

"Building Intimacy"

How can husbands and wives grow closer and make their marriages stronger? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders. This is a Bible study, "In SEARCH of the Lord's Way." Today we're going to discuss building intimacy in marriage. You won't want to miss this.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way. We're here to search God's Word for the Lord's Way. We study God's word because we love Him and want to stay close to Him. The best way truly to know God is to study what God has revealed about Himself in His Word. We also realize that the One who blessed mankind with the marriage of Adam and Eve still has the best plan for men and women today. Thanks for studying with us today. We want to be part of your life each week.

Intimacy is the close sharing of ourselves with our mates—our thoughts, feelings, plans, hopes and dreams—our very souls and bodies. Intimacy has two essential elements: first, the security of being truly loved, accepted, and valued for what we are. And second, the significance and privilege of making a substantial, lasting, positive impact on another person we love. When we love and stay close to each other as God wills, we make each other better and stronger.

The Scriptures in Malachi 2 verse 14 calls marriage a covenant, a lifelong relationship, in which a man and a woman have vowed to remain true to each other until death parts them. It will take work to keep any marriage strong and warm for a lifetime. The key to keeping a good marriage lies in the quality of the relationship. Close marriages don't just happen. Men and women must intend to have good marriages and be willing to invest their hearts and their time into that relationship. They must be willing to make their marriages a priority and must be willing to grow together. Whether you're in a problem marriage or you've grown complacent, there's still hope for you. If you're willing to make some changes, you can have a great marriage.

Now, we're offering a free booklet, entitled Together for Life. And if you'd like a printed copy of our study and you live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. Now, if you live outside the United States, we have materials free online, and you can download printed or audio copies of this program on our website at www.searchtv.org.

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from Proverbs 5:15 to 18, and explore how husbands and wives can build intimacy.

Our reading today comes from Proverbs 5 verses 15 to 18. And here Solomon is giving advice to a young man about how he should treat his wife and how he should act.

Drink water from your own cistern
And fresh water from your own well.
Should your springs be dispersed abroad,
Streams of water in the streets?
Let them be yours alone
And not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
And rejoice in the wife of your youth.

That's good advice. Let's pray together. Father we're thankful for our spouses and we pray that Your will help us to grow close to them, to love them and have them love us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

A loving and meaningful marriage requires intimacy. For two hearts to embrace each other, intimacy is a must. If you don't know how your partner thinks and feels about various issues or concerns, he or she is somewhat of a stranger to you. For two hearts to bond, they cannot be strangers. Some assume that intimacy automatically occurs between married partners; but I've seen far too many "married strangers." I've talked to too many husbands and wives who feel isolated from their spouses and lonely, even after many years of marriage. I've heard statements like well: "We share the same house, the same table, and the same bed, but we might as well be strangers." Or, "We've lived together for twenty-three years, and yet I don't know my spouse any better now than when we first married." Or, "What really hurts is that we can spend a weekend together and I still feel lonely. I think I married someone who would rather be a hermit." No, intimacy is not automatic; it takes work for two people to grow close.

There are three types of intimacy in marriage. The first is emotional: loving support, sharing of burdens, sharing of goals, showing we that esteem our mate, and loving attention. In Song of Solomon 3 and verse 2, the bride says, "I will seek him whom my soul loves." Well, true intimacy is more than a physical desire; it must involve the whole person, so that we can say with Song of Solomon 6 and verse 3, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine." It's two hearts and two lives so intertwined that they belong to each other and they long for each other.

A second form of intimacy is physical: affection, touching, sharing in duties, and the sexual act. Genesis 4 and verse 1, "Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, 'I have gotten a man child with the help of the LORD.'" God regards this physical intimacy between husband and wife in marriage as honorable. 1 Corinthians 7 verses 2 to 3 says in the English Standard Version, "But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband." Physical intimacy is not only approved in marriage but also God's will.

A third kind of intimacy is spiritual: shared prayer and devotions, shared morals and values, shared spiritual goals, and a shared style of handling forgiveness and reconciliation. I think here of Aquila and Priscilla, who were tent-makers and worked and traveled with Paul. When you read about one, you read about the other. When Apollos came to Ephesus, Acts 18:26 says that Priscilla and Aquila pulled him aside and "and explained to him the way of God more accurately." 1 Corinthians 16 verse 19 says that Aquila and Priscilla had a church meeting in their house. Paul said in Romans 16:3 and 4, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well." Aquila and Priscilla shared their lives and their faith together.

When couples share faith and values, they're able to teach others the gospel together and to give their children an unconfused message about God. When a husband and wife disagree over morals, spiritual truths, and values, they leave their children guessing as to what is right and wrong. Couples need to be united spiritually in the truth of God's word.

The Scriptures give a sad picture of a husband and wife who never had the kind of intimacy that God desires. I'm speaking here of King David and Michal, the daughter of Saul. 2 Samuel 6 verse 16 records, "Then it happened as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David that Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart." Verse 23 simply says, "Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day

of her death.” You see intimacy is first a matter of the heart. To have true intimacy two people must love each other and must maintain that love.

Well, how can I develop this intimacy in my marriage? First, I must accept and welcome my spouse as my partner in life. All husbands and wives have differences in the way they think, the way they do things, and the way they like to eat, the things they eat and the way they react to things. You know accepting my spouse means I will love and respect him or her, even though we may differ on things that do not matter. Some things matter and some things don't. We need to accept our spouses in matters that don't involve accepting or approving sin. Should your spouse sin, loving your spouse means humbly confronting the sin in the hope they will repent. But in those matters which do not involve sin, your spouse needs to know you love and accept them as a person.

Second, everyone needs affection. They need to know that they're cared for through loving words and through physical touch. Hugs and kisses are essential to happiness in marriage. Sweet notes, caring deeds, and expressions of love ought to flow between husbands and wives. Virginia Satir, a family therapist, said that, “We need four hugs a day for survival. We need eight hugs a day for maintenance. We need twelve hugs a day for growth.” Five times the Scriptures urge Christians to greet one another with a holy kiss or a kiss of love. You see everyone needs affection.

Third, husbands and wives need appreciation. They need the feeling of gratefulness from their spouse. You know nothing hurts more than to feel unappreciated for what you do for your family. Every husband and every wife need recognition for the good they do and the sacrifices they make for the family. Saying “thank you” and “I appreciate you” should be part of our everyday conversation with our mates.

Fourth, we must give our spouses our undivided attention, interest, and support. Withholding your attention from your spouse says well, “I don't care about you.” When your spouse needs you, don't selfishly refuse them. Giving your spouse your attention is how you let them know you genuinely care for them and respect them. You want your spouse to feel highly valued and prized in your heart. Show them by paying attention.

Fifth, when your spouse hurts physically or emotionally, give them comfort. Comfort means saying tender words, putting an arm around them, and feeling their hurts with them. When Mary and Martha lost their brother Lazarus, Jesus wept with them. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1 verses 3 to 4, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.” When those we love hurt, we should empathize and give comfort.

Sixth, everyone needs encouragement. Husbands and wives need to know their spouses believe in them and want them to move forward and to grow as a person. 1 Thessalonians 5 and verse 11 says to all Christians, “Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.” We especially need encouragement from the person that we've married.

Seventh, we need to be secure in our relationship with the one we love. When we need to know they will help us, all of us need that, and that they will help us to remain free from harm or danger. A secure and stable home, where mom and dad love each other, is the best place for children to grow and prosper. Every parent wants his child to grow as Jesus did. Luke 2:52 says, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.” Children in Christian homes where mother and father are secure in their love make better grades and avoid the pitfalls of life.

Last, husbands and wives need to support one another. Each one needs to know that he or she has someone to walk alongside and help carry the loads of life. They have someone to share their victories and their grief, someone who understands their burdens and their dreams. Marriage is a partnership of two people who complete each other and who help each other succeed in the challenges of life. Everyone needs to know there is someone in their corner who will cheer them and stand by them. Just as the Lord supports and watches over us, we as married couples need to say to our spouses, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13 verse 5).

It's vitally important for husbands and wives to pray together. When a man and woman marry they no longer think and act as a single person. It is no longer "I" but "we." And all of life is then lived in connection with another person. Everything you do affects this significant person. You're a team of two, and when both of you participate, you function better. When you confront problems and crises in your life (and you will), you can find tremendous comfort and support in your loved one who prays for you and with you. When you're struggling financially, when you have problems at work, when you have tough decisions to make, or when you face a medical crisis, you can share the burden with your spouse; that will lighten the load.

Couples need to pray together for the health of their marriages. When you two are married, you entered into an adventure with risks and challenges. And the vows that you took at your wedding will be attacked on all sides by Satan and by others. Praying together will make your marriage stronger as well as help protect you from allowing the challenges of life to separate the two of you. Couples who have prayer lists and pray daily and fervently will come to see the results of answered prayer. They will be encouraged as they see how God works in their lives.

When couples pray together, their prayers make an impact on disagreements, conflicts, and anger expressed toward each other. When you see your spouse as a child of God, valuable and precious in His sight, someone that He sent His Son to die for, that will affect how you pray for him or her. You'll pray for what is best for your spouse. And praying together will bring you closer together. I want my wife to pray for me and with me.

Praying together brings peace for a couple. Philippians 4:6 to 7 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Well why do we discuss intimacy? Because intimacy with our spouses is what keeps our marriages strong and secure. When people grow close to each other, intimacy allows each to see the other as they really are. They see their strengths and weaknesses, their beauty and their flaws. And this kind of closeness may seem to open the door to vulnerability, but it also provides the greatest sense of security. It allows each to say, "My spouse loves me in spite of my flaws and weaknesses. My spouse loves me for me." When I think of the love that my devoted wife has given me in spite of my weaknesses, I'm grateful to her and I'm grateful for her, as God's gift to me. Because of her faith in God and her love for me, she "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Love never fails. And true devotion doesn't stop loving, even when people are unlovely. God loves us that way, and so should we.

Let's pray together. Oh, Father help us as husbands and wives, to love each other fervently. To love the way You have loved us. And help us to grow in our faith and our love for You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Willard F. Harley in his book, *His Needs, Her Needs*, suggests, "Give your undivided attention to your spouse a minimum of fifteen hours each week, meeting some of your spouse's most important needs." I hope that you two are spending time together. The things that made husbands and wives fall in love are the things that keep them loving each other. There simply isn't any substitute for time. After forty-five years of marriage, both Jackie and I have matured; and our marriage has developed with time. When you marry for a lifetime, you pass through several stages of life, and each stage is different. By maintaining close intimacy, two people can grow together for life a lifetime. When you give your spouse your time; you're actually giving him or her your most precious possession— that's yourself.

That's true of marriage, and it's true of our relationship with God. You can't be close to God if you never spend time with Him. Everyday read from His Word and pray fervently to Him; praise Him in song; and count your blessings. When you give God your time; you're giving Him your most precious possession—and that's yourself.

When we become Christians, the Lord adds us to His church; and we unite with Christ in a covenant relationship. We have His promise of grace and love, but we must commit to trust and obey Him. To enter that covenant relationship we must hear His words, confess our faith in Him, repent of our sins, and be baptized into Christ. Baptism into Christ is an immersion in water and it means we're baptized into His death. And that's when the blood of Jesus washes away our sins and causes us to be born again. Now, in baptism we're crucified with Christ and we rise to walk in newness of life according to Romans 6 verses 3 to 7.

We hope that today's study and this month's study about marriage and today about the intimacy of marriage, has been a blessing. Now, we're offering a free booklet, *Together for Life*, just for the asking. And if you live in the United States and want a free printed copy of this message, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. Now, if you live outside the United States you can still download printed and audio material or watch the program online at our website: www.searchtv.org. There are other resources that are also there. And they're free. Now, don't worry, if you get a hold of us, we won't ask you for money or put you on a list.

We do ask that you please get involved with a church of Christ. They love you and they support our ministry, for which we're grateful. And if you're looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we'll be happy to help you find one. Churches of Christ want guests, and you'll be glad that you worshiped with them. Well, we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about the program. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.