

How to Open the Door to the True Marital Intimacy You Seek

The need in the human heart for intimacy is deep. God created you and me for intimacy. One of the most excruciating things a person can experience is intimacy gone wrong. It's risky, and yet we still seek it. But how do you get there? How do you open the door to intimacy, especially in marriage?

You got married wanting to be close. Women may often spell *intimacy* T-A-L-K, and men may often spell it S-E-X, but neither physical intercourse nor speaking words truly equals intimacy. Without intimacy, sex is— just sex. And without intimacy a volume of words may serve only to push your spouse farther away.

That hunger for intimacy can provide the fuel necessary to seek a partner, pursue marriage and work through challenges. But what is it? What are we after?

The Picture of Intimacy

Biblically, perhaps the best picture of intimacy is when Genesis describes how the first couple came together; “Now Adam knew Eve his wife (Gen. 4:1a, ESV) (“Know”: Hebrew *yada*). This describes more than physical nakedness and exchange of bodily fluids. It speaks of complete openness, total understanding, nakedness not only physically but emotionally and spiritually. This idea is further made clear by the different Hebrew phrase often used for illegitimate sex; “lie with.” It's possible to “lie with” another person and not “know” them (married or not).

On the deepest level, it's God who knows us. “Search me, O God, and know my heart” (Ps. 139:23, MEV). “For he knows how

we are formed, he remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:14). And wonder of wonders, we can know God too! "Be still and know that I am God." (Ps. 46:10a). (Same Hebrew word *yada* in each verse here.)

The desire for intimacy is the desire to know and be known, to be connected, to be close, to have no walls between, to understand and be understood.

True intimacy is not automatic in marriage. I believe this kind of intimacy is uncommon, perhaps even rare. Between husband and wife, how do you get to that place of knowing? Of intimacy?

Communication as the Door to Intimacy

How do almost all relationships begin (romantic or otherwise)? With communication. In the early days of your relationship, you likely talked for long periods of time—about anything and everything. Many affairs begin with communication; *Someone wants to listen. Someone wants to understand me.* Communication is the way you come closer, to begin to dismantle walls between you, to begin to understand.

You don't know someone intimately by taking the clothes off your body; you know someone intimately by taking the covering off your heart.

Mutual communication is the way you begin to break through the shell surrounding your spouse's heart. It's how you make your own heart open. Both pushing physical nakedness and speaking lots of words without moving toward knowing and understanding can actually shortchange intimacy.

Men may read this and feel terrified. *Why would I want to open myself that way? That's too risky.* While it feels (and is) vulnerable, gradually taking the coverings off your heart in this way, in a relationship with a measure of safety, is the only way to true intimacy.

Women may read this and respond, *Of course!* But hold on. We're not talking about the volume of words you say. It's possible to talk for hours and not understand anything more when you're done. This is about communication that is mutual, voluntary and directed toward understanding.

Additionally, those who have experienced heart-wounds from being vulnerable in the past may read this and want to give up. *Opening my heart means I could get hurt again, and I'm not going to risk that.* Yes, it's risky. That's why you only do it gradually, and only with someone who continues to demonstrate they are taking the coverings off their own heart in response.

And if that's not happening, taking off your clothes will not help.

Developing Healthy Communication

Most of us understand that communication involves much more than the words one says. Body language, tone of voice, context—they all communicate loudly. Words comprise only a small part of the message your partner receives or that you receive from them. That's why it's important not to take communication for granted.

Healthy communication in marriage means sharing understanding, sharing, knowing. It means talking about superficial and deep things, easy and hard things, all the time. It involves as much or more of listening than speaking, and it's focused on seeking to understand. When you engage in this kind of communication, you open the door to intimacy.

It's a rare person indeed who comes into marriage having the communication skills they need to engage in communication in this way. But these are skills you can learn.

May you open the door to intimacy in your marriage through developing healthier communication.

Your Turn: How's the intimacy in your marriage? Do you need to pay attention to opening the door—working toward healthier communication? Leave a comment below. {eo}

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