

How True Biblical Intimacy Can Transform Your Marriage

The very first institution God gave to humankind in the Garden of Eden was marriage. Surely He knew that marriage, intimacy, sex, and all related “issues” would get so messed up by the enemy that they would become the source of untold misery and pain. So God’s design for intimacy in marriage must have been important enough to take the risk.

God is the only self-sustaining entity in the universe. And yet He is a God of relationship. The intimacy between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is so close that they are one God—a mystery to us.

And God’s design for intimacy in marriage is that it be a mirror of the intimacy God experiences in Himself. And yes, that’s a mystery! It’s the foundation of “one flesh”: “Therefore a man will leave his father and his mother and be joined to his wife, and they will become one flesh. They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:24-25).

We humans so easily make intimacy about our own needs. Men may usually spell intimacy s-e-x, and women often spell intimacy t-a-l-k. In some couples, that’s an accurate description of the “felt need” of husband and wife. But intimacy as God designed it goes far beyond either sex or *talk*.

As the verse in Genesis indicates, this is about being “naked”—not only taking the clothes off your body, but taking the clothes off your mind and heart as well.

On my! Naked—and unashamed? It’s a God-sized goal. Here’s some of what that looks like.

Physical Intimacy

When sex becomes about fulfilling a physical impulse, it demeans the holiness, power and beauty of physical intimacy within a covenant marriage. Who has not been sexually wounded in some way? Those wounds cause us to grasp for physical/emotional titillation, deny the sexual way in which we are all created and either put up walls or demand “compliance,” even within marriage.

God’s design for physical intimacy means vulnerably giving oneself to one’s spouse for their pleasure and receiving great physical pleasure from one’s spouse in return. It means celebrating the bonding, exhilaration, comfort, joy, security and more that good sex in marriage provides. It means mutual submission of both husband and wife.

And when physical pleasure is lacking, it means husband and wife both seek ways to overcome the physical, emotional and spiritual barriers to sexual union that the enemy continually tries to insert into human lives and marriages.

Physical intimacy also means great physical closeness separate from sex. It means caring about your spouse’s physical well-being, welcoming your spouse’s physical body, frequent affectionate non-sexual touch, and giving and receiving affirmation through physical presence.

Emotional Intimacy

Having an open heart toward one’s spouse feels vulnerable, just as sex is vulnerable. It gives your spouse a measure of “power,” and it means you could be hurt. But that’s what emotional intimacy is about.

Emotional intimacy means your spouse knows you and you know your spouse better than any other human being. Your internal walls are down, and their walls are down. You understand what makes your spouse “tick,” and they understand the same about

you. You choose to see the world through your spouse's eyes and allow your spouse to see the world through yours. You each invest the very best of yourself in the relationship.

The ground between you is swept clean of anything dividing you. When conflicts arise (and they always arise), emotional intimacy means you fight to achieve a solution together instead of to be right. You both refuse to accept mediocrity in your relationship and care more about the connection between you than you care about your own needs.

Emotional intimacy happens through communication—both sharing and listening.

Spiritual Intimacy

Being “naked” before God in your spouse's presence is perhaps the most vulnerable—and bonding—experience human beings can have. That's what it was like in the Garden of Eden for Adam and Eve. That means sex, prayer and communication are all in the same pot.

Spiritual intimacy means seeking God's purpose for your union even more than His purpose for you individually. It means lovingly supporting what God is doing in your spouse's heart, and allowing God to do His work in your own heart because anything less will be wounding to your spouse. It means allowing Him to use your marriage to increase your ability to love well.

Spiritual intimacy also means raising your eyes from your own marriage and investing the wealth of love and intimacy God has built into you for the benefit of others. That may mean children, marketplace ministry, community relationships or church involvement. But it always means that the intimacy you grow in your marriage is not really about you; it's to be invested for the good of His kingdom.

That's Impossible!

Yes, it is. When God gave marriage to humankind in the Garden of Eden, He knew sin would come. And He knew we would need a laboratory in which to find healing, to grow and to learn to love well.

That picture of the intimacy God designed for marriage is something like “becoming like Jesus;” it’s what God wants for us. It’s the goal. Will we ever get there? Certainly not by trying to on our own.

But the very process of journeying toward that goal is priceless. And risky. And satisfying.

Don’t give up on the goal because the journey is difficult.

Next time, we’ll talk about how to pursue that kind of intimacy in *your* marriage.

Your Turn: *How does this picture of God’s design for intimacy in marriage make you feel? Angry? Desperate? Disappointed? Hopeful? Leave a comment below.* {eo}

Dr. Carol Peters-Tanksley is both a board-certified OB-GYN physician and an ordained doctor of ministry. As an author and speaker, she loves helping people discover the **Fully Alive** kind of life Jesus came to bring us. Visit her website at .

This article originally appeared at .