



Marriage Seminar

ANCIENT PATHWAYS *to* INTIMACY

SESSION THREE: PHYSICAL 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.

It is a serious matter... to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All the day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations... There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal... it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit--immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.

– C. S. Lewis, *Weight of Glory*

The Ancient Pathways to Physical Intimacy

Introduction

John Chrysostom (c. 347–407) wrote:

There is no need to blush when talking openly about marriage and the holy pleasures of married love and the union of a husband and wife ... [Kelly, *Golden Mouth*, 134-135]

I. How do we tend to view physical intimacy in marriage? How does the Bible view physical intimacy in marriage?

- A. Guilt rather than gratitude often casts a shadow over your experience of sex. If so, one of the best things you can do is regularly thank God for His gift of sex. *Do you view sex as a gift for which to be thankful, or as a guilt-ridden burden to be borne?* (Gary Thomas, *Sacred Marriage*, p. 200)

Years ago, young women in England were instructed that on their wedding night, they should lie on their backs and think of the queen, meaning that they were to endure sex so that they might conceive babies who would be loyal citizens to the queen and loyal soldiers in her army. What a terrible image!

- B. Physical intimacy occurs only within the bounds of a life long, monogamous, heterosexual marriage.

- C. Physical intimacy in marriage is really good and in marriage needs to be equal and reciprocal

(See I Corinthians 7:1-5 below).

1. Christianity teaches us first about the goodness of sex while reminding us that there are things that are more important than sex. It allows us to experience pleasure without making pleasure the idol of our existence.
 2. We tend to view sex in marriage as the duty of the wife and the privilege of the husband. It is the privilege and responsibility of both partners equally.
- D. Physical intimacy in marriage is **the crowning symbol** of your total giving of yourself to your spouse. It serves as God's ordained way to say to your spouse: "I belong completely, exclusively to you in every aspect: socially, legally, economically, spiritually, emotionally."
- E. Physical intimacy in marriage is **the physical support** by which a couple builds the house of a strong relationship. We all have a longing to know and to be known, to love and to be loved. The Hebrew word for physical intimacy is "to know" a man or woman.

II. What is the purpose of physical intimacy in marriage?

A. PROCREATION

Genesis 1:28 - And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion." Psalm 127:3-5

Scottie's Birds and the Bees Talk.

B. PREVENTION

By means of pursuing a loving, faithful, and intimate marriage, we may keep at bay those temptation to sin that might very well be our everlasting undoing.

1. **1 Corinthians 7:2-5** – 2 But because of **immoralities**, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband. The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your **lack of self-control**.
2. Husbands, ensure that your wife is the sole object of your stimulation, satisfaction and delight! Confine all acts of physical intimacy to the marriage bed with your spouse. (**Hebrews 13:4** – Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled...)

C. PLEASURE

1. To experience the pleasure of giving yourself physically and completely to your spouse.
2. **Proverbs 5:15-21** – 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. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love. For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress and embrace the bosom of a foreigner? For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He watches all his paths.
3. "It is not having a wife, but loving a wife, that makes a man live chastely. He who loves his wife, whom Solomon calls his fountain, will not go abroad to drink of muddy, poisoned waters. Pure marital love is a gift of God, and comes from heaven; but like the vestal fire, it must be

cherished, that it go not out. He who loves not his wife is the likeliest person to embrace the bosom of a stranger.” – Puritan Pastor, Thomas Watson

4. **When does this pleasure and intimacy flourish?** Note the progression of this process in **Ephesians 5:31-32**.
 - a. Intimacy flourishes only when your marriage is permeated with the security of commitment to one another and when there is unconditional acceptance of one another.
 - b. Two becoming one flesh – Ephesians 5:31-32 – **For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.** This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.
 - c. “In one sense, we are never more Godlike than in the act of sex... We give and receive in a simultaneous act. We feel a primordial delight, entering into the other in communion. Two independent beings open their inmost selves and experience not a loss but a gain. In some way – “a profound mystery” not even Paul dared explore – this most human act reveals something of the nature of reality, God’s reality, in his relations with creation and perhaps within the Trinity itself.” – Philip Yancey

III. The Pathways – How do we pursue physical intimacy in marriage?

A. WORSHIP

1. Don’t divorce your sex life from your spiritual life with God... Physical intimacy is a foretaste of the ecstasy of joy that comes from being in complete union with God – the beatific vision. The most rapturous love between a man and woman on earth is only a faint hint of what it will be like to enter into God’s presence and see and share His glory in the new heavens and new earth.
2. Use your sexuality as a spiritual discipline to remember that you are more than lovers. You are brothers and sisters in Christ. We must use aspects of our physical intimacy to grow spiritually. Turn earthly marital pleasures and challenges into channels of holy adoration. Cultivate the art of celebration.
3. The world is obsessed with sex as the key to fulfillment. Yet ,
spiritual intimacy with God is the real answer to sexual fulfillment (Hebrews 13:4). The quality of our life and relationships – now and forever – depends on Jesus. *We enjoy body oneness and pleasure only as an expression and outgrowth of our spiritual and emotional intimacy.*

4. Your marriage is to be a union of friends and a union of lovers . This intimacy is the fruit and result of a heart to heart, transparent relationship with your lifelong partner.
5. Satisfaction or the lack thereof in marriage has more to do with our relationship to God than with our relationship to our spouse.

B. CONTEXT

For a man, context means nothing. For a woman, context means everything. Men know little about creating context. For real intimacy to take place there must be the proper “context” for sex. The air must be cleared of antagonisms (i.e. verbal communication must form the context for physical). Sex must be the culmination of a whole series of kindnesses and acts of love (i.e. volitional giving must form the context for physical giving).

C. MINISTRY MINDSET

1. The biggest and lasting pleasure is giving pleasure. Giving arousal is the most arousing thing.
2. Main purpose in sex is ministry... giving pleasure.
3. The goal of sex is not your physical release, your self-gratification or performance – it is the satisfaction of your spouse.
4. Sexual relations are regulated by the principle that your body and sexuality belong to your partner – they exist for his or her pleasure (1 Corinthians 7:4). True sexual pleasure comes from giving pleasure. Implication: There can be no bargaining with sex.

D. TYPES OF SEX

(taken from Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus, *Intimate Issues*)

1. Appetizer sex.
2. Main course sex.
3. Gourmet sex.

E. FREQUENCY

1. The Newlywed Game Couples’ illustration on frequency of sex in marriage.
2. *Wives, we glorify God by cultivating a sexual desire for our husband and by welcoming his sexual desire for us* (Betsy Ricucci, quoted in Gary Thomas’ book *Sacred Marriage*, p. 207).
3. Sexual relations should be equal and reciprocal (1 Corinthians 7:4). Therefore, neither has more rights to gratification or frequency in sex.

4. Participation and initiation of sexual relations is the mutual responsibility of each spouse.
5. The great danger zone in a marriage is when we *withhold/deprive* anything in our power to give that would bless our spouse (I Corinthians 7:1-6). Perhaps that's why the Bible encourages couples to make sure that sexual love is given freely. "Stop depriving one another," the apostle Paul says, "except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer" (1 Corinthians 7:5). In other words, don't let your sexual life degenerate to a place where either of you feels that the other person could give love yet chooses to withhold it.

IV. The Roadblocks to physical intimacy

A. SHAME AND OUR PROPENSITY TO HIDE

The fall brought shame into our lives and the tendency to hide (Genesis 3).

1. It started, of course, with Adam and Eve. Before they ate the forbidden fruit, "the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed."
2. It was only after the Fall that "they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves garments" (Gen. 2:25, 3:7).
3. Frederick Buechner declares: "... part of knowing evil as well as good was to know sex as a way of making objects of each other as well as a way of making love, and we have all felt guilty about it ever since."

B. CONDITIONAL LOVE

Do not criticize your wife's body. When a woman truly feels cherished by her husband, she will give herself freely, fully, and generously to him.

C. BOREDOM AND TAKING EACH OTHER FOR GRANTED

Your sex life needs an element of spontaneity and surprise. Caution: Men, never ask your wife to do something that makes her feel uncomfortable.

D. DISAPPOINTMENTS

Extreme care needs to be exercised here. It is crucial to commend and affirm. It is also imperative that you talk openly and candidly about the disappointments of sex.

1. A woman may find the man too rough, abrupt, insensitive, and more frequently desirous of sex.
2. A man may find the woman too slowly aroused, too particular about the circumstances of sex (the mood, climate, conditions), too easily distracted and so on.

3. Early adjustments are normal, and should be expected. Some of the adjustments include early bodily discomfort, learning the timing of each other's bodies and jitters from the unfamiliar. It takes time to "mesh."
4. Guard against unrealistic expectations and trying to perform and simply work at truly loving and enjoying one another.

E. SEXUAL SIN AND PAINFUL EXPERIENCES IN THE PAST

We are all prone to the snare of sexual sin and the propensity to spoil the good gift God has given us. We all are prone to relieving personal pain through physical pleasure.

1. Past experiences of emotional pain that somehow involve sexuality. Some sexual problems stem from guilt or bad experiences from misused sex before and during marriage. We can idolize sex or we can obsess with guilt over the past. This causes us to continue to focus on ourselves.
2. Premarital sex, masturbation, homosexual experiences, and pornography can all create ingrained patterns that are detrimental to satisfying marital sex.
3. These experiences may need to be dealt with in counseling.

F. PROBLEM WITH PORNOGRAPHY

Settling for cheap substitutes that enslave.

1. Men, see to it that your wife alone is the sole basis of your sexual stimulation and satisfaction (Look again at Proverbs 5:18-21).
2. Philip Yancey says that "in modern lust, people sit in living rooms or even office cubicles watching strangers undress and make love. Yielding to such unattached desire can become addictive, and often damages true relationship. A wife who discovers her husband fawning over pornography may well feel rejected and devalued, her feelings of intimacy betrayed."

G. OTHER RELATIONAL PROBLEMS Most sexual problems are not really "sexual" – they are relational problems that show up in bed. Look for fear, worry, jealousy, self-pity, guilt, suspicion, fatigue, and anger at the bottom of it all. How do you speak to one another? Do you know what truly communicates love to each other?

Conclusion

Paul Tournier, a noted Christian psychologist, has rightfully said: *When God directs the sex life of a couple, they can practice it divinely, if I may use the word – in a full mutual communication that is carnal, moral, and spiritual all at once. It is the crowning symbol of your total giving of yourself to your spouse.*

Sex within marriage is neither as easy nor as important as we imagined before marriage. It expresses intimacy, yes, and provides pleasure. But much of marriage consists in making day to day decisions, managing the complexities of careers and schedules, rearing children, negotiating differences, juggling finances, and all the other effort involved in keeping a home running. – Philip Yancey, “Holy Sex”

Take Home Questions:

1. What words would describe your current attitudes toward the physical relationship in your marriage?
2. What is our biggest obstacle to physical intimacy?
3. How can we become more ministry-oriented rather than manipulative in our pursuit of physical intimacy?
4. Ask each other: How might I deepen your enjoyment of our physical relationship?
5. Ask the Lord how you need to move past the hurt, shame, guilt, and angst that you associate with sex.