

GOD INTENDED INTIMACY

Marriage should be the most intimate relationship anybody experiences in life. It should be more intimate than a friendship, a mother-daughter relationship, a father-son relationship, a boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, etc. But sadly, many couples often feel distant and alone in marriage.

Because man is body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess 5:23), married couples must cultivate each aspect of their being in order to develop intimacy. They must cultivate their friendship (soul), their sexuality (body), and their spirituality (spirit) in marriage. If one aspect of this tri-unity is missing, couples will lack the intimacy God desires. Therefore, all three must be continually cultivated.

How should married couples develop these three aspects of intimacy?

1) Intimacy in Friendship

As we consider developing intimacy in friendship, we must consider Christ and his friendship with the church. Jesus said this in John 15:15

“I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

What makes the difference between being Christ’s servant and his friend? It was the fact that Christ shared everything with his friends. As the church, we are both Christ’s bride (cf. Eph 5:23-27) and his friend. He has taught us his secrets, things that the world will not and cannot understand (1 Cor 2:14). Through his Word and the Holy Spirit, he has taught us truths about salvation, mankind, creation and the future. As the church, we are Christ’s friends, and every day we have the privilege to grow in intimacy with him through studying his Word and speaking with him in prayer.

Similarly, this practice of connecting by sharing one’s life, thoughts, fears, and concerns will cultivate a married couple’s friendship and therefore intimacy. Certainly, there is a need for discipline in this area. As life gets busy with work, managing the household, raising children, church, hobbies, etc., there will be many things (some good things) that can distract from cultivating the friendship.

Likewise, this often happens in our relationship with God. Remember the story of Mary and Martha? Martha was busy serving, while Mary quietly sat at Jesus' feet. In the same way, we often get busy with good things, which can cause us to neglect our relationship with God. This can also happen with our spouse, causing not only a lack of intimacy but discord in marriage.

What disciplines can couples practice to cultivate their friendship? (4 things)

a) Couples should set aside time every day for sharing and listening.

Activities are good, but intimate sharing should be maximised when couples are together. For most, evenings will be the best time for this, after work and other chores are completed.

Personally, my wife and I get time every Monday - 1st talk about ourselves and then ministry. Usually nights before we sleep we talk(I've fallen asleep sometimes)

As a couple has more children, it becomes even harder to allot time for intimate sharing, but it is still just as important. I read about a man's wife, who had five children, share that in their home, the children had to be in their rooms by 8 PM. She would commonly tell their kids after 8 PM, "I am no longer mom but my husband's wife." That's how they managed a busy home and yet kept intimacy. It also demonstrated to the kids the priority of the marriage relationship.

b) Couples should be careful that intimacy killers don't destroy your friendship

In considering the importance of time alone, one should be aware of intimacy killers. Often watching TV, being on the Internet, playing video games, being on the phone, etc., can be ways of distracting from or avoiding intimacy.

One marital book said early on in marriage encouraged couples to not turn on the TV for the first year of marriage. The first year of marriage is foundational for the rest of marriage. In the Old Testament, a man was not allowed to go to war during the first year of marriage. He was to stay home and bring his wife happiness (Deut 24:5). It is within the first year of marriage that **patterns** are established, both healthy and unhealthy ones. If a couple establishes early patterns of primarily watching and doing instead of being and sharing, it may reap hazardous dividends later in marriage. It is not uncommon for couples to say after years of marriage, "We realised that we really didn't know one an-

other.” It is very possible these couples established unhealthy patterns early in marriage of being distracted by intimacy killers, which kept them from ever truly knowing one another.

This is good to consider about marriage and especially one’s first year, which establishes a foundation for the rest of marriage. Do you want to have a marriage where your spouse comes home, hugs you, and then gets on the Internet, TV, or phone for three hours before bed? It is good to beware of these tendencies which can potentially hurt couples. Protect yourself from intimacy killers; block out daily time to focus on sharing, listening, and being together.

c) Couples should enjoy activities together to cultivate their friendship.

With all that said, **balance** is needed in marriage. Couples need times of just sharing and listening to one another, but they also need to enjoy activities together such as: reading, working out, going to movies, traveling, etc. Sadly, many couples get married believing they have many activities they love doing together, but after the first year, they find that they really enjoy different things. In the early years, the woman would watch sports with her husband because she was just happy to be with him. However, soon after getting married, she would quickly decline watching the game to do her own thing. While newly weds, the man would go shopping or to the mall with his wife because he was just happy to be around her. Later, in marriage, he promptly declines to instead stay home. It is not uncommon for early passion to blur the reality of the person one is going to marry, and couples should be aware of this.

Whether this happens or not, it is important for couples to find activities they enjoy together, to help maintain and increase intimacy. Christ went everywhere with his infant church, the disciples, and shared everything with them(Matt 17:1, John 15:15 - are we keeping secrets from each other)

Of course, many times husbands and wives will simply not enjoy the same activities.(I am into sports,Jas is not) This is normal. However, out of love for their spouse, they should participate in many of the activities their spouse enjoys. The wife should occasionally watch sports, and the husband should occasionally watch the romantic comedy. Out of love, we should serve our mate, and one of the greatest ways to do this is by doing something he or she enjoys. This will enrich the friendship.

d) Couples should have a weekly date to cultivate their friendship.

In addition, a wise practice for couples is to establish a weekly date night. Choose a convenient night of the week to go out and do something special. Guard this night from the rigours of busyness, and when unforeseen circumstances do not allow it, always reschedule. Date night does not have to be expensive or even cost money; the most important aspect of it is spending uninterrupted time together (Switch off the phone)

One of the great realities of marriage is that it will take a lifetime to truly know your spouse since he or she is always growing and changing. Therefore, as a discipline, wisely plan to cultivate the intimacy of friendship in marriage.

2) Intimacy through physical relationship

Next, couples must cultivate intimacy through PR. God meant PI to be a powerful means of increasing intimacy in marriage. In fact, it has often been called the “test” of marriage. Couples who are angry with one another will eat together, go to the movies together, and church together but most likely will not have a PR together. PR is a gauge for a couple’s intimacy and, also, how a couple increases it.

If a married couple finds themselves going weeks without PR, it may be a good time to evaluate the relationship. “Are my spouse and I alright?” “Am I meeting his/her needs?”

In considering PR, it is also important to consider Satan’s tactics in that area of marriage. While unmarried, his energy focuses on tempting couples towards premarital sex, but in marriage, his energy focuses on tempting them to not have sex. Young married couples will often find this a paradox since their passion was hard to contain before marriage. But in the marriage union, sexual intimacy tends to become dry and stagnant. Satan wants to hinder a married couple’s intimacy through a lack of PR.

For now, let’s consider God’s purposes for PI.

a) God’s purpose for PR is as a means of unity and intimacy in marriage.

Genesis 2:24 says: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” When the narrator said the man and woman become “one flesh,” he was referring directly to PR. This is supported by the fact that 1 Corinthians 6:16 says a man who has a PR with a prostitute becomes “one flesh” with her. The sexual act was meant to

be a symbol of unity and intimacy in marriage and how a couple cultivated them.

In fact, sex was used to picture God's intimacy and covenant with the nation of Israel. Ezekiel 16:8 says:

Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign LORD, and you became mine.

God took Israel as his wife, as a husband took his virgin wife to himself. God meant PR in marriage to symbolise the most intimate relationship in the world, our relationship with him. It is a powerful union. It is both a symbol of unity and intimacy and the means of how a married couple grows in them.

b) God's purpose for PR is as a means of procreation.

God desires for couples to give birth and raise godly children. Consider these verses:

Genesis 1:27-28

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

Malachi 2:15

Has not the one God made you ? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek ? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.

c) God's purpose for PR is as a means of enjoyment and pleasure.

Consider these verses:

Proverbs 5:18-19

May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer— may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.

Song of Songs 7:6-12

How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love, with your delights! Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. I said, "I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit." May your breasts be like

the clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine. May the wine go straight to my lover, flowing gently over lips and teeth. I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me. Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom—there I will give you my love.

Couples are meant to enjoy their spouse through PR. In a very real way, PR is a celebration of the relationship, a way to express pleasure in one another.

d) God's purpose in PR is as a means of serving one's spouse.- my sharing

In **1 Corinthians 7:3-4**, Paul said:

The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Paul taught the wife must give her husband the right of ownership of her body, and the husband must do the same (v. 4). They should not withhold PR as a weapon to get their way or to punish their mate. Paul explicitly said to not "deprive each other" except temporarily by "mutual consent" for spiritual reasons (v. 5).

When I got married, I received counsel about PR from a godly man. He said when he first got married, he and his wife made an agreement. When angry or when one didn't desire to have sex, one would still offer oneself to the other as Scripture teaches. He or she would say to the other, "I may not feel like it now, but if you will take me like this, I want to serve you." Married couples must learn to view PR as a ministry to one another and commit to always be available to fulfil their spouse's need.

Sadly, intimacy in marriage is often about fulfilling one's lust or reaching one's own climax instead of serving. Consequently, a spouse can still feel used and/or unsatisfied sexually in marriage. However, this was never God's plan.

Philippians 2:3-4 says this:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

In PR, as with every relationship, nothing should be done out of selfish motivation but primarily to serve the interests of the other. In sex, the husband's goal should be his wife's pleasure, and the wife's goal should be her husband's pleasure.

How does this work when spouses have different libidos(sexual drive)? In most marriages, one spouse desires sex more than the other. Because God's plan for sex in marriage is for each spouse to seek the pleasure of the other, this means that one spouse will have sex more than desired, and the other will have less than desired. Each should continually seek to serve the interest of the other within the sexual relationship.

Obviously, no one should feel forced, but if a spouse is lacking desire to serve his/her mate, the spouse should pray and ask God for grace to serve. In fact, it is a wise practice for spouses to continually pray to serve their mate better in the sexual union. By serving their mate, they are honouring God and his design for marriage.

e) God's purpose for PR is as a means of protection from sexual immorality and other temptations.

1 Corinthians 7:1-2 says, "Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband."

Paul taught that marriage, and PR in marriage, was meant to protect couples from temptations towards sexual immorality. In fact, Paul added this:

1 Corinthians 7:5

Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

When couples do not practice consistency in PR, it allows Satan to tempt them in various ways. In what ways does Satan tempt couples for lack of sexual consistency?

Of course, he tempts them sexually through lust, pornography, adultery, etc. But there are many other temptations, such as one or both spouses feeling

unloved, undesired, depressed, and/or insecure. I have found this very common for wives, especially after having children. When the sexual union is not consistent, they are tempted to feel unattractive and unloved. It becomes an open door for Satan to trample the woman in marriage. With the husband, when the sexual union is inconsistent, it seems he is more prone to be tempted sexually. This might be because the husband more commonly works outside the home around members of the opposite sex. It is wise for husbands and wives to view their sexual intimacy as a necessary protection from the evil one's schemes.

Personally, I think it is wise for couples to establish a weekly plan to practice sexual intimacy. Satan will use busyness, body pain, tiredness, children, ministry, etc., to keep couples from the blessing of PR. **Proverbs 21:5** says, "The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty." Those who plan, plan to succeed, and those who do not plan, plan to fail.

Let me add a caution about when couples have children. The birth of children adds new challenges to a couple's intimacy. The children stage is a tremendous blessing, but it will open more doors for Satan to attack sexual intimacy in marriage. Many times children become the focus of the marriage. In some cultures, the wife will often co-sleep with the child for years. In those scenarios, couples will have to be even more strategic. Satan is not going to stop attacking the marriage because of children. In fact, his attacks will probably increase. Therefore, Christians must be wise and strategic in how they protect the sexual union.

With all that said, what are some ways to enrich PR in marriage?

- openly talk about it
- set up dates for it
- practice roam throughout the day
- pray about it
- be creative
- wisely read Christian books about it

For instance, God made the woman's body differently than the man's. The woman's body typically takes longer to arouse, and they are stirred more emotionally than men. In order for the husband to serve the woman, it will typically start long before entering the bedroom through touch, communication, and loving service.

In summary, PR is a celebration that God created to enrich marriage. It is where intimacy and unity are cultivated, where the miracle of procreation

happens, and where pure joy is stimulated. However, it is also an area where Satan commonly attacks. Couples must guard it and cultivate it to grow in intimacy with one another.

Feedback session or practicals for women

1. Keep myself grateful..anything that is given to me is not meant to be kept for myself.
2. Satan hates our unity...we are made in his image and satan hates that image and he is constantly battling to destroy that unity..
3. I Peter 3:6 - fight for the connection..husband not the first love and can't expect him to meet your needs..apologise first and then connect..its God who love me the most..can't convince ourselves that we need this badly..
4. Study your husband..being a helper..drawing him out..
5. Help retrace the steps..
6. Store memories of the special times you had with your husband...then you will look forward to it..PR is based on memories for women..turned on.. Think about Adam and Eve..there is no shame..nothing impure or unholy about it.. Think about this in a new way..explore something different.. It takes away anger.. They need more of it to release the stress..set your priorities right..

3) Intimacy in the Spiritual

The final way of building intimacy is through cultivating spiritual intimacy. This may be the most neglected aspect of intimacy in marriages. People cultivate the mind and the body but often forget the spirit. Many couples in marriage, even marriages lasting over twenty years, commonly say to themselves, "There is something missing." The spiritual aspect is often the missing link to a successful marriage.

One of the aspects that distinguish man and animal is the fact that God gave man a spirit to connect with him. It is the highest function of humanity, and when it is neglected, man, in one sense, resembles animals. They are driven simply by their basic instincts to feed, to have PR, to have security, and to have power. Mankind was meant to have a relationship with God. In the Genesis narrative, it continually shows how man walked and talked with God (Genesis 2:16-17, 5:24, 6:9, 13). When couples cultivate their spiritual life together, they greatly increase intimacy with one another.

What are some ways for couples to increase spiritual intimacy?

a) Couples should schedule times of seeking God through prayer and God's Word as a family (1 Cor 7:5).

This could be done every night and/or morning, once or twice a week, or even at meal times. In general, couples should try to incorporate prayer and Scripture as much as possible, when starting the day, when driving in a car (not riding a bike), when eating, before going to church, before putting the children to sleep, etc. (cf. Deut 6:6-9).

b) Couples should worship with other Christians weekly.

This should be done by becoming a member of a Bible preaching church and participating in Sunday service, small groups, prayer meetings, etc. The Bible commands us to "not neglect" the gathering of one another together for the purpose of encouragement (Hebrews 10:25). With this, married couples will generally find it very enriching to develop spiritual connections with other Christian couples in the same stage of life and also with those who can help mentor them.

c) Couples should find ways of serving God and others together.

Hospitality should definitely be one avenue of serving. **Hebrews 13:1-2** says: "Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." Couples should open their home to bless others. However, serving should not be limited to hospitality. God may call some couples to invest in ministry to teenagers, children, neighbours, the homeless, widows, etc.

How will you cultivate your spiritual life together in marriage? Certainly, couples should not neglect their own individual devotions, worship, and gifts, but in becoming "one flesh" in marriage (Gen 2:24), they should also cultivate their spiritual life together.

Conclusion

Intimacy is a very important part of marriage. God made man a tri-unity with a body, soul, and spirit (1 Thess 5:23), and each of these must be cultivated to develop intimacy in marriage. Couples do this by cultivating their friendship (soul), their sexuality (body), and their spirituality (spirit). Developing a plan to cultivate these three aspects of intimacy will greatly enrich one's marriage.

How is God calling you to strategically develop intimacy in marriage?

Intimacy in Marriage Homework

Answer the questions, then discuss together.

1. What was new or stood out to you in this session? In what ways were you challenged or encouraged? Were there any points/thoughts that you did not agree with?
2. How would you describe intimacy and the importance of it in marriage?
3. What intimacy killers do you and your spouse have to be careful of? How will you navigate these to cultivate your friendship?
4. Write down five activities you enjoy doing for fun. Write down five activities your spouse enjoys doing for fun. What activities will you and your spouse do together? What activities are you willing to learn how to do or enjoy to further cultivate your friendship?
5. How will you cultivate a healthy sexual relationship to protect your marriage from the evil one's temptations (**1 Cor 7:5**)? How will you keep your physical relationship from stagnation?
6. What will you do in marriage when you and/or your mate start to lose love for one another? **Revelation 2:4-5** offers principles that can help protect and restore love in marriage.

The context of this verse is Jesus speaking to the church of Ephesus who had lost passion for him. The church was excelling in many things (v. 1-3): preaching, teaching, hating false doctrine, and righteousness, but they had lost the most important thing—their first love for Christ.

Love is the most important part of our relationship with God. (Matthew 22:37) Since the church of Ephesus had lost this, Christ promised to discipline them by taking away their lamp stand, which would ultimately destroy the church.

Similarly, love is the most important part of marriage. Therefore, the counsel Christ gave this church can be applied to restoring love in marriage. Christ called for this church to restore their love by repenting (recognising and turning away from sin) and doing what they did when they first started to love God (maybe extensive time in the Word and prayer, church fellowship, serving, etc.). This type of response to a lack of love is also needed in marriage to maintain or restore intimacy.

What type of things did you originally do when you fell in love with your spouse? How can you continually cultivate these to keep your first love or restore it?

7. After completing this session, how do you feel God is calling you to pray for your marriage? Spend some time praying.