

Cultivating Intimacy

Selected Texts

Introduction

My aim in this sermon is to consider how we, as Christians, can cultivate greater intimacy in our marriages. But what do I mean by intimacy? Intimacy can be defined as “a feeling of closeness and connection in an interpersonal relationship.” So, while intimacy certainly includes aspects of romance and sex, intimacy is more extensive than those categories. Cultivating intimacy in marriage is about cultivating a close connection in our relationship with our spouse. I believe this is what God intends for our marriage, and my prayer this morning is that this message will help us take healthy steps in the right direction of cultivating a deeper relationship with our spouse.

Genesis 2:19-25

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

²³ The man said,

“This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Exposition

Genesis 2:19-25 gives us a glimpse of God’s ideal for intimacy in marriage before sin entered the world. God creates mankind in His image. As an aspect of God’s image in mankind, he places within each of us a need for relationships. As God declared after making Adam, “It is not good for man to be alone.” So, God created woman as a complement to man. Equal in glory and dignity, yet distinct in role. United in purpose and relationship, yet each making their own unique contributions according to God’s purpose and plan for humanity.

Within these verses, we encounter a mystery. Specifically, in verse 24, we are told that as a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, they “become one flesh.” To be sure, this one flesh union implies a sexual relationship, but it is also much broader than sexual expression. As the apostle Paul quotes this verse in Ephesians 5:28-30, “Husbands out to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church.” In other words, God’s intention for married couples is a union so close that husband and wife regard each other as they regard their own bodies. They know their own bodies, care for their own bodies, protect their own bodies, serve their own bodies, feed their own bodies, support their own bodies, and the list could go on for quite a while.

In marriage, we have been so united to our spouse that we cultivate an intimacy, a closeness with them that reflects this mysterious union that God's Word speaks of. So, what does intimacy look like?

I. Five Types of Intimacy

If you research the different types of intimacy, you are likely to find a multitude of suggestions. For our purposes this morning, I want to stick with the five types of intimacy generally identified by various experts. This is not exhaustive, but I do think it is a helpful place to begin. Here are the five basic types of intimacy:

- A) **Physical Intimacy** – Physical intimacy is any physical activity to cultivate closeness with your spouse through physical touch. This could be a hug, holding hands, kissing, cuddling, and sexual touch. (All Your Strength)
- B) **Emotional Intimacy** – Emotional intimacy is related to sharing or talking about the future, talking about fears and worries, talking about stress, or practicing sympathy and empathy, listening, and offering comfort and encouragement to your spouse. Emotional intimacy will depend on trust and vulnerability. Any action that promotes emotional closeness. (All Your Heart)
- C) **Intellectual Intimacy** – Intellectual intimacy is related to sharing ideas, and opinions, asking questions, or other thoughts, reading a book or watching a documentary together while listening closely and carefully to your spouse, or learning something new together. (All Your Mind)
- D) **Experiential Intimacy** – Experiential intimacy overlaps with a few previous types, but it is different enough to list separately. Experiential intimacy includes acts like spending quality time together, doing activities together, finding shared hobbies, laughing together, eating together, and watching a movie or TV show together. (All Your Strength)
- E) **Spiritual Intimacy** – Finally, spiritual intimacy is connecting with God together, growing in God's grace together, reading God's Word together, praying together, reading a Christian book together, attending church together, participating in a small group together, serving in a ministry together, caring about the spiritual well-being of your spouse, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you (All Your Soul)

Obviously, not all types of intimacy are exclusively tied to marriage. We experience intimacy of all sorts with a variety of people. Yet, the closest human relationship that we have should be with our spouse who we have been united to by marriage. We share a one-flesh union only with our spouse. Thus, we must make a holy effort, empowered by the grace of God, to grow in our intimacy in our marriage.

But why do we have to work at this? Why doesn't this come more naturally to us? Well, it is because there is an obstacle to intimacy that we all face...

II. The Obstacle to Intimacy

In one sense, there is only really one obstacle to intimacy in marriage, and that obstacle can rightly be defined as sin. Sin is any action or thought that falls short of God's ideal for us and His world. Or, to state it another way, "Sin is whatever is opposed to God's will, as that will reflects God's holy character and as that will is expressed in God's commands. Sin is fundamentally opposed to nature and reason, and it is ultimately opposed to God." (Thomas McCall)

None of us are immune to sin or its consequence in our lives or in our world. We live and move in a world that is broken by sin. It might be our own sin that puts an obstacle in our path to intimacy in marriage. It might be the sin of our spouse. Or it might be the sin of another against you, like someone who abused you emotionally or physically at an earlier time in your life. But the reality is that intimacy is not necessarily something that comes easy or without work in our sin-broken world.

God's Word testifies to the impact that sin has on intimacy in marriage. In Genesis 3, the chapter that follows the chapter that we read at the beginning of this message, we read of Satan's attack on humanity. Satan tempted Eve to disbelieve and disobey God's Word. Adam followed suit and disbelieved and disobeyed God. And one of the results of this sinful disobedience was the fracturing of human relationships, which begins with the fracturing of a marriage. Satan hates marriage. He hates your marriage. And if he can tempt you to disbelieve and disobey God's Word, he will make your marriage a miserable experience that falls short of God's intention for it.

Because we live in the broken, sin-filled world, we will be tempted to believe and behave in ways that deny the union that God intends for us to experience in marriage. We see this in our expression of physical intimacy, where not all touches are aimed at the cultivation of love. Physical touch becomes a means to satisfy my desires instead of satisfying my spouse. Physical touch becomes a bartering tool that I can use to manipulate the relationship to get what I really want. Physical touch can become means of performance instead of a means of service. This is how sin distorts a good thing, but turning what God intended into a means to selfishly serve ourselves instead of our spouses.

Emotional intimacy is disrupted by sin by causing a lack of trust and thereby a lack of vulnerability. We come critics, poor listeners, judges of our spouses instead of partners. We lie. We conceal the truth. We refuse to communicate. We check out. We want to hear our own voice more than be attentive to the emotional needs of our spouse.

Intellectual intimacy gets replaced by giving the best of our brain power to our careers and education instead of our marriage. We do not seek to love our spouse with our minds, but we use our minds to love other things. The same goes for our experiential intimacy. We give our best to other things. We care more about our own personal experiences as an individual, but we rarely think about how we can be more thoughtful in our joint experiences over a meal or on a trip or in our homes.

Spiritual intimacy gets wrecked by sin, which makes us want to stay away from God altogether. While we know that we ought to be growing in spiritual intimacy with God and our spouse, the shame of our sinfulness keeps us from repenting and confessing our misplaced priorities. Instead of correcting course, we just continue to drift away from God and our spouse. We think, “It would be awkward, it would be weird if I went home today and told my spouse, ‘I want to start praying each night before we go to bed.’” We hold on to feelings of inadequacy. We tell ourselves that we will grow in spiritual intimacy when “we get our lives together.” But here is what we are failing to see. As one scholar notes, “We do not drift toward holiness.” We must grow in our intentionality to cultivate spiritual intimacy. If we don’t grow in our intentionality, we will never grow in this area.

Conclusion

How do we overcome the obstacle that sin places between us and the intimacy we long to experience in our marriages? Simply put, we need Jesus.

We need Jesus to deliver us from the selfishness that has become an obstacle to physical intimacy. We need Jesus to free us from the shame that we carry around because of our sin. We need Jesus to renew our minds that we might be emotionally more engaged and available to our spouses. We need the mind of Christ to be our example in humbling ourselves to serve others. We need Jesus to set us free from the delusions that tell us that our marriages are not worth the effort. We need receive the forgiveness that Jesus offers when we confess our sins to him, so that our relationship with God and our spouses will be revived.

If sin is the greatest obstacle to intimacy in our marriages, then we need the One who have dealt definitively with our sin to set us free and model for us what a life of humility and serve and care and love looks like.

For many who are here this morning, I have no doubts that the sins of selfishness and lust and laziness have produced all sorts of shame in your life and in your marriage. Maybe there has been unfaithfulness in your marriage, maybe there have been habitual patterns of lust from pornography, maybe there have been lies that have devastated the foundation of trust in your marriage, maybe there have been hurtful words spoken, and the list could go on.

Yet, herein lies the hope of the gospel. All such sins can be covered by the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ, and restoration, healing, and renewal can come to your marriage.

It won’t be in your own strength or wisdom, but through the power of God in the gospel to forgive you, and empower you to forgive your spouse.

If we would cultivate intimacy, we must deal with the obstacle of sins that leads to all sorts of relational breakdown. If, through this message, God has revealed things in your own heart that need to be dealt with, I want to close in a time of reflection, giving you an opportunity to open your heart to the LORD and come to Him for forgiveness, asking Christ to heal you and your marriage by His grace.