

Growing in Marital Intimacy

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Introduction:

- Marital intimacy does not happen automatically! Many persons desire greater intimacy in their marital relationship but it often seems to elude them. This may result in a painful relationship with your spouse, frustration, and sad to say, for some, separation or divorce.
- However, as a child of God, we have all the resources of God, by His Spirit, at our disposal to assist us in carrying out the necessary attitudes and actions that enable us to grow in intimacy! The *choice* is ours! As we submit our body, soul, and spirit to the Spirit of God, we will bear fruit that will lead to greater intimacy in our life!

“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation--but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.” – Romans 8:5-14

- The word “intimate” defined [Webster dictionary]: “*marked by very close association, contact, or familiarity; marked by a warm friendship developing through long association; suggesting informal warmth or privacy; of a very personal or private nature.*” The word “intimacy” signifies the “*state of being intimate.*”
- In the context of marriage, because of man and woman becoming “one flesh,” there is a God-given expectation of intimacy. Unfortunately, Satan uses every means, weapon, or power necessary to prevent a man and woman to experience true and godly intimacy. In this lesson, we will look at the following:
 1. Attitudes and actions necessary in order to grow in intimacy
 2. Obstacles that prevent intimacy and the solutions to overcome the obstacles
 3. Benefits of growing in and experiencing intimacy
- We believe that the principles learned in this teaching as it relates to marriage can also, in many ways, be applied to our spiritual life as we seek to grow in intimacy with God!

HOW DO A HUSBAND AND WIFE DEVELOP AND GROW IN MARITAL INTIMACY?

A. Develop godly attitudes and actions

1. Absolute Faithfulness

Statement of commitment: My spouse is my only true love as far as human intimate involvement and relationship.

“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” –Hebrews 13:4

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” –Matthew 5:27-28

“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” –I Corinthians 6:9-11

Action: I will demonstrate *absolute faithfulness* to my spouse by _____

2. Continual Praise

Statement of commitment: I will exalt and praise my spouse with loving words, actions, and attitudes.

“How beautiful you are, my darling, Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves. How handsome you are, my lover! Oh, how charming!” – Song of Solomon 1:14-15

“However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.” –Ephesians 5:23

Action: I will demonstrate *continual praise* to my spouse by _____

3. Self-giving Sacrifice

Statement of commitment: I will lay down my life for my spouse. I will go out of my way to be sure that all the needs of my spouse are met...physical, emotional, spiritual (body, soul, and spirit.)

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 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.” –Philippians 2:1-4

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” –Ephesians 5:25

“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.” –Ephesians 5:22-24

“The husband should fulfill 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.” –I Corinthians 7:3-6

Action: I will demonstrate *self-giving sacrifice* to my spouse by _____

4. Lavish Love

Statement of Commitment: My love for my spouse will be unconditional agape love.

“Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” –Colossians 3:12-14

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” [each other as husband and wife]. – I John 3:16

Action: I will demonstrate *lavish love* to my spouse by _____

5. True Transparency

Statement of commitment: I will be honest and open with my feelings and what is happening in my life to the point it is necessary. I will withhold nothing from my spouse that is important for them to know.

“This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” –I John 1:5-7

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.” –Ephesians 5:8-10

Action: I will demonstrate *true transparency* to my spouse by _____

6. Open Communication

Statement of commitment: I will seek to regularly and effectively communicate with my spouse that goes beyond surface and mundane talk. This will include a commitment to pray for one another.

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. –Ephesians 4:29-31

Action: I will demonstrate *open communication* to my spouse by _____

7. Expressive Gratitude

Statement of commitment: I will express gratitude for all the ways my spouse blesses me...household tasks, his/her affirmation and support, prayers, challenges, exhortations, encouragement...

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing." –I Thessalonians 5:11

Action: I will demonstrate *expressive gratitude* to my spouse by _____

8. Resolute Commitment

Statement of commitment: No matter what the conflict or challenge, I will always resolve to walk in godly covenant and know that divorce is never an option.

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator `made them male and female,' and said, `For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." –Matthew 19:4-6

Action: I will demonstrate *resolute commitment* to my spouse by _____

9. Passionate Celebration

Statement of commitment: Life will not consist of striving to maintain a relationship only out of duty or obligation. Life will focus on the positive and seek ways to celebrate the intimate relationship that God has given to us. There will be joy expressed and fun enjoyed

“Listen! My lover! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. My lover spoke and said to me, “Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me.” –Song of Solomon 2:8-13

“How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride. How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your perfume than any spice! Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon. You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.” –Song of Solomon 4:10-12

Action: I will demonstrate *passionate celebration* to my spouse by _____

10. Humble Attitude

Statement of commitment: At every point along the way, when there is failure to be what God intends or desires for our intimate relationship, I’m willing to say, “I’m sorry.”

“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” –I Peter 5:5b-6

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” –Ephesians 4:32

Action: I will demonstrate a *humble attitude* to my spouse by _____

B. Remove obstacles that hinder intimacy

Warning! Exposure to these attitudes, along with a personal evaluation of our own heart, may seem tough! However, remember, it’s the truth that sets us free! Let’s allow the Holy Spirit to shine His light in our hearts and reveal what we need to remove so that we may grow in marital intimacy!

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”
–Hebrews 12:1-3

1. Obstacle – Self Rule

Attitude and action expressed: “I want to please myself. I’m No. 1. I want to do what feels good.” Often there is a stubborn will. Persons with “self rule” get offended very easily and find it difficult to forgive. To do so is to step down from their “throne of power.”

Solution: Consider yourself dead to sin. The stubborn “I” must be broken at the foot of the cross. There must be a complete and absolute surrender to God’s rule!

“Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.” –Romans 6-8-12

Note: After the description of each obstacle, there will be an opportunity for us to evaluate our life and marriage in view of what we have learned. A “1” signifies that we have little problem in this area. A “10” means that it is a major problem. The purpose of this is not to condemn ourselves. The purpose is to take a “checkup” on our marital intimacy. I believe with all my heart that your and my goal is to grow in marital intimacy!

Once again, let’s allow the Holy Spirit to reveal what is in our heart. Let’s allow the grace of God to strengthen us to be honest with God. Where we need to repent of sin, there is cleansing in the blood of Jesus! God loves us with an everlasting love and desires that we live to our fullest potential. Are we ready to get real?

Evaluation: (Self-rule)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. Obstacle – No discipline

Attitude and action expressed: (closely related to 1st obstacle) “I am spontaneous and quite often do what feels good at the moment, often without considering the consequences.” This often leads to hurts and offenses to my

spouse that quite possibly will result in conflict. Lack of discipline leads to not putting forth the effort to work at developing marital intimacy.

Solution: Seek help in how to grow in discipline. Be honest and name the specific offenses and trust God’s grace to help you grow in discipline. Be accountable to another person who has matured in discipline.

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” –Proverbs 1:7

Evaluation:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Obstacle – Ignorance

Attitude and action expressed: These persons are not aware of what to do to grow in intimacy.

Solution: Learn through training events such as retreats, seminars, reading, study, and most of all by having an open mind and heart to receive instruction.

“My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.” –Hosea 4:6

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” –Psalm 119:105

Evaluation:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Obstacle – Pride

Attitude and action expressed: This attitude says, “I don’t need help. Everything is O.K. Don’t mess with me.” Many times these persons know everything is not right but will not acknowledge their need.

Solution: Come to the cross of Jesus Christ in humility and repentance and confess all specific sin and foolishness. When one acts in faith and humility, the result is unspeakable joy and release.

“When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.” – Proverbs 11:2

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” –1 John 1:9

Evaluation:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Obstacle – Insensitivity

Attitude and action expressed: This person may not be “tuned in” with their spouse needs and emotions. They have a tendency to live in their own world.

Solution: Acknowledge and confess our insensitivity and start a pathway of recovery by being alert to the many ways we can reach out to our spouse.

*“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”
–Galatians 6:2*

Evaluation:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Obstacle – Multiple “loves”

Attitude and action expressed: This means that, quite often, more than is healthy, other things compete for time and attention. This can include an *excess* in sports, work, ministry, relationships, TV, ...

Solution: Acknowledge the idolatry that exists and smash the “idols” of multiple loves. We must return to our true lover with all of our heart!

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” –Matthew 6:33

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.” –Mark 12:30

Evaluation: (multiple “loves”)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Obstacle – Little passion

Attitude and action expressed: The “fire” has gone low. Instead of putting fresh “kindling” on the fire, we drift further apart from one another.

Solution: Realize the power of a small “spark” and let it grow into a blaze of passion. Be creative! Be spontaneous! Be the lover we are called to be!

“Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.”
–Song of Solomon 8:6-7

Evaluation:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Obstacle – Infrequent dialogue

Attitude or action expressed: There is minimal communication between one another. It may be because of busyness, insensitivity, lack of desire, or many other reasons.

Solution: Acknowledge with humility to one another that there is a problem. Begin to open the channels of communication. Converse freely and often. Don’t wait on each other.

“And do not forget to do good and to share [communicate] with others [including spouse], for with such sacrifices God is pleased.” –Hebrews 13:16

Evaluation:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Obstacle – No vision

Attitude or action expressed: Life has become a routine of each spouse seeking to survive in their own world. Life is often busy but often without a clear purpose other than daily survival. Marriage has more of a maintenance mentality than a

mission mentality. Often couples without vision feel tiredness and, in the extreme, see life as a drudgery.

Solution: Take time to discover your purpose of existence as a couple and as a family. Be courageous and take stock of your situation. Establish a vision and set short-term and long-term goals to fulfill your vision.

“Where there is no revelation [vision], the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law.” –Proverbs 29:18

"Write down the revelation [vision] and make it plain on tablets." –Habakkuk 2:2

Evaluation:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Obstacle – Independence

Attitude or action expressed: "I do my think and you do your thing!" Each spouse is mostly living their own life under one roof but not seeking to live in one spirit. This independent spirit gets carried out in financial decisions, leisure activities, and general household duties. There is no genuine intimacy in living an independent lifestyle in a marriage relationship.

Solution: Repent! Begin a process of what it means to grow in mutual love and respect, sharing, giving, and receiving.

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness." – James 3:13-18

Evaluation:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Remember! There is not greater joy than walking in spiritual freedom. Obedience always brings blessing! *"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does."* –James 1:22-25

C. Embrace the benefits of marital intimacy

1. **Joy** - There will be fullness of joy.
2. **Peace** – There will be peace of mind, heart, and in the relationship.

3. **Direction** – There will be sense of direction where we are going.
4. **Pleasure** – In the marriage, there will be a whole new knowing of intimacy in the physical relationship. In the Lord, true intimacy leads to a whole new dimension of sonship
5. **Respect** – Respect will flow normally and without effort.
6. **Giving** – There will be a mutual giving of honor, sharing, ...
7. **Communication** – Communication will flow freely and kindly.
8. **Blessing** – There will be a new-found freedom of all of God’s blessings. Remember, obedience always produces blessing!
9. **Security** – There will be a bonding of mutual love that will result in security of relationship.
10. **Impartation** – Our lives will minister to others

Conclusion:

- Growing in marital intimacy is a life-long journey! There will be many tests and distractions along the journey that have the possibility of hindering our intimate relationship with one another.
- Remember, God’s design for husband and wife is “one flesh.” Satan will try to destroy God’s intention by making us look for intimacy in the wrong ways and places. Let’s fulfill our God-given destiny of walking in godly intimacy as God intended!
- While this lesson focuses on “marital intimacy,” many of these same principles would apply to our personal intimacy with God. Growing in intimacy with God is foundational to our growing in intimacy with one another. They can’t be separated. The closer we are to God, the closer we will be to each other.

God’s grace is the power we need to live according to God’s standard. God’s grace is sufficient for every step we need to take to grow in intimacy! *“Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”* –II Peter 1:2-4