



Marriage Seminar

ANCIENT PATHWAYS *to* INTIMACY

SESSION ONE: SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

*This is what the Lord says:
Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is,
and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.*

– Jeremiah 6:16

A Brief Overview

The Ancient Pathways to Intimacy

SESSION ONE: Spiritual Intimacy/Spirit-oneness/ Agape Love

Your relentless commitment to draw near to God so that you look to Jesus Christ and not to your spouse to meet your deepest longings and needs.

SESSION TWO: Emotional Intimacy/ Soul-oneness/ Phileō Love

Intimate Friendship and Affection

Your relentless commitment to minister to your spouse's needs rather than manipulating them to meet your own needs.

SESSION THREE: Physical Intimacy/Body-oneness/Eros Love

Your relentless commitment to experience the pleasure of giving yourself physically and completely to your spouse.

Taking a Risk:

*Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell – C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, p. 121.*

The Ancient Pathways to Spiritual Intimacy

Introduction

I. What is spiritual intimacy?

- A. Draw near to God so that you look to Jesus Christ and not to your spouse to fulfill your deepest longings and needs.

“Two children of God on a walk through life, each holding the hand of the One who walks with them, savoring his companionship.” – Chap Clark

- B. What are those deepest needs?

To know and be known (Transcendence), John 17:3

We all have a desperate desire to connect with someone/something that is larger than ourselves. We want solutions and answers to life's dilemmas.

To love and be loved (Community), John 15:13; 1 John 3:16

We all need to meaningfully connect to other people and experience acceptance and love.

To serve and be served (Significance), Mark 10:45

We all desperately need a purpose in life and to discover a meaning for life that will outlast it.

- C. Spiritual Intimacy – Key Scriptures:

Hebrews 4:16 – Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 10:22 – Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

James 4:8 – Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.

II. Pathways: How do you cultivate spiritual intimacy as a couple?

- A. A Good Word Picture

Peter Marshall: “Marriage is not a federation of two sovereign states.

It is a union – domestic, social, spiritual, physical.

It is a fusion of two hearts – The union of two lives – The coming together of tributaries, which, after being joined in marriage, will flow in the same channel, in the same direction... carrying the same burdens of responsibility and obligation.” – Catherine Marshall *A Man Called Peter*, p.54

B. **Important caution:** The pathways that foster spiritual intimacy for other couples may not work for you. Secondly, cultivating spiritual intimacy is much more than doing certain activities together. It is the atmosphere that permeates your marriage relationship.

C. Specific Pathways to Spiritual Intimacy

John Piper reminds us of the intentionality to which God's Word calls men as the spiritual leaders of their families.

“When a man senses a primary God-given responsibility for...
the spiritual life of the family
gathering the family for devotions,
taking them to church,
calling for prayer at meals,
for the discipline and education of the children,
the stewardship of money,
the provision of food,
the safety of the home,
the healing of discord,
he is not being authoritarian or autocratic or domineering or bossy or
oppressive or abusive. It is simply servant leadership. And I have never
met a wife who is sorry she is married to a man like that. Because
when God designs a thing he designs it for his glory and our good.”

Corporate Pathways

1. What type of value do you place on worship? How would assess you your commitment to personal, family, and corporate worship? Believers have always met together on the Lord's Day for worship, instruction and encouragement (Hebrews 10:24-25).
2. Intentional involvement with a small group. Life transformation takes place in the context of a small group.
3. Missional engagement with others in the body of Christ. “Most men and women are not satisfied with the permanent output of their lives. Nothing can wholly satisfy the life of Christ within His followers except the adoption of Christ's purpose toward the world He came to redeem. Fame, pleasure, and riches are but husks and ashes in contrast with the boundless and abiding joy of working with God for the fulfillment of His eternal plans. The men and women who are putting everything into Christ's undertaking are getting out of life its sweetest and most priceless rewards.”
– J. Campbell White, Leader of the Laymen's Missionary Movement, 1906

Individual/Family Pathways

1. Appropriating the gospel daily. Learning how to preach the gospel of grace to your own heart as well as to your spouse's heart (Romans 1:14-16; Galatians 2:14; Hebrews 12:15; 13:9)
2. Cultivate daily, receptive, absorbing communion with the living God (A regular meeting where you spend time together in devotions, share your greatest victory and your greatest struggle).
3. Reading and discussing a book together
4. Establishing a regularly scheduled date
5. Listening to worship music

Martin Luther called music God's "fair and glorious gift."

"I desire to see all arts, principally music,
in the service of Him who gave and created them.
Music is a fair and glorious gift of God.
I would not for the world forgo my humble share of music.
Singers are never sorrowful, but are merry,
and smile through their troubles in song.

Music makes people kinder, gentler, more staid and reasonable.
I am strongly persuaded that after theology
there is no art that can be placed on a level with music;
for besides theology, music is the only art
capable of affording peace and joy of the heart...
The devil flees before the sound of music
[almost] as much as before the Word of God."

6. Praying with and for one another. Turn selected verses of your Bible reading into personalized prayer guides for each other. Proverbs 31 Guide

Example: Prayer for My Wife from Proverbs 31

- a. Make her a woman of noble character (31:10). Virtuous, morally excellent, hate sin, and love Christ.
- b. Develop her into a hard worker in all of her roles, especially at home (v.17). Give her strength for her tasks and the ability to discern the best from the good (Philippians 1:9 - making the excellent choice).
- c. Sensitize her to meet the needs of those around her (v.20).

- d. Give her a proper perspective of the future (laugh and smile at it) (v.25). Free her from undue anxiety and fear.
 - e. Develop her into a faithful, wise, and kind teacher (v.26).
 - f. Cause her to grow in her knowledge and fear of the Lord (v.30). Show me how I can encourage her spiritual growth. Remember to praise and compliment her frequently (v.28).
 - g. Help her to have a proper perspective on her outward appearance (v.30a). Free her from the tendency to compare herself with other women. Free her from an undue focus on externals for God does not look on the outward appearance, but on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).
 - h. To become a person who loves others well. (truthing in love – Ephesians 4:15)
- 7. Prayer walking
 - 8. Hardships and suffering, yours and that of friends

III. The Roadblocks to Spiritual Intimacy

A. Spritual Warfare

- 1. Doubting God's Promises (unbelief)
- 2. A Spirit of unforgiveness
- 3. Unhumbled pride

B. Pride and self-centeredness (Hebrews 3:13; James 5:16)

- 1. Selfishness is a reflex to expect to be served.
- 2. Selfishness is a reflex to feel that I am owed.
- 3. Selfishness is a reflex to want praise.
- 4. Selfishness is a reflex to expect that things will go my way.
- 5. Selfishness is a reflex to feel that I have the right to react negatively to being crossed.

C. Busyness and distractions – (hobbies)

D. Tendency to spiritually drift – lack of a plan/intentionality (Hebrews 2:1)

E. Unrealistic expectations

F. Sense of personal inadequacy and past failures that immobilize

A Prayer Life that Nourishes your Relationship to God
by Tim Keller
Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Manhattan, NY

Every year I look forward to the slower pace of the summer months because of the opportunity it gives me to re-energize my prayer life. It's not that I don't pray during the year, but rarely, in the press of hectic scheduling, am I able to consistently devote the hours necessary to reawaken the intimacy with God that not only I crave, but which is my only defense against burnout.

Just as the old discussion of quality time versus quantity time with your family is a red herring (there IS no quality time, except that which occurs in the midst of a large quantity of time), so with God. The richness of my experience of God in prayer only occurs in the midst of much time set aside to be with him. That said, there are several other things I do which might be helpful to some of you who also will have increased flexibility of time in the coming months, and who want to connect with God in a deeper way.

The main way I do this is to seek an increase in the amount of my meditation. It is no accident that the first two Psalms in the Psalter are not prayers per se, but rather meditations. In fact the very first Psalm, the doorway into the prayer book of the Bible, is a meditation on meditation. Why? We are being taught that while it is certainly possible for deep experiences of the presence and power of God to happen in innumerable ways, the ordinary way for 'going deeper' spiritually is through meditation. It is in meditation that we get into deeper self-surrender, then into higher, clearer faith-sights of his beauty, and finally into powerful, dynamic prayer for the world.

What is meditation?

In most Protestant traditions, the 'personal devotional' life consists of two parts: Bible study and prayer. But meditation is neither and both. The Puritan Richard Baxter wrote: "Solemn or stated meditation is distinguished from the study of the word, wherein our principle aim is to learn the truth; and also from prayer, whereof God himself is the immediate object. But meditation is the affecting of our own hearts and minds with love, delight, and humility toward the things contained [in the Word]."

An example of meditation is found in Psalm 103:1-2: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Notice that this is not the same thing as prayer. He is not speaking directly to God, though it is clear that

David is extremely aware of being in the presence of God. The object of the meditation is his own heart. David is 'talking to himself' - to his soul. But the subject of the meditation is truth about God - "forget not all his benefits."

Obviously, David has not intellectually forgotten that God has forgiven his sins, redeemed his life, and so on (Ps.103:2ff.) Rather, he is taking Biblical truths and driving them into his own heart until it is affected, delighted, and changed by them. Peter Toon has written that meditation is the descent of the mind with Biblical truth into the inmost heart until the whole being yearns for God.

The kind of meditation we see in the Psalms is neither the anti-rational 'spirituality' of New Age religion, nor is it the over-rational 'spirituality' of much modern evangelical religion. On the one hand, New Age religion takes its cues from Eastern philosophy and thinks of meditation as a calm, serene emptying of the mind of all rational thought. David's meditation, however, is furiously rational. "Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me?" he says in Psalm 42, literally arguing and reasoning with his heart. On the other hand, much evangelical religion is afraid of any mystical, experiential element. It conceives of a 'devotional life' as only the study of the Bible and then prayer for the strength to practice it. David's meditation, however, is deeply mystical. "One thing I seek - to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord" (Ps.27:4). He is looking for a transformation of the affections of his heart as he prays.

Jonathan Edwards speaks of this very thing in his own practice of meditation. "In reading [the Scripture] I seemed often to see so much light, that I could not get along in reading - almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders....I...found, from time to time, an inward sweetness, that used, as it were, to carry me away in my contemplations. I felt alone... sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapped and swallowed up in God. The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden as it were, kindle up a sweet burning in my heart; an ardor of my soul, that I know not how to express..." Notice how his meditation ("contemplations") on the Word led into a deep sense of intimacy in prayer. That is why a Psalm on meditation begins the Biblical book on prayer.

How to meditate

Of course, the best way to learn to do anything is to watch a "master" at work. If you read Psalms 1, 42, 77, 103, and 119 you get this very thing. However, we all need to begin as beginners. There is no better 'Beginner's Guide to Meditation' than the model that Martin Luther gave in his letter "A Simple Way to Pray" written to his barber, Peter Beskendorf, in 1535. Luther directed that we should "warm the heart up" through meditation

before we prayed. Based on Luther's insights, I use the following outline for a short (30 minutes or less) time of Bible reading, meditation, and prayer. After reading a portion of the Bible slowly, and choosing one or two things or insights that especially helped me, I take each insight and ask the following questions:

Adoration – What do I see in this text for which I can praise the Lord? How can I love and praise God on the basis of this?

Repentance – How do I fail to realize this in my life? What wrong behavior, harmful emotions or attitudes result when I forget this about the Lord?

Gospel Thanks – How can I thank Jesus as the ultimate revelation of this attribute of God (#1) and the ultimate answer to this sin or need of mine (#2) How does this text point me to Jesus Christ: His person, work, and/or teachings?

Aspiration – How would I live differently if this truth were powerfully real to me? How does this show me what I should or can be and do for God's glory?

After I have thought out and at least sketchily written out answers to each question, then I proceed to pray my praises, confessions, and supplications to God directly. Often, as you are meditating, or as you are praying, you may feel your heart warm or even melt with a spiritual sense of the reality of God. Sometimes, of course, nothing happens at all! And very rarely, you can have life-changing experiences of the presence of God that you never forget. The number and power of these encounters are completely out of your control. The Spirit blows wherever he pleases (Jn 3:8). But it has only been with the practice of meditation that my own experience of God's reality has become at all regular and progressively deeper.

Take Home Questions:

1. How close are we spiritually as a couple? What one thing do we need to start doing to strengthen our spiritual intimacy? What one thing do we need to stop doing?
2. Is there any way that I am looking to my spouse to meet needs that only the Lord can meet?
3. What one thing can we do differently to help one another grow in our faith?
4. What one thing can we do to serve the Lord together?