

7 Ways Your Marriage Can Be More Intimate Without Sex

Overall, I would say intimacy is one of my biggest struggles in our marriage. Even before last year I felt as if I had a whole separate part of me, deep inside, that John knew nothing about. I would share my feelings, as long as they didn't bring up conflict (or even if I thought they had the smallest chance of causing conflict). It was easier for me to put on a happy face, than to pour out my heart—it still is. Intimacy is something that's great to talk about, but it's hard to do.

Couples choose to marry because we want a heart-connection with one other person for life. That's why I married John. But it's hard to make a connection when my heart is surrounded by a solid, brick wall.

One definition of intimacy that I've heard, and I have used in my writing, is: "In-To-Me-See." But this is only possible when there is transparency between spouses—including sharing the truth about past conflicts, pain from former relationships, and personal struggles (both past and present).

I resisted transparency, even after sixteen years of marriage, in part because I was afraid to let John know how sinful I really am. I was sure he'd hate me (although I don't know why I thought that) if he knew all my wild high school years involved. Or if he knew my current day-by-day struggles.

Over the years, it was easier to keep things to myself than to risk seeing disappointment or pain in my husband's gaze. And, I realize now, even though I've been in a committed relationship from the time I was eighteen, I feared love. (Or every example I saw love to be.) I witnessed what it did to my own parents. I felt what it did with every other past relationship.

And over time I've worked to reveal myself to John, layer by layer. It's a process, but I'm seeing the difference it makes on our level of intimacy. I feel loved after I bear all, and as I witness love in my husband's gaze.

The following steps helped me peel away the layers:

1. **Understand that your wall of protection is a coping mechanism.** God created us with the ability to cope. Yet, now that I was nearly two-decades into a loving, committed relationship, my fear was a coping mechanism I no longer needed. After all, my issues and insecurities came B.C. (before Christ) and before John.
2. **Let go of your guilt.** Guilt never helped me connect. In fact, it just pushed me further from a resolution. Instead, I started looking ahead to the hope and freedom found in connecting with my spouse.
3. **Pinpoint where your fear is coming from.** We have an enemy of our souls who will use anything he can to keep us disconnected from God and from our spouses. I chose to believe God's promise that He is not a God of fear but of power and a sound mind!
4. **Know that God could help.** The closer I grew to God, the more I understood the barriers I'd erected around my heart. Yet God did not leave me to tear them down alone, but worked within me as only He can.
5. **Surrender your fear.** As Abbas said, we can ask God to "help us connect the dots from our head to our heart." I didn't want to let down my guard, so I prayed God would help me release my fear—help me to engage. In return, God answered my prayers by softening all the hard parts of my soul.
6. **Pray with your spouse.** During the time I struggled to let John into my inner recesses, I discovered I wasn't the only one praying. My husband also prayed for God to show me His love through John. He prayed that his

responses would be ones that would draw us closer and make me more comfortable with intimacy in marriage.

7. **Simply talk.** And though I felt God's strength to open myself up more and more to John—not keeping my internal life separate from the external one—it wasn't easy. One thing that helped the most was to talk in the dark of our bedroom, staring at the black ceiling. It also helped John to know I didn't expect him to give me a response, or solve anything—simply feeling him by my side was enough . . . followed by his embrace and whispered affection when I was through spilling my guts.

Do you have ways that help you to open up your heart?

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