

Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

Building Deeper Intimacy

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I. Biblical Basis

"Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. I will go wherever you go and live wherever you live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. I will die where you die and will be buried there. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!" (Ruth 1:16-18 ~ NLT).

"After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king's son. There was an immediate bond of love between them, and they became the best of friends" (I Sam. 18:1 ~ NLT).

"Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death" (Song of Solomon 8:6).

II. Introduction

The word "intimate" has been abused in our culture. Its original intent has been changed. Today it is most frequently used when describing sexual activity, as in "They were intimate," or, "Have you been intimate yet?" However, intimacy and sexual activity are not equivalent terms ~ in fact in many cases they're not even synonyms. One can have either sex or intimacy without the other. Let's look at a few definitions of intimacy, because intimacy is what this chapter is all about.

Webster's Dictionary defines intimacy as: "The state of being intimate; close familiarity or association; nearness in friendship. Syn: Acquaintance; familiarity; fellowship; friendship."

Some statements about intimacy are ethereal ("airy-fairy"), almost funny in their vagueness. For example, in his book on intimacy, author Terry Hershey (1984) wrote, "Intimacy is not a destination or a possession or a status. Intimacy is a journey." Wow ~ what the heck does that mean ~ is that really deep or is it just stupid?

Another statement about intimacy comes close to contradicting itself. Psychologists Rosellini and Worden (1989) wrote, "Intimacy is much more than love. Intimacy is a

feeling of deep closeness and understanding between two people. It is trust, loyalty, friendship, sharing. An intimate relationship between a man and a woman will usually include sex. But not all sexual relationships are intimate. We can be desperately in love without sharing a trace of emotional closeness with our lover." Notice how these authors intermingle the terms "intimacy" and "sex," linking closeness with desperate love. It's a little like saying cows and chickens are the same because both have legs.

Eric Berne (1964), founder of "Transactional Analysis," said, "Intimacy is a game-free relationship," which goes well with the title of his book, *"Games People Play."* But it's not much of a definition.

In their first book, Miller & Miller (1980) came closer to the intent of the word "intimacy" as they wrote, "In an intimate relationship one feels safe to reveal hopes, dreams, fears, the past -- including one's sins and mistakes. These things can be shared without the fear of being judged, condemned, or straightened out." That's a pretty good definition.

In another definition, psychiatrist and author M. Scott Peck (1978) wrote that intimacy is "...the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." *That's a very good perspective ~ one which will be developed at greater length in this chapter.*

Five Minute Reflection

Create your own two-sentence definition of intimacy, and share it with the class.

III. Dysfunctional Expressions Of Intimacy

There are many myths about intimacy ~ many things that intimacy is not. For example, intimacy is not necessarily found within marriage ~ it may be found in marriage, but many marriages have little or no intimacy. Many singles hovering on the outside of marriage, looking in and wishing they were married, carry fantasies of belonging and intimacy that are not met with reality within many marriages. Marriage does not equal intimacy.

Nor is the intimacy found only in heterosexual relationships. In one biblical situation a young widow named Naomi expressed her non-sexual, non-erotic intimate love for and desire to be with her mother-in-law Ruth. She made a statement that is frequently used in marriage ceremonies when she said, ***Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. I will go wherever you go and live wherever you live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. I will die where you die and will be buried there. May the LORD punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us! (Ruth 1:16-18 ~ NLT).***

In another text the young prince, Jonathan, and the future king David shared a deep bond of non-sexual love. This was not a homosexual relationship (as Hollywood has

projected), but a profoundly deep connection between two young men. *After David had finished talking with Saul, he met Jonathan, the king's son. There was an immediate bond of love between them, and they became the best of friends (1 Sam. 18:1 ~ NLT).* In fact, scripture says, *Jonathan loved David as much as he loved himself (1 Sam. 20:17 ~ NLT).*

Nor is intimacy measured by frequency of contact. Some fortunate people have many extremely dear and precious friends whom they neither see nor talk to for extended periods of time ~ yet they are joined at the heart.

Nor is intimacy a plateau to be reached. Nor is it measured in terms of dependence or independence. Nor is it a constant state of symbiotic oneness. Yet each of these myths (dependence, plateau, symbiotic oneness, etc.) can be found woven into the fabric of current cultural assumptions.

Here are four common assumptions about intimacy ~ assumptions based upon a misunderstanding of love, and leading toward dysfunctional relationships.

A. Intimacy as Sex

Intimacy does not necessarily equate with sexual intercourse or sexual activity. Although sexual relations were intended by God to reflect a deeply connected, trusting, and intimate relationship, in today's world that's a pipe dream for many who, after a first or second date say, "Well, your place or mine?"

Without handling sexual relationships as God instructs, intimacy and sex can be about as related (as I said above) as cows and chickens ~ similar because they both have legs. Next time you catch yourself believing believe intimacy and sex are the same thing, picture yourself trying to milk a chicken.

B. Intimacy as Emotion or Passion

Sometimes intimacy feels very emotional, and is often presented as emotional expression. For example, in her widely known "Sonnet #43, *From The Portuguese*," poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote some very emotional lines as she pondered her deeply emotional love for Robert Browning:

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;

I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.
 I love thee with the passion put to use
 In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
 I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
 With my lost saints!---I love thee with the breath,
 Smiles, tears, of all my life!---and, if God choose,
 I shall but love thee better after death.

What a lovely way of expressing deep stirrings of one's heart. It sounds and feels intimate as Browning pours out heartfelt pictures of love. At the very least one might say that passionate emotional expression may sometimes be a reflection of intimacy. Yet there are times when true intimacy is not accompanied by passionate emotional expression. In fact, if intimacy were dependent upon emotions then we'd all be in trouble, because emotions come and go.

Maggie Scarf (1987) in her book, *"Intimate Partners,"* observes, "It is a fact of marital reality, well known to experts in the field, that those qualities cited by intimate partners as having first attracted them to each other, are usually *the same ones that are identified as sources of conflict* later on in the relationship." (Italics hers.) Things change. Emotions come and go. Things which drew us together initially and "felt so right," often become the very things that push us away from one another later.

Pitman (1997) gave a humorous but *clinically accurate* description of the romantic phase of a relationship, calling it "a state of temporary insanity, akin to a manic episode. It is a narcissistic intoxication that has no relationship to loving." Pretty strong words. In reality, the romantic phase of a relationship can actually be an overwhelming *flight from* reality, an exotic journey into blind ecstasy, governed by little connection to reality. Trained therapists understand that such an approach to intimacy is frequently tied to clinical issues including need, loneliness, personal crisis, or depression. The bottom line: Intimacy is not necessarily emotion or passion. It's deeper and more stable than these.

C. Intimacy as a "Soul-Mate" Connection

A popular term today is "Soul Mate." It implies a relationship in which one wandering soul found their perfectly matched "other" soul and joined together into a quasi-spiritual symbiotic oneness. Here's a song that expresses part of the "Soul Mate" myth. The song was published by Bread and is titled, "If."

If a picture paints a thousand words, then why can't I paint you?
 The words could never show the you I've come to know.
 If a face could launch a thousand ships, then where am I to go?
 There's no one home but you; you're all that's left me to.

And when my love for life is running dry,
 You come and pour yourself on me.

If a man could be two places at one time I'd be with you,

Tomorrow and today, beside you all the way.
 If the world should stop revolving, spinning slowly down to die,
 I'd spend the end with you, and when the world was through,

Then one by one, the stars would all go out,
 Then you and I, would simply fly away.

The “Soul Mate” kind of connection reflects a temporary sense of having emotionally or psychologically “merged” with a beloved person. There may be a sense of ecstasy and bliss associated with this merging together, and it may seem as if the relationship will function in this manner forever. However, like all emotions, it will pass. Then the relationship will become normalized around other dynamics. In the end it is likely that those “merging-into-oneness” sorts of experience more often reflect people’s emotional neediness than any actual joining of the soul.

So what happens in a relationship when this magical “merging” sensation fades? Can intimacy remain, or does it leave when the sense of “merging” leaves? Some talk of “falling out of love.” Can one also fall out of intimacy? Is there any way to sustain intimacy and love even after the “Niagara Falls” sort of falling-in-love, or floating-in-space love-experience? If intimacy is defined as this sort of experience, then it cannot be sustained.

D. Intimacy as Dependency

Some people associate intimacy with a deep sense of need for the other person. In a very telling song titled, “Vehicle,” song-writer Jim Peterik wrote the following lyrics. Watch how the word “need” is used in his song.

I'm the friendly stranger in the black sedan
 Won't you hop inside my car
 I got pictures, got candy, I am a lovable man
 And I can take you to the nearest star

I'm your vehicle baby. I'll take you anywhere you want to go
 I'm your vehicle woman. By now I'm sure you know
 That I love you, I need you, I want you, got to have you child.
 Great God in heaven you know I love you

Does Peterik’s song describe love? Obviously not. Do the lyrics speak of intimacy? Of course not. But it does a good job expressing his sexual drive, which is often perceived as need. In his hit song “Wichita Lineman,” Glenn Campbell sang, “I need you more than want you....” How would you like to be needed more than wanted? Another old pop song crooned, “I can’t live without you ~ can’t smile without you.” An obvious question arises ~ what happens when that desperate person doesn’t desperately need you any longer? The thought, “I can’t live without you” may express need, but it doesn’t have anything to do with intimacy.

Need-based attachment is perhaps the least stable platform upon which to attempt to build intimacy. The single mom of two kids who keeps “falling in love” with guys who look as if they’d make a great dad for her kids ~ the hard-shell unemotional guy who assumes anything wearing a skirt somehow must be able to fill his emptiness ~ the 45-year-old woman who has burned through several serial-monogamy relationships but can’t sustain an attachment ~ the hard-driving corporate guy who has lots of money but no friends ~ all reflect need. While each of these is needy, none are likely to sustain an intimate attachment. Their need gets in the way. Emotional neediness is the least stable platform on which to build a relationship.

Need is self-oriented. Need is demanding and controlling. Needs change. When someone says, “I need you so much,” the expression has more to do with their dependency than with your personality. Don’t necessarily take their “need” as a complement. Someday they might not need you, and then you won’t mean nearly as much to them as you do right now. M. Scott Peck (1978) observed, “Dependent people are so busy seeking to be loved that they have no energy left to love. They are like starving people, scrounging wherever they can find food, and with no food of their own to give to others.” Except for the early weeks of honeymoon, the desperately focused attention and ravenous hunger of a lover for his/her beloved is not necessarily an expression of intimacy. It may perhaps be just an expression of emotional neediness. Intimacy is not the same as need.

Ten Minute Reflection

Can you name any movies in which one or more of these four dysfunctional expressions of intimacy were portrayed? In the movies, were these things portrayed as being normal and healthy, or were they seen as they truly are ~ dysfunctional and painful?

IV. Functional Expressions of Intimacy

If intimacy is not sex, dependency, emotions, etc., how can one understand what it is? There are many helpful definitions which express and enhance intimacy. Here are six.

A. Valuing Both Togetherness and Separateness. Anyone who has been in love knows the desire of the heart to be in the presence of the beloved. Just being together is filling. However, healthy relationships need both togetherness and separateness. While a sense of connection and interdependence remains constant in any committed relationship, all relationships (including marital relationships) need outside interests and relationships. Time away from each other can be almost as important as time together.

This “time away” is not measured in months or weeks ~ but some “apart time” time in an average day is usually a good thing for intimacy. It may involve one or both going to

work at different jobs. It may involve having different social circles, different athletic interests, or separate hobbies. These are usually good things, provided separation doesn't become the dominant theme within the relationship. Intimacy is enriched through separateness as well as togetherness.

No relationship can long stand without other supportive relational connections. The tendency of people newly in love to hide themselves away, must morph to incorporate the larger community. Couples who have only each other, end up putting all their emotional and relational weight upon their partner. Clinically trained people know that try as one might, one person cannot long carry another person. Having only one egg in one's basket does not provide a sufficiently broad relational base for either partner. Both partners need to bring friends, family, work associates, and so forth into their relational networks. Introverts may desire fewer of these additional relationships than extraverts, but the couple's relational connection is enhanced by having them.

B. Maintaining One's Commitment to Belong. Intimacy is fed by a desire to belong. Healthy people share their souls with one another because they want to deeply know and be known. They want to "rummage around" in each other's attics and basements, learn of each other's secrets, and experience all that each person brings to the relationship.

When a couple is first dating the desire to belong is usually strong. However, as years pass it can wane as the stresses and interests of life function like currents in a lake, drawing each spouse away from the other. A dangerous moment is sometimes identified when one spouse realizes they really don't care if their marriage survives. Standing too long at the edge of that precipice can be fatal to a marriage. Remaining there for any length of time becomes a matter of character and integrity.

Each spouse must accept the personal responsibility of keeping their own heads in the marital game. There are times when one must say to oneself, "I choose to continue to belong. I choose ongoing exclusivity." Maintaining marital closeness and intimacy is not completely the other person's responsibility. There are times when one must fight the temptation to "belong" a little too much to someone other than one's spouse, whether that be a close same-sex friend or a potential lover.

Healthy marriages confront this issue on a daily basis ~ with hugs ~ with the words, "I love you," ~ with kisses before going to work and upon returning home ~ with looking the other direction when a hot member of the opposite sex passes ~ with doing special things for one another just because you love them ~ with serving and submitting. *In the early days of a relationship, belonging just happens. Later in the relationship, it is built.* And exclusivity doesn't just happen – it is repeatedly chosen, and intentionally maintained.

C. Making Regular Investments. A common mistake that many married people make is that they stop investing in each other. Husbands are often rightly

accused of being so goal driven that after they woo and marry their bride, they pretty much cease investing in the relationship. They may desire to belong, and they probably have sexual desire, but they stop making relational investments ~ things like taking long walks ~ writing poetry ~ sending flowers ~ bringing chocolate ~ helping with the laundry ~ taking over with the kids for a while ~ washing her car ~ giving her a back rub ~ etc. Husbands often forget how important it is for them to serve their wives. Then they get bent out of shape because their wife re-focuses her attention to the kids.

As with any bank account, if there is going to be ongoing withdrawal, there must be regular investment.

Men aren't the only one who stop investing in the relationship. Women often stop pursuing their mate sexually. If not careful, women can tend to put the needs and interests of their children above those of their spouse. It can be too easy for a woman to become satisfied with her nest and her children.

Both partners must make regular investments in their marital account, or the bank will run dry. When the bank runs dry, relational intimacy suffers.

Have you ever had a friend whom you liked and thought they liked you, but then you discovered that you were the only one initiating toward them? You were the only person ever calling. That sort of relationship is bound for the "intimacy junk heap." Intimacy is fueled by regular pursuit of the other person. Since we're focusing here on marriage relationships, it must be stated that the pursuit of one for the other must be both emotional and sexual.

D. Maintaining Vulnerability and Openness. Intimacy is built upon knowing each other's good and bad, and still committing to love. Some males identify with the "Clint Eastwood" type character ~ stony hard ~ emotionally stoic ~ unfeeling ~ needing no one. That character can expect to live without relational intimacy. Who wants to be close to a piece of volcanic ash? Some men and women present as being very open and vulnerable, but they're just being sexual. Who wants to be close to someone who just can't keep their zipper up? Genuine vulnerability and openness aren't things that one does quickly ~ that's emotional "flashing," not vulnerability.

Vulnerability begins where one's ability to control one's life ends ~ where one says, "This is an area in which I am weak ~ this is an area in which I am not skilled ~ this is an area in which I have done badly. Now that you know this, can you love me?"

Vulnerability and openness require a willingness to communicate openly about emotions, and trust that the other person won't reject you because you have feelings. Intimacy involves knowing each others' most sensitive emotional areas, and then providing them with the strength of love and commitment. Intimacy and trust are like congenital twins ~ they are different, but are almost identical. One cannot have one without the other.

It's probably safe to say that no marriage goes the full distance without either one or both partners really screwing up. This is why forgiveness is so necessary and powerful, because every Prodigal Son needs a way to come home again. When we have been wounded by someone, the last thing we want is to remain vulnerable to them. In those moments, sometimes the only thing one can do is to pray, "God, help me remain soft and open toward this turkey to whom I'm married."

E. Recommitting to Commitment. As said above, most marriages go through difficult times during which there is little else to sustain the relationship other than the fact that the couple once stood before God and witnesses and said, "For better or for worse; for richer or for poorer; in sickness and in health; I will love, honor, respect, cherish and serve, until death parts us."

Commitment is a word with which today's culture struggles as half of all first-time marriages end in divorce, and the statistical probability of second divorce gets worse following first divorce. Young adults struggle with the notion of commitment as they watch their parent's divorce, the thought being, "If mom and dad couldn't hold it together, how can I?"

Yet this is the very reason why commitment is essential. There are *going* to be times when couples step on each others' toes. There are *going* to be times when she finds someone to be more emotionally dependable, or he finds someone to be more physically attractive. There are *going* to be times when one's own smallness of character erupts into a major marital conflict. Yet research has shown that those couples who tough it out in the worst of circumstances, talk through their problems and issues, and pay the heavy costs of maturation and humility, come out stronger and more closely bonded than before.

Intimacy requires commitment. The strength of such commitment is reflected in Solomon's heart as he wrote, "*Put me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm. For love is as strong as death*" (Song of Solomon 8:6).

F. Liberally Giving Forgiveness. All relationships occasionally need a way of offloading anxiety and hurt. The solution to this challenge is spiritual. Forgiveness is not a "stand-alone" thing that one unilaterally gives and then is magically free from the pain requiring it in the first place. But it is an *essential starting place* prior to entering into serious dialogue regarding the issue that caused the rift. It is possible in the same breath to say, "You hurt me ~ I forgive you ~ I still need to talk about what you did." Forgiveness takes the initial "heat" out of the issue, thereby facilitating both sides' ability to express themselves with integrity and vulnerability.

Sometimes the person who has been wounded refuses to grant forgiveness. When this happens, that person takes over primary responsibility for the failure of the relationship. Unforgiveness may be justifiable in a court of law, but in a spiritual relationship like marriage there is no room for it. Unforgiveness does one thing effectively: It places the

focus of the relationship upon oneself rather than upon God and His grace. It is therefore just as culpable in the eyes of God, as was the initial fault requiring forgiveness.

Following forgiveness often comes the question of whether to trust again. That is a separate subject to be evaluated. After being bitten by a dog, it can be reasonable to keep a chair between oneself and the dog, until one is fairly certain the dog won't bite again. There's nothing wrong with having boundaries with a person who has wounded you. On the other hand, God's objective for all relationships is reconciliation.

Ten Minute Reflection

Which of these six items, A – F, is easiest to you? Which is most difficult? And why? Discuss your answers with the small group. (Tip: There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. This is a personal preference plus personal experience thing.)

V. The Spiritual Path To Intimacy

Scripture never uses the term “intimacy.” It teaches a lot about love, but the notion of “intimacy” as being some deeper level of love is without biblical support. This doesn't mean that love is a single-layered thing with no potentially greater depth as people's lives grow together. As was pointed out in another chapter, there are indeed different levels, linked by transitions, in the journey of ever-deepening love.

This being true, let's turn to the greatest single statement in all literature regarding the subject of love. It's a statement many marrying couples include in their wedding ceremony. It comes from the Bible and is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7:

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance (NLT).

You may have noticed that this biblical text is about love, not intimacy, while this chapter is about intimacy, not love. Love is the pathway to intimacy, and this biblical text turns lights onto the pathway. To understand how this text is a pathway, let's use the key words from this text to create a two-column comparison. Although 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 gives its instructions via seven positive traits and seven negative traits, for purposes of this chapter we've compared antitheses of each trait, and then separated the traits into two columns ~ one positive column and one negative column. As you study these columns it should be apparent that love is a pathway to intimacy.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 ~ A Comparison Of Antitheses

Positive	Negative
Patient	Impatient
Kind	Unkind
Trusting	Jealous
Modest	Boastful
Humble	Proud
Polite	Rude
Yielding	Demanding own way
Easygoing	Irritable
Forgiving	Keeps records
Loving justice	Glad about injustice
Rejoices when truth wins	Lacking integrity
Continues forward	Gives up easily
Maintains faith even in conflict	Loses faith rapidly
Looks forward with hope	Not hopeful
Able to maintain commitments	No endurance factor

Figure 1

Having looked over these two lists, which column represents a pathway toward intimacy? Which set of traits would lead a person more comfortably toward greater openness, vulnerability, respect, trust, attachment and intimacy?

First Corinthians 13:4-7 teaches two principles which strongly lead toward establishing and maintaining intimate attachment.

A. Intentionality. The traits found in this biblical text are forms of behavior which any person can intentionally do ~ and that's the point. Love and intimacy are not things that somehow just *happen* to us. They are like plants that can be watered, fed and nourished ~ and the elements with which we accomplish this are found in the Positive column in Figure 1, taken directly from God's Word.

It's important to understand that these things can be given intentionally to a person, regardless of how the giver feels at the moment, and regardless of whether the other person deserves them at the moment. To understand this concept, look at the first trait ~ "patient." When an angry husband comes home from a bad day at work and dumps his frustrations onto his wife, she can respond with defensiveness, emotional distance and retaliation. Or she can intentionally be patient. Either way, her response is her choice. She has the ability to intentionally treat her angry husband in the way scripture instructs, or she can take some other approach.

The word "intentional" literally means, "with intent." If the wife's intent is to communicate love to her husband when he comes home crabby and blaming, she can communicate her intent by choosing patience ~ kindness ~ forgiveness ~ etc. These intentional responses are gifts, like boxes of chocolate that she can intentionally give to her husband, at any time, in any circumstance, whether or not she has warm feelings toward him. And each of these gifts is stepping stone in the path toward intimacy.

B. Focus. The focus of the person building these stepping stones toward intimacy, is the other person. It's not themselves. This decision to "focus" loving actions toward the other person does something rather incredible: It changes the locus (or center) of control. To understand this, ponder the words of a pop song of yesteryear. It was sung by a breathy blonde who crooned, "Lovin' you is easy 'cause you're beautiful." Those words establish the notion that the one doing the "loving" was controlled by the physical appearance of the other person. Notice that this "love" is controlled outside of one's self. It has an "external locus of control." The singer's heart-strings were controlled outside herself, in the other way the other person looked. She is therefore dependent upon the other person's ability to *make her feel loved*. If that person fails her, if they don't make her feel loved, then she will "fall out of love" ~ i.e., experience a loss of emotions and desire to remain relationally connected.

When one learns the principle of "focus," it relocates the locus of control into one's own hands. One can be patient, kind and forgiving *toward* another person, regardless of whether they love or dislike that person. One can "aim" their actions toward the other person, like someone aims a flashlight in a dark room. That's "focus."

People who "fall out of love" have not learned the wisdom of 1 Cor. 13:4-7. They have likely externalized the source of the control of their lives. They have decided that in order for them to "love" someone, that other person must first please them. They have not understood the model presented in Christ, of serving others. *Love that exists to enhance the other person, or to allow them to become their highest and best, is the true path of intimacy*. It is trustworthy because it has an *internal locus of control*, and is based upon God's values.

Putting these two principles (intentionality and focus) together we learn that we are able to aim our behavior and attitude, toward someone we love, whether or not we feel emotionally pleased with them, and whether or not they deserve it. We do this for their highest good, not our self-satisfaction. And the more we apply this kind of love, the greater our personal capacity for intimacy.

In the final analysis, intimacy is a product of character. As we mold our characters to reflect the character of our Father in Heaven, He returns the favor by gifting us with the ability to share as deeply, function with as much vulnerability, rest as securely in the trust, and depend as comfortably in the commitment of intimacy, as is humanly possible.

Ten Minute Reflection

If you were going to teach a child how to be prepared for marital intimacy, how would you go about it?

VI. Price Tags for Intimacy

Intimacy is not cost-free. It can be extremely costly to maintain an intimately connected relationship. Here are a few costs.

A. Integrity. It is not possible to maintain vulnerability and openness in a relationship where integrity is compromised. The person who has an affair ~ the person who compulsively gambles marital resources away ~ the alcoholic ~ all these are obvious examples of lack of integrity. But integrity is a far deeper issue. It incorporates being completely honest and above board with one's spouse. Integrity builds trust. If trust has been broken, integrity repairs it. Intimacy costs trust and integrity.

B. Risk. Intimacy requires risk. It's not possible to hide away in a self-protective hole of personal insecurity and still enjoy the benefits of intimacy. Indeed, it's not fair to the other partner. If a person chooses to hang onto their insecurities and never take the chance that their spouse might reject them, then the person will never know for sure if their spouse is completely reliable and the insecurity will be exacerbated. It will become a regular component of the relationship and in so being, it will poison the relationship ~ it will erode the very intimacy and belonging that the insecure person wishes to enjoy.

A few years ago there was a pop song, "The Rose." The lyrics of that song express the necessity of risk within an intimate relationship:

It's the heart, afraid of breaking, that never learns to dance.
It's the dream, afraid of waking, that never takes a chance.
It's the one who won't be taken, who cannot seem to give.
And the soul, afraid of dying, that never learns to live.

A cost of intimacy is risking everything one is, in hope of discovering they are completely loved. Those who refuse to risk, miss the opportunity and possibly *confirm the very rejection they most fear*. Years ago a book was published under the name, "The Rejection Syndrome." It's out of print now, but the thesis of the book was that if people don't fight

and overcome their low self-esteem issues, then they will draw others to reject them in the same way they reject themselves. Intimacy requires risk.

C. A relationship with God. There are so many ways of initiating and maintaining dysfunctional relationships that it would be impossible to list them all. Yet having a personal, dynamic, interactive, transformational relationship with God can help overcome even the most severe pathology. Kahlil Gilbran once said, "The closer we are to God, the closer we will be to our fellow man." One cannot walk close with God and remain unchanged.

The changes brought about by God, lead us toward the capacity to enjoy and maintain intimacy. God is the definer of mental and relational health. Are you willing to pay the cost of being close to God so that you may enjoy greater intimacy with your spouse? Are you willing to allow God to come into your life and *transform* you in a manner that you can't control? It is a cost. It costs you "yourself." Yet in the same transaction frees you from the mortal boundaries of "yourself," to become all that your Creator intended for you to be in the first place. But it's a cost.

D. Acceptance of pain. Most relationships hurt once in a while. Those relationships which strive hardest to avoid pain often find themselves becoming shallower and less willing to risk. From time to time even the most loving partners will wound one another, whether out of ignorance, out of the growth required by love, or because of sin. If intimate partners desire to retain that connection, they must be willing to accept pain, because we're all a little like porcupines on a chilly night ~ the more warmth we desire, and the closer we get to each other, the more we risk sticking one another with one of our quills. This is why the Old Testament character, Jabez prayed, "*Keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!*" (I Chron. 4:10 ~ NKJV). Intimacy requires that we accept the cost of pain.

E. Accountability. When we wound one another we must accept responsibility for our actions, both in asking forgiveness and in striving not to repeat what we did that wounded the other person. But intimacy requires something deeper than confession and repentance. It requires accountability. A person who has had an affair must open their lives, their date books, their schedules, telephone and computer lists, etc. They must open themselves to penetrating questions and answer each question with integrity.

But accountability goes to both sides of a wounded relationship. The person on the other side is accountable to God, to forgive. And there must come a time when the questioning stops and the wounded partner is ready to move forward. Furthermore, the wounded partner must ask what they did to play into this wound ~ what responsibility did they ignore ~ what slight did they give.

Genuine strength of character requires that we are more accountable to ourselves and to God, than we are even to our beloved. If there is total and honest accountability to God,

then one will live on a plane far higher than any required by a spouse. It's a cost of intimacy.

F. Humility. There is little so humbling as someone knowing every dark secret of one's life, and still being loved by them. As was seen in section V of this chapter, one cost of intimacy is the willingness to lay down all that brings us pride and power, in order to serve and cherish the other person. There is no place within intimacy for arrogance or pride. Pride and arrogance are formats of self-love, formats which keep relationships shallow and get in the way of one's ability to love another. Humility is essential to intimacy. It's a cost of intimacy.

G. Gentleness. Anyone who has worked with horses knows that if the bit is yanked too hard, too often, a horse's mouth loses feeling and it becomes more difficult to guide the horse. The best way to guide the strength of a horse, is to use as little pressure as needed. The same thought applies in relationships. Gentleness in relationships is a tonic. If one is too frequently rough and uncaring, trust will be broken, partners' self-esteem will suffer, and any sense of intimacy will be wounded. Gentleness is a cost of intimacy.

Ten Minute Reflection

Which of these items is easiest for you? Why? Which is most difficult? Why?

If deep connection (i.e., intimacy) is such a desired commodity, why do so few people find it?

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