with labeling your own emotions try writing down your emotions throughout the day. At the end of the day journal some of the things you wrote during the day. This will help you understand and better work with the emotion. It's almost impossible to let someone else see into you if you can't first see into yourself!

3. Study Your Mate: Not only should you study yourself, you should also study your mate. Make sure you have a good comprehension of male-female differences, of your and your mate's temperament and love language, Men, learn how to 'speak woman.' Look below the surface of your mate to see what is behind what you see. What is affecting them, what is causing what they are facing and experiencing, what makes them 'tick.'

Typically men are stereotyped as rational, logical and objective and women as subjective, emotional and more relational. But in about 24% of relationships this is reversed. The male is the subjective, emotional and more relational one and the female is rational, logical and objective. This is not a problem but quite common. The dynamics are the same only the roles are reversed.

So study your mate as you want them to study you. It takes work and focus, but anything worthwhile in life requires that. You worked on your relationship before marriage, you must keep on working on it afterwards. That means you develop your friendship first. As your friendship with your mate goes, so goes your marriage.

4. Communicate: Of course, friendship is based on honest, open communication. It means speaking the truth in love, listening to the other as you want them to listen to you. That's how you study them, by talking them and listening to them. The goal for communication is to understand each other, not to force the other to agree with you. Never use anger or rejection to manipulate. Learn how to agree to disagree. "Don't let the sun go down on your anger" (Ephesians 4:26). Emotional intimacy begins with accepting and validating your mate's point of view, even if you don't agree with it. It means accepting them and their feelings, not just trying to change them. You may need to set boundaries against that which makes you uncomfortable.

Communicating also means listening with an open heart to what the other is saying, even if it hurts. "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses" (Proverbs 27:6).

Connecting emotionally is essential before real physical intimacy can ever take place. Physical intimacy isn't and can never be an effective substitute for emotional intimacy."

5. Apologize: When you communicate the first thing that must be said is an apology for anything that has hurt the other, on purpose or unintentionally. As soon as you have said or done, or not said or not done, something that bring hurt to the other, apologize. Don't justify, blame, make excuses – jut apologize to them the way you want them to apologize to you. Take responsibility for your own part. Hurt left between you both will fester and infect all parts of your relationship. Clean the wound as soon as possible so healing can take place!

6. Forgive: Not only are we to be quick to apologize, we must be just as quick to forgive. As soon as you feel the hurt from another, forgive them. Don't wait for an apology. Even as it is happening make that choice in your mind to forgive. If not revenge and hurtful things will fill your response and then they will have to forgive you as well. Two wrongs never make a right! Hurting someone back for hurting us never is rewarding or satisfying.

Forgiving them doesn't mean you excuse what they did, but rather that you choose to take the hurt yourself instead of passing it back to them. That's what Jesus did on the cross for us, and He is our example in all things. Forgiving means you will take the hurt and give up any right you have to see them suffer for the pain they caused you. It is a free will choice, not an emotion or a feeling. "He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends" (Proverbs 17:9). If you repeat their actions you are just making things worse, not better.

Making a relationship work often means carrying more than your share of the burden. A businessman was very upset because he felt like he was carrying more than his share of the work in his company. He shared this with a friend over lunch one day. Quietly and patiently the friend heard what he had to say, then reached for a glass of water and shared this with his friend. "Water is the foundation of life. Other planets are barren because they don't have water. For water to exist there must be teamwork, but that teamwork isn't mutually equal. Water is made up of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen – H₂O. Hydrogen has to work twice as hard as oxygen. If a business (or marriage) is to thrive we must be willing to sometimes work twice as hard as others."

7. Quality and quantity time: No relationship stays healthy and grows without time being invested into it. It has to be time well spent, but also needs to be a good enough amount of time. In the Song of Solomon we see the importance of time alone together to Solomon and Shulamith. The key to their married love was the foundation of close friendship. Later, when problems developed, they went back and strengthened their friendship by spending significant meaningful time together. Solomon was the richest man in the world and could have given Shulamith anything, but what she wanted was his time. Make sure you invest time in your relationship. This means time talking and connecting each day, and not just about the children and details of daily living. It means going out on a date weekly, and not talking about the children and work the whole time, but enjoying each other as you did before marriage. It means trying to take a vacation away together, just the two of you, for a few days each year. These are important investments in your present and future relationship and, although they take work and planning, are well worth it now and for your future. After all, the whole reason you got married in the first place is to spend quality and quantity time enjoying being with each other!

8. Have fun, laugh together: Its been said that the shortest distance between two hearts is laughter. You enjoyed each other's company before marriage. You had fun together. Don't let that fade! Its true that the family that prays together stays together, but its also true that the family that plays together stays together as well. When is the last time you and your mate

laughed, really laughed together? How many times a week does that happen? If you aren't laughing together regularly its no wonder there is a strain on your relationship. Laughter is a tranquilizer with no side effects! "A cheerful heart is good medicine" (Proverbs 17:22).

I do a lot of marriage counseling, and inevitably the advice I give to a couple who is struggling is to go back to the friendship they had before marriage and rekindle that. Do together the things they did then for fun. Laugh together. Get out from the stress and pressure of life and enjoy each other again.

Make sure your home is a place of fun and your meals are enjoyable – not times for scolding, nagging, criticizing, etc. There are many things you can do to have fun. Kidnap your mate for a minivacation of a day, afternoon or evening. Plan something they've been wanting to do, make reservations, dress up and have a special time. Or create a holiday in honor of your mate. Include the children in your plans. Decorate the home, even have a parade, order in food, etc.

Another idea is to have a tour of yesterday. Spend time looking at old pictures, videos or memorabilia reminisce about the past. Talk about special times and good memories. Share when you had the most fun, when you felt embarrassed or loved, when you felt the closest to each other or to God.

If you don't have time to plan just go for an evening walk, hold hands and don't talk about work or the children. Talk about the things you used to talk about before you were married.

Nancy and I like to explore, either on foot, on bike or in the car. We like to go to new places and look around. We keep a list going of places we'd like to go to or favorite places we'd like to go back to. We enjoy it a lot – it doesn't take much work or money but we enjoy it.

Whatever you do to have fun, just keep doing it! Harry Ward Beecher once said, "A marriage without a sense of humor is like a wagon without springs – you get jolted by every pebble in the road."

9. Cry together: Not only should you laugh together, when one is sad you need to cry together as well. Share your hurts, your sorrows and your disappointments. When one shares these things the other must just listen and empathize, not try to offer suggestions or tell them why they shouldn't feel that way. There is "a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). Each is appropriate, even necessary, in its time. Laugh together, but also cry together.

10. Get help: Don't hesitate to get counseling. It can be very beneficial. Don't let pride, fear or finances stand in the way. It is an excellent investment in your present and future.

These are some way you can let someone "into-me-see." Total intimacy starts with emotional intimacy, with growing as friends. When you're married to your best friend you're a love story in progress, an epic in the making.

Those who mountain climb must work together to make it to the top. They depend on each other, communicate and sacrifice for the benefit of all. All make it or none make it. It's not a race and not a keeping score of who does most of the work. It's working together as one, depending on each other – just like marriage. You'll face some mighty tough mountains in life and you need each other to scale them. That takes intimacy in marriage. It's a lifelong process but well worth the effort. Are you growing in emotional intimacy? If you aren't, you should be!

SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer - Copyright © 2015

Second in a series of articles about emotional, spiritual and physical intimacy in marriage, which is all based on our intimacy with God. These messages were first presented at a Marriage Retreat held by Christian Training Organization and Main Street Baptist church at Bird-In-Hand, PA, on March 13-15, 2015. For more information contact Jerry Schmoyer jerry@schmoyer.net.

When my wife and I got married we looked forward to deep, growing spiritual intimacy – but it didn't seem to happen. We contacted a favorite seminary professor of mine to get his suggestions and he told us that what we were facing was very, very common among pastors. He said many struggle and a good number have very little spiritual intimacy. Hearing that was both encouraging and discouraging at the same time. We weren't the only ones struggling with this issue. While that was a bit reassuring, hearing that so many pastors and wives also failed in this area was disheartening. We could only imagine how it was for the average church attendee! But we have learned some things over the years and would like to share them with you.

While 100% of Christian couples agree that spiritual growth together is very important, very few would say they are moving in that direction. Yet God made us spiritual beings and we aren't really "one" until that happens. Our bodies, minds and hearts can become one but until our souls/spirit is one we aren't experiencing what God created marriage to be (Genesis 2:24).

Mahatma Gandhi said, "Spiritual relationship is far more precious than physical. Physical relationship divorced from spiritual is body without soul." Still, we work far harder at developing physical or emotional intimacy than spiritual. It is usually the most neglected aspect in our relationship. Husbands know they should be leading in this way, and most wives say this is what they want in their marriage more than anything, still most couples don't know how or where to start.

DEFINITION: Spiritual intimacy has been defined as being able to share your spiritual self with another and have them share their spiritual self with you, developing a deeper union between the two. Emotional and physical intimacy ignites the rocket in your marriage but spiritual intimacy fires the afterburners and gets you into orbit. Emotional and physical attraction draws people together, but spiritual connection is what keeps them together.

WHY SO HARD? It shouldn't surprise us that what can be the most rewarding part of marriage can also be the hardest. We encounter our deepest fears and most stubborn pride when we try to be open spiritually with each other. We fear rejection and want to keep up a façade of having it all together, but spiritual intimacy demands gut level honesty and willingness to be helped by God and mate.

This can be especially difficult for men, who often struggle with even surface relationships. Women are often more involved in spiritual activities than men. Men equate spirituality with "doing" something while women are often more comfortable with sharing inner needs and experiences. (Remember, in 25% of relationships this is reversed and the man is more like the 'typical female' while the female is more like the 'typical male' stereotype.)

Women, as a whole, communicate differently than men, and this is true in communicating with God through prayer as well. Men pray short, to-the-point prayers to God – nothing flowery or theological, just direct memos. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this. When you read

Jesus' prayers in the Bible they were exactly this same way. Surely there was nothing wrong with His prayer life! But men and women today both seem to think that women's prayers are more 'spiritual' than a man's prayers. As a result a man has less confidence to pray out loud and a wife can see herself as more spiritual than her husband. But being more emotional is not the same as being more spiritual!

Let's be honest, 'church' is more of a woman thing than a man thing as well. Flowers, dressing up, pretty paintings and art, music, singing, sitting quietly, listening to people share their feelings and emotions and talk about their struggles and failures – that is just not natural for a man. Men like to be loud, active, a bit sloppy and often very 'earthy' in their talk and actions. How does that fit into a church service? It just doesn't. So women feel comfortable but men often a bit uncomfortable and therefore both equate that with being less 'spiritual.' That is not the case!

There is nothing wrong with these differences; they are God-created and natural to us. It does mean, though, that what meets a woman's spiritual needs often won't meet a man's, and vice versa. So what can you do when you and your spouse have different spiritual maturity levels and interests?

First of all, be patient. Don't overreact, push, criticize or look down on them. Pray for them, set a good example of God's unconditional love and acceptance for them and be open and authentic (but don't demand they be so). Be sensitive to their needs and where they are at spiritually. Treat them as God has treated you through as you have progressed through your own spiritual journey. Let God love your spouse through you!

SPIRITUAL INTIMACY MYTHS: In order to move ahead in spiritual maturity there are some myths we need to debunk. One is that spiritual intimacy must always and only be initiated by the husband. While that is ideal, it isn't always possible. Women can be much better at all forms of intimacy and there is nothing wrong with initiating spiritual topics or praying together. This can be a great help to a man.

Another myth is that spiritual intimacy is all about doing devotions together. Devotions can be an important part of growing together spiritually, but spiritual intimacy goes way beyond that and includes daily conversation, events attended together, programs watched and music listened to together. Leading devotions can be very scary and difficult for men, especially if it isn't something they saw modeled in their family of origin. Give them time to work into it.

A final myth is that spiritual intimacy will make your relationship problem-free. That is not true; in fact it can bring hidden, latent issues to the surface so they need to be dealt with. Spiritual intimacy won't clear your marriage of problems, but will help you both better face the problems. Still, no matter how close you are spiritually doesn't mean you still don't have sin natures that will cause hurt, misunderstanding, selfishness or neglect in marriage.

Now, having set a good foundation, let's move ahead to talk about what God does expect of men and women in their spiritual relationships with each other.

SPIRITUAL ROLES OF MEN: The first and main thing God expects men to do is to **pray for their families**. That is not too difficult an expectation. It does presume a man is on good speaking terms with God and talks intimately with Him daily. It can be hard for some men to be consistent in their own time of Bible reading and prayer, but talking to God in prayer throughout the day is something any and all men should do. A top priority in this time of prayer must be his wife and children. That doesn't mean throwing up a general "God bless good ol' Margaret and the kids" in the morning. It means detailed, specific prayer about each of their personal, specific

needs. And that means being attuned to them enough to really know what their current needs are in life!

Job prayed regularly for a hedge of protection to be around his family and children (Job 1:4-11). This word describes a garrison, a fort, a wall of spiritual and physical protection. Each man should pray this for each person in his family each day along with bringing their other needs to God and praying for His blessing on them in the present and future.

Not only must men pray for their families, men must pray **with their families**. Promise Keepers repeatedly states that a Christian wife's number one desire for her husband is for him to take the spiritual leadership in the family and initiate prayer with the family. There is no magic formula to make this happen; a man simply must do it. Evelyn Christenson says, "Praying together is like riding a bike. You can read how to do it or have someone tell you; but until you try it yourself you'll never learn how to do it."

Many wonderful benefits come from praying together. God answers prayer, and promises to be with "two or three" who come together in His name (Matthew 18:20). We can't remain estranged from someone when we pray with them. There is openness, a humbling and a vulnerability that sets a good foundation for all of marriage.

Every time you pray together another layer gets added to God's divine, protective bonding of soul to soul. The Holy Spirit uses it to strengthen your marriage and commitment, and a security develops between you.

The third thing God expects from husbands in their spiritual leadership is to **initiate family devotions**. It's been said that a house is not a home unless it contains food for the soul as well as the body. A wife can help and even take this over from time to time, but God's established order is for the man to be the leader, and that includes in spiritual issues as well.

For a man, this can be difficult, but it is good in that it forces us to face our fear and insecurity, our pride and hypocrisy. We must work through our own feelings of inferiority and spiritual awkwardness. We must discipline our schedules to make sure this becomes a priority. Remember, children get their first impressions of God the heavenly Father from seeing what their earthly fathers are like. What example are you setting?

SPIRITUAL ROLES OF WOMEN: As in all of marriage, a woman is to support and encourage her husband spiritually as well. Are you making it easier or harder for him to fulfill his spiritual role in your marriage? Many women, sometimes without realizing it, make it harder by their demands, spoken or unspoken criticism, disappointment and lack of support for their husband. He needs a cheerleader on his team, not a referee pointing out every infraction and failure!

Pray for him in detail daily if not more often. Encourage him; trust that God is working in Him. When you give advice do it after encouragement and praise and in a respectful way. Speak the truth in love. Don't ever criticize him, even to your friends. Go to him for help and prayer when it is needed. Feel free to initiate prayer. Build him up in front of the children, set an example of how you want them to treat him and respond to him.

When he does lead in devotions with you or the children make sure you are supportive: be on time, complement him for whatever effort he makes because it is more than many Christian men make. Thank him for doing it, realizing it is probably much harder for him than you realize. MUCH harder!

Make sure you keep your own personal relationship with Jesus strong and growing. You are responsible for yourself, so go to Him with your needs. God will never allow your husband to meet all your needs. He is a jealous God and wants (and deserves) first place in your life. If

your husband could meet all your spiritual needs he would be your 'god' and God will not allow that! So watch what you expect of your husband, and instead turn your expectations to God for He alone can meet all your needs.

GETTING STARTED: OK. Now you are motivated to grow in your spiritual intimacy with each other. Where do you start? These steps are guidelines to help:

1. Make a commitment to pray regularly. Be willing to pay whatever cost it takes to start growing together spiritually. "As for me and my house we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15). Make this commitment to yourselves, to each other and to God.
2. Develop a plan. Spiritual growth will never just 'happen.' You need to have a time in mind when you can read the Bible and pray together. Put it on your calendar like any other commitment. Still, be flexible and not legalistic. Remember, though, that a time to read the Bible and pray together is only one part of spiritual growth. Making spiritual concerns and needs part of your normal conversation is just as important. This can't be scheduled but must be something you do spontaneously. It must be planned as well.
3. Don't expect immediate perfection. Watch for unrealistic expectations. Remember, if you are doing anything spiritual in your marriage or family you're far ahead of the vast majority of Christian men today.
4. Pray together. Prayer doesn't have to be scheduled, it can be done any time or place: before making a large purchase, when leaving the house for the work day, meal time, when hearing of needs in a friend's life, with a child who is facing a difficulty, spontaneously thanking God for something special happening, etc. You can pray silently together or one (either one) or both praying out loud. Keep praying on your own, individually, throughout the day as well.
5. Worship Together Regularly. Attend church together, drive there and home together, sit together in church (at least MOST of the time, don't have other responsibilities that keep you apart every week). Pray together before church for God to bless it and use it in your lives. Afterwards talk about the message and lessons you hear and how they apply. Develop friendships with other couples who are growing spiritually as well.

BENEFITS: Growing together spiritually promotes unity. When you pray or talk about spiritual things with your spouse you are drawn into unity with God and each other. Spiritual intimacy helps emotional intimacy increase as well, and so does your ability to communicate together. Also, spiritual growth invites God into your relationship. For a marriage to be happy and fulfilling, three parties need to be involved: the husband, the wife and the Lord.

It's like braiding. Two strands cannot hold together when braided, but when a third is added there is strength and unity that make it last. It only looks like two strands for the third is not seen, but the third is the key. You know who the third strand is that holds the two of you together don't you? "Unless the Lord builds the house, they who build it labor in vain" (Psalm 127:1).

PHYSICAL INTIMACY

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Third in a series of articles about emotional, spiritual and physical intimacy in marriage, which is all based on our intimacy with God. These messages were first presented at a Marriage Retreat

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“Here we are, with all of our high notions of ourselves as intellectual and spiritual beings, and the most profound form of knowledge for us is a plain business of skin on skin. It is humiliating. When two members of this godlike, cerebral species approach the heights of communion between themselves, what do they do? Think? Speculate? Meditate? No, they take off their clothes. Do they want to get their brains together? No. It is the most appalling of ironies: their search for union takes them quite literally in a direction away from where their brains are” (from “Hallowed by this House” by Thomas Howard).

When we use the word ‘intimacy’ our first thoughts go to sexual intimacy. It’s what we think of first, but an area where we often really fail. Consider the following statements: “The typical wife doesn’t understand her husband’s deep need for sex any more than the typical husband understands his wife’s deep need for affection.” “Women give sex to get love. Men give love to get sex.” “Being ready for sex and being prepared to make love are two different things.” “A man cannot achieve sexual fulfillment in marriage unless his wife is sexually fulfilled as well.” “The weaker sex is the stronger sex because of the weakness of the stronger sex for the weaker sex.” “Sex functions as a mirror. We meet ourselves in it, and we often don’t like what we see.” “We teach our children all about handling money, but nothing about handling sex. That’s because we often don’t have the answers ourselves.”

‘Intimacy’ is from the Latin ‘intimus’ which means ‘innermost.’ As related to sex it refers to pleasure with a purpose. God created sex for procreation (Genesis 1:27-28; 9:1) as well as pleasure (Genesis 3:6; 18:12; 26:8; Deuteronomy 24:5; Song of Solomon 7:6-10; etc.). Sex continues long after the possibility of having children is past, so clearly God did not create sex just to have children.

So it is legitimate to enjoy physical intimacy simply for pleasure, but making sure the experience is totally fulfilling for both man and woman is often where the problem comes in. While men equate affection and sex, to women they are totally different. Affection is the environment and sex is an event. Men must learn that affection is a way of life, a canopy that covers and protects a marriage. Fulfilling sex begins with sexless affection by the man. Men wonder why their wives don’t get as turned on as they did before marriage, but they don’t realize that they do not show sexless affection as they did before marriage. Often women will have sex with their husband just for the affection they can glean from it but that can leave them empty, resentful and bitter. Physical intimacy begins with emotional intimacy and spiritual intimacy. There must be deep emotional intimacy and built on that must be a growing spiritual intimacy. Physical intimacy is an outgrowth of these two. That’s why this is the third article, not the first.

How can men become more affectionate? Knowing your wife’s love language and learning to speak it is of the utmost importance. In addition, ask her what her needs are and listen carefully, read between the lines, don’t explain or defend yourself, just listen and learn! For men, sex is often the only way to intimacy. But for women, it is just one of many ways, and not the first way, either.

Song of Solomon is a book that focuses in physical intimacy (not just sex). There are several principles we can glean from the book.

1. Intimacy takes time. Throughout the book Solomon describes the Shulamite several times, from first meeting to after marriage (and their first conflict). Each description is more explicit and intimate. It takes years to learn to really ‘click’ INTIMATELY -- not just years having sex, but years communicating, experimenting, letting the walls down, giving instead of getting.

2. Intimacy takes timing. Must work at intimacy, won't just happen. Recognize and use opportunities to serve, listen, reach out, encourage, share, open heart, forgive, etc. Solomon came to bed in the middle of the night, aroused and wanting sex. She was long asleep and not in the mood. She says she has a headache! Solomon storms out, male pride wounded. As she lies awake and has time to think of Solomon, she slowly becomes aroused. Men turn on quicker, must make sure it is a good time of the day (or month) for wife. Then must give her time. Her curve is more gradual in increasing and decreasing. Men go straight up and then straight down!

3. Intimacy takes talking. Communication The English word "intercourse" refers to communication. Verbal intercourse is a basic prerequisite to sexual intercourse. Solomon and Shulamite lay in bed and talk together first. They then praise each other and talk about what they want to do and are doing. The verbal communication creates the romantic atmosphere in which sexual intimacy can blossom. Women spell intimacy T-A-L-K

4. Intimacy takes trust. No one perfect, but when know other person trying their best and know they are putting you first, security and trust develop. Intimacy requires a relationship of trust so playful expression and comfortable exploration can take place. The Shulamite requests this from Solomon, even dreams of it when it isn't present (what does your wife dream about?). A main theme in Song of Solomon is not allowing sexual love to be aroused until it can be totally satisfied (before marriage). Sex can only be what God made it to be in a secure love relationship in marriage. Often sexual problems, impotency, wrong thoughts during sex, etc., show a basic lack of trust in the other person.

5. Intimacy takes time away. Solomon and the Shulamite get away with just each other from time to time. "Let's go into the country, find a cute place to stay, see if the leaves have turned, and make love!" she says. Solomon cleared his schedule and went! Time away from kids, responsibilities, and friends is essential to a growing, intimate sexual relationship. It takes time to explore, develop new trust,

INTIMACY WITH GOD

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Fourth in a series of articles about emotional, spiritual and physical intimacy in marriage, which is all based on our intimacy with God. These messages were first presented at a Marriage Retreat held by Christian Training Organization and Main Street Baptist church at Bird-In-Hand, PA, on March 13-15, 2015. For more information contact Jerry Schmoyer jerry@schmoyer.net.

Paul was growing older. He had more days behind him than ahead. He has seen the then-known world. He had walked intimately with his Lord. Now he was again in prison and he took his pen to express what was of the utmost importance to him. Though Paul had won many to Christ, his chief desire was not to win more. Though he had planted dozens of churches, his chief desire was not to plant more. Though he had served Christ well, his chief desire was not to serve Him better.

Instead he wrote: "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing

Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:7-14)

Paul’s key thought here is “I want to know Christ.” It is so important he even repeats it. It was the central goal of his life. But what did he mean? Didn’t he already know all about Jesus? He is the one who taught us in his letters. However there is a big difference between knowing about someone and knowing the person themselves. It was intimacy, not knowledge that Paul sought. That don’t come with an act of commitment, it takes a life long focus on pursuing a closer relationship with God. Any time intimacy, true lasting intimacy, develops there is a price that must be paid. It doesn’t happen without work, focus, sacrifice and desire. The same is true spiritually. There was nothing more important to Paul than closer intimacy with God – nothing!

Jeremiah wrote, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13) As in any relationship, it takes quality and quantity time to grow closer to someone. The same is true in the spiritual realm. Our desire to become closer to Jesus must be more important than anything else, and then we must be willing to give Him the best and most of our time and attention. Nothing else is as important; in fact it is as ‘rubbish’ (verse 8) in comparison.

After all, He loves us with a love greater than we will ever have for Him (John 13:23; 3:16). He loved us first, He initiated a relationship for us, He certainly was willing to pay the price to have that, and what a price it was! What we pay is nothing like what He paid for us! That alone should drive us to want to know Him better and love Him more!

So then why is it so hard for us to develop intimacy with God, even harder than intimacy with other people? For one thing, we often don’t know how to be intimate with others, much less God! What experiences we have had often ended in pain. Few of us have seen deep intimacy with God in real life, lived out by someone we know.

Add to that the fact that we are often busy, too busy to give any of our relationships the time and attention they need, especially our relationship with God. We don’t do anything to change our business so we don’t have time for the really important things in life – relationships.

Then, too, it can take a lot of work to develop closeness with God – read your Bible, pray, worship, etc., etc., etc. It’s much easier to stay an arms length away, like we do with our mates. Our natural self-centeredness and selfishness keeps our focus on ourselves instead of Someone else.

But suppose we do recognize the importance of intimacy with God above everything else? After all, what higher purpose in life could there be? If we desire that, how would we attain it? First of all, find a quiet time and place to meet regularly with God. Make time with Him a top priority, not something else to be crossed off a ‘to do’ list of something done to relieve guilt.

Then select a passage of Scripture to meditate on. Work your way through it slowly, thinking about the words, praying them back to God, reading between the lines, asking for His

insight and then quietly listening as He speaks His truth to your soul. Listening is more important in developing intimacy in any relationship, including with God!

Don't expect an emotional high to come sweep you away. You are going deeper with God, not higher! When your mind wanders pray and move it back. Ask Him to teach you, to fill you with His love so you respond in greater love to Him. Spend plenty of time in praise and worship. Music can help with that as well. Don't rush, just enjoy His presence. Don't have certain expectations, just spend time hanging out with Him. Intimacy develops slowly over time, and it will be that way with God as well. But the key is getting started, seeking to know Him better.

The Psalmist put it this way: "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?" (Psalm 42:1-2) Do you thirst for God? Is He your passion? A soul hungry to know God better is the basis for deeper intimacy with God. And what could be better? It's what we'll have for all eternity in heaven so it might as well start now!