

## “An Intimate Marriage”

It's Mother's Day, but today I'm not going to focus on moms, but broaden my message to a *family* theme. Actually, it's also “Christian Home Month”. I want to talk about husbands and wives. Marriage. Particularly *intimacy* in marriage

One of the notable features of a strong and happy marriage is that there is sense of togetherness, a closeness between husband and wife. Now this doesn't mean they will always agree, or always feel warm and cozy towards one another, or will want to do everything together (couples need space and distance at times). But intimacy means couples will bond in ways that bring joy and satisfaction.

The Biblical basis for what I want to say is the creation story in Genesis, chapter 2. (Turn to Genesis 2:18-25). God created a man. Then after a while look at what happens: “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner’” (Genesis 2:18). So God made animals, and told Adam to name them. After a while, Adam looks at all these giraffes and tigers and porcupines and rabbits – but something is missing! I mean, our pet poodle or parakeet or Persian kitty can only do so much for us! “The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner” (Genesis 2:20). God says, “I'm going to have to do something. These animals really don't provide the intimate companion the man needs.” So He does a bit of surgery: “So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman, and brought her to the man” (Genesis 2:21-22).

Then the Lord, with the woman by His side, walks up to Adam: “Look here a minute, Adam.” I can imagine Adam looking over this new kind of creature with wide-eyed amazement. It is kind of like him...but pleasantly different! “All right!! How cool is this!” Adam responds. “Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’” Genesis 2:23. Adam is ecstatic! “Here is one who is my counterpart, one who completes me!” he cries.

The creation story presents a beautiful picture of *intimacy*. “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (verse 24). A man leaves home and parents and bonds with a wife. The husband-wife relationship takes precedence over one's relationship with parents. The next verse also speaks of a type of intimacy: “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (verse 25). They are naked, but there's no shame or embarrassment. There is a natural, beautiful oneness between them.

*Intimacy is God's ideal for married couples!* Let me say more about intimacy in marriage, and how we can grow in this. Some psychotherapists have identified 10 or 12 different types of intimacy for couples. I will simplify that somewhat, and look at **four** important types of intimacy. Actually, these four types of intimacy are not separate and distinct, but they kind of spill over into each other.

**First, physical intimacy.** God intended this when He created men and women: Genesis 2:24 speaks of “one flesh”. God wants husbands and wives to enjoy each other physically – the kiss,

the embrace, the gentle touch, and sexual oneness too. When a couple are dating, or in the infatuation stage, physical intimacy can be easy to achieve. It's a matter of just doing what comes naturally. Physiologically, their body chemistry is in overdrive. Think back to when you were dating. Wasn't it wonderful! Just to be near your girl friend or boy friend. To kiss, hug, hold hands.

*The good news is:* It's a wonderful time of life. It's great to be in love. The world's a rosy place when you're in love. *The bad news is:* That euphoria doesn't last! You can't stay up in the clouds forever. So, if 5 or 10 or 25 or 40 years later a husband and wife are to enjoy physical intimacy, it takes commitment to one another, patience, and work! You have to commit to **keeping romance alive** in marriage! Doing the nice little thoughtful, tender things that (hopefully) you did when you first fell in love.

One also has to commit to achieving **sexual oneness** in marriage if it's to happen. When young, you may tend to think sexual satisfaction in marriage just happens naturally – just go with the flow! But achieving a lifetime of physical and sexual pleasure with our spouse takes commitment, hard work, and unselfish effort.

It's interesting that in spite of the sexual revolution of the 1960's and 1970's, I don't sense that our generation is any more sexually fulfilled than parents or grandparents! One sex therapist I know, an author and instructor, claims that more than 60% of couples have a self-perceived sexual problem in their marriage (i.e. 6 out of 10 see themselves as having a problem in this area).

If physical intimacy is lacking, or in short supply, what can couples do? First, talk: Try to be open and honest. Listen to what your partner is saying without feeling hurt or defensive. When it comes to physical touch or sexual desire, couples often differ in what they expect and need. Stop criticizing your partner. Ask yourself: where can I change to help meet my partner's needs? If you're stuck, and unable to change, get help. There are all kinds of self-help books and tapes available, plus professional counseling can be extremely helpful.

Bonding *physically* is important to a healthy and happy marriage, but **intellectual intimacy is important also**. By intellectual intimacy, I mean that there is some common bond in the sharing of **interests** and **ideas**. No two people think alike all the time. That's normal. Having differences in the way we think and what we like can add variety to a relationship. But *major differences* can eat away at a sense of closeness in a marriage. For instance, here's a lady who loves the world of ideas, is an avid reader, volunteers at the local library. And she's married to a man whose entire intellectual activity for the week is digesting the halftime statistics for Monday Night Football while sitting on the sofa drinking beer. Or, here's a man who takes time to develop his mind, keeps up with current events, has all kinds of interests in life, and is married to a lady whose whole world is TV game shows and twice a week bingo games at the local fire hall.

We can all probably point to couples like this and, wonder: "Why did they ever get married in

the first place?” (Maybe this even describes *our* marriage!). Well, there may be a number of reasons, but couples like this probably married out of physical attraction or mere infatuation. This camouflaged the fact that they didn’t really have much in common. Or couples may start out ok, but later develop a different set of interests, and grow apart.

*What can we do if this is our situation?* It’s not hopeless. But this presents a real test of how mature and unselfish we are: Can we work together on developing some common interests? Can I stretch myself to get interested in some of the things my partner likes? I knew a couple who, after their children were grown, realized that their marriage was stale, and that is they were going to stay together, they would have to develop some common interests. So they took dancing lessons, loved it, and spent a lot of time in their later years dancing.

***Then too, emotional intimacy is an essential part of a healthy and happy marriage.*** Remember, God gave the woman to Adam because the animals just didn’t satisfy the man’s desire for a partner. There was only so much “togetherness” you could have with zebras and groundhogs. The man needed the woman to share his deepest feelings and emotions.

Most of us marry someone because, unconsciously, that person meets some kind of emotional need in us: He or she may make us feel secure...or important and special. Or, the partner kind of offsets some personality deficiency in us. For instance, we’re kind of straight-laced and serious, and our partner is rather fun-loving. Or we’re rather reserved and on the quiet side and our partner is outgoing, a talker. *But what can happen? The personality differences in our partner we used to laugh about can now irritate us, or drive us crazy! Or that person who paid so much attention to us and made us feel so special – well, things change.*

When married for a while, we can easily become preoccupied with our job or career. Or children come along, and there are dirty diapers, messes to clean up. Housework and chores and sick kids and the daily grind of work take their toll. And there may be financial worries. And *that person who made you feel so special.* Half the time he or she doesn’t even notice how you look or listen to what you’re saying. And you feel alone, hurt, and a bit bitter. And the luster of our marriage fades, and disillusionment sets in. We just kind of exist, in the same house, but are emotionally distant.

***Actually, many of us have some anxiety about intimacy.*** Some of us are afraid of revealing our feelings, of opening up. Maybe we felt smothered by an overinvolved parent, or as child we were abused, or emotionally abandoned. So, we build walls around ourselves to protect us from being hurt or rejected or put down. Even the healthiest of us, in some ways, are often a bit anxious about taking down the walls and removing the masks and revealing who we really are and what we really are feeling.

*So what can happen when a couple reach that point where one, or both, feel alone, and where our deepest emotional needs for affirmation and affection are not met?* Maybe separation, divorce. Often with the words, “There’s nothing there anymore.” Or, a couple may stay together, but just kind of live separate lives. And, I don’t think I need to tell you, this can be one

of those vulnerable times when we might begin to look elsewhere – for someone else to fill the emotional emptiness. That woman at work, who seems to understand you so much better than your wife. That man whom you know, perhaps even at church, who really pays attention to what you say and how you look and treats you like a *woman*. Often affairs are attempts to find an emotional closeness that you lost, or never had, in your marriage.

*But here's good news: Emotional intimacy is something we can recover, or discover for the first time, in a marriage!* We may need professional counseling if our fear of intimacy is so deep and pervading that we just can't open up to others. But most of us can improve our emotional bond with our partner, and here are a few ways.

*Make time for each other.* Building or rebuilding closeness requires that we spend some quality time together. Often we are just too busy, and have too much on our plate. We have to take the time and make the time. Turn off the TV. Talk to each other. Play a table game. Go out on a date. Second, *listen and pay attention to the person we married.* Really listen. A lot of times, couples do talk – but they talk about their jobs, the kids, the daily schedule and activities, but don't communicate at a deeper level. They don't talk about their feelings. Get in touch with your own feelings. Share those feelings with your partner. Allow your partner to share his or her honest feelings with you, without getting offended, or shutting your partner down.

*If we are parents, we often make the mistake of focusing all our attention on our children, and have little time or energy for each other.* The best thing we can do for our children is to have a warm, loving relationship with their father (or mother)! And then, *do some of the nice things you may have once done to say "I love you"*. The unexpected little gift. The flowers when it's not a special day. The little love notes left under the pillow. Whispering sweet nothings in your partner's ears (even if he is hard of hearing!). The night out at the movies, or watching a movie together at home.

God, in His beautiful purpose for us, created husbands and wives to help fulfill each other's needs for recognition, appreciation, and tender affection.

Finally, just a word about another kind of intimacy: that is *spiritual intimacy*. In the Genesis story, when God made a man, then a woman, God made them not just for each other, but God made them both for a relationship with Himself. Physical intimacy is important. Likewise intellectual and emotional intimacy. But God wants couples to have a *spiritual oneness*, that special closeness that can come, when husband and wife both know the Lord and are committed to Him.

*Yet this spiritual intimacy is often lacking, even for people in the church!* I have performed quite a number of wedding ceremonies where one of the persons marrying is a professing Christian, but he or she is marrying a person who doesn't share that faith. Scripture is plain in saying followers of Jesus shouldn't be mismatched with unbelievers: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship

can light have with darkness?...what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?" (2 Corinthians 6:14-14). God is not telling us this in Scripture just to be ornery and demanding! God knows if we can't share with our partner *spiritual values, a godly way of looking at life*, there will be a barrier between the couple. It's hard to share on the deepest level with our partner if *one* loves the Lord, and for the other, God and the Bible and Church are not that important.

*Some of us here are married to someone who's not a follower of Jesus.* Don't condemn yourself. Accept your spouse. Love him, love her, with all you've got. Be the best husband, the best wife you can be. And pray for your spouse to come to Christ. Ask others to pray. Don't give up that hope that someday God's Spirit will move your partner to confess Christ and serve Him.

*Some of us here are married, both profess Christ, but maybe we haven't been working at developing a genuine spiritual intimacy.* Why not begin to pray together...read the Bible together...look for things you can do as a couple to serve the Lord!

Dennis Rainey is a Christian author and marriage counselor. He tells of counseling a middle aged couple having significant marital problems. One day the woman left his office, and said she was going into the hospital the next day to have major surgery for cancer. Dennis called her husband, "I hear your wife is having major surgery tomorrow." The man replied, "Well, I've had this fishing trip planned for 6 months." Then in an icy voice, he stated: "I'm not going to the hospital. For 30 years she oppressed me. I'm going fishing."

When I was growing up, we got our groceries at a little corner grocery store, an old-fashioned kind. The store owner and his wife, a Jewish couple, Izzie and Minnie Ansel, ran the store. She got cancer. She suffered much, then died, Her husband was crushed. I remember sometime later, talking with him in his store. He looked across that old wooden counter, and with tears in his eyes, said to me, "You know, I loved her more each day."

Now, if you are married, or hope to marry someday, which of these marriages do you want yours to be like? Is there a closeness? A togetherness? A relationship crowned by your mutual love for Jesus?

That can happen, if you both are willing to work at it, are willing to change where it would improve your marriage, and where you are willing to ask God for help!

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