



## Week Five Intimacy

Welcome back, and congratulations on sticking with it! The sad truth is that most people are more dedicated to their hobbies than they are to improving their marriages. They seem to think that just because they've said, "I do," and throw their spouse a bone of affection every now and then, that all will be well. We know that nothing is further from the truth. If you want a healthy, vibrant marriage, you must tend to it daily, just like you would an exotic plant in your garden.

Way back as part of session one, the project asked you and your spouse to take the Love Languages quiz and identify concrete ways to communicate love to each other. We are going to go back to those different ways to show love and look at how each of those could play out in your marriage. It's important to remember that just because your spouse has one or two primary ways they feel love, each of the forms has a place in your relationship. Each variation should be woven in and through your daily activities.

The first love language we are going to address is quality time. There is some debate going around now that quality time is actually a myth; that you can't just arbitrarily choose a specific time slot and plop down with someone else to enjoy some quality time. The argument is that quality time emerges from quantity time; generally people are addressing this in terms of quality time spent with your children. If you think about that it really does make sense; the best memories that we have are ones that happened at unexpected moments. In the world of love languages, quality time kind of fits that same pattern; however, it is more concerned about expressing love by spending time together than it is about expecting something astounding to happen during that time, so in that sense, quality time is quantity time.

As you are planning your day and week, you need to be sure that you are intentionally

scheduling time with your spouse. It doesn't have to necessarily be sitting in a coffee shop for hours, but you do have to spend time together. One easy way to gain a lot of time is by restructuring your view on errands. Instead of regularly splitting the errands and each of you going a different direction, try to use that time as together time, even if it means that you have to give up a TV show or two. Save the splitting up for real emergencies and savor the time you will gain together.

Another way is to simply commit to doing the chores together. If the basement or garage needs to be cleaned out, work on it together; now is not the time to divide the house into "zones" that are male or female. The same goes for yard work and gardening, or vacuuming and dusting. Usually chores actually come in pairs, take advantage of that and use it as time together. That said, it won't work for that to be the only time that you are spending together. You should plan a weekly, or at least biweekly, date night that both of you can count on. That date should take precedence over any other plans, and should only be moved if you both agree to it.

Date nights are so important because they allow for that time that you need to grow closer as companions. Companionship is one aspect of intimacy that many couples tend to ignore after they have passed the "dating" phase of their relationship. We'll talk a more about the importance of this in a little bit.

The next love language has to do with physical touch. This is about so much more than the act of sex. Simply rubbing your spouses back or holding hands can establish a connection that deepens your intimacy. I'm not suggesting going to the extent of risking arrest for a PDA, but there are simple, innocent ways that you can express your love. It is important that you talk to your spouse about his or her feelings regarding this - some people are very uncomfortable with any kind of physical demonstration of love if anyone else is around. It isn't a good idea to think that you are going to desensitize them to this by forcing contact in front of people; chances are good it would end up in a horrible argument.

If your spouse is private about physical touching, reserve it for the bedroom when it is just the two of you, but don't always have it lead to the actual act of sex. The point I am trying to make is that touching is more than sex. How would you like it if the only time you got to experience one sensation was when it was simply a stepping stone that led to something else? That isn't very honoring to either of you. Sometimes being held or gently

caressed is what is needed at the moment. Feed that part of you spouse's love by regularly making contact with them without expecting anything more than enjoying the moment.

Speaking of enjoying things for the simple pleasure they bring, gifts are a grand way to brighten a day. I'm not talking about the more obligatory gifting days like birthdays and Christmas, I'm talking about the unexpected, out-of-the-blue gifts. These don't have to be expensive, just well thought out. A card made on the computer with pictures of a special memory you share, a single flower, or a dessert treat all count.

Kids get this one right from the very beginning - just think about how many dandelion bouquets have been given to mothers around the world. Kids don't get caught up in the, "I can't afford it" mode; they sit down with paper and crayons or go exploring for a pretty rock. It is the sentiment attached to the gift that has the power, not the dollar amount spent on it.

Taking the time to think of something that is meaningful deepens the connection you have with your spouse. They see that you aren't too busy to have him or her on your mind, and they have something to share with friends. It feels good to be able to say, "Guess what my husband/wife gave me last night!" It validates their importance to you in a very tangible way.

That leads us to the next love language: affirmations. Affirmations are those statements that you make verbally or in writing to let your spouse know how special they are to you. They don't need to be long, drawn out verses of adoration unless you have a talent for that sort of thing. A simple, "Thank you for \_\_\_\_\_," works just fine.

Another powerful affirmation comes in the form of expressing what you admire about the other person. One of our sons taught us the power of this one. For him, it isn't enough to say, "I am proud of you." He wants to know why. If you take the time to tell your spouse how you feel about him or her, and what specific action embodied that, it will result in the two of you being closer. You want your words to be specific enough that he or she isn't left guessing as to what was done to merit the attention.

The final way to demonstrate love is through acts of service. These are the things that need to be done around the house, but that you do for the other person without expecting anything in return. An act of service isn't taking out the trash if that's the chore you are supposed to do; an act of service would be finishing the laundry or cleaning the bathroom when those aren't the things you typically do.

Another way to love through acts of service is by volunteering to regularly take the chore that no one wants. In our home, Peggy does all of the cooking, but after dinner I tackle the pots and pans. Neither of us enjoys scrubbing them, but that is my act of service to her daily. You might think about one thing you could do that would be appreciated by your spouse. You might also think about all the things you currently do for each other and consider whether or not you have expressed appreciation for those things.

When most people think of intimacy, they equate it with sex; however, you've just seen how incorporating the love languages leads to greater intimacy. I heard one person describe intimacy as, "into-me-see," and that is actually a pretty good description. When we experience intimacy with someone we are allowing them to see deeply into who we are. Because we are multi-faceted people, intimacy is also multi-faceted. There are four main areas that we experience intimacy with others: companionship, commitment, spiritual, and passionate intimacy.

Companionship grows when we spend time with each other doing things outside of the bedroom. This is where the power of dating your spouse comes in; just because you've said, "I do," doesn't mean that you should stop having fun together. Many people get stuck in the mindset that "grownups" simply take care of business. This is the place where we see the old saying, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," come to light. To keep your relationship alive you must do things together just for the joy of doing them.

This is where the idea of the man-cave or wife's room needs to be given up. Men, you shouldn't be hiding yourself away from your wife and family; and women, you shouldn't be creating spaces that others feel unwelcome in either. As a married couple, you are each a part of the other. To intentionally block the other from an area of your life is unacceptable.

That leads to the next component of intimacy: commitment. You each need to know and feel that the other is completely, 100% committed to the relationship, even when things are tough between you. This is built by including each other in the various facets of your life. Pay attention to those red-flag indicators of secrecy and guilt. If you notice that you are feeling uncomfortable with how you are acting, and would rather isolate than share that particular activity with your spouse, you probably need to do some deep soul-searching about the appropriateness of what you are doing.

Commitment embodies more than simply agreeing to stay together physically.

Commitment in marriage refers to not allowing anyone or anything else to take you spouse's place of significance, whether that is in physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual ways. Most affairs start, not with being physically unfaithful, but with being emotionally unfaithful. If you ever find yourself sharing things with someone other than your spouse that aren't for public knowledge, you have the beginning of an affair on your hands. Public knowledge items are the "elevator talk" of the conversation world. They are topics you could discuss with anyone without feeling uncomfortable. That isn't to say that you can't have friendships with members of the opposite sex, but you must be vigilant that the level of connection you experience is appropriate.

One way to combat inappropriate friendship is by making all contact you have with members of the opposite sex known to your spouse. Any emails, texts, or phone calls should be openly shared; the fact they happened, as well as the content. It isn't a matter of having to "report out" your actions because you can't be trusted, rather it is a way to honor the relationship you have with your spouse. It tells them that you honor them above anyone else. If you have nothing to hide, this shouldn't even be an issue; however, if you feel apprehensive about your spouse knowing about those conversations, it's probably time to turn and run in the other direction.

Growing together spiritually is one of the best ways to honor God and your spouse. No marriage can become what God intended without Him being involved in it. Think about it like an isosceles triangle; God is at the top angle and each spouse is at one of the bottom angles. Initially you are separated by a large expanse, and the only way for you to get closer to each other is to move up the sides of the triangle. That process will bring you closer to God, because He occupies that top angle. I would argue that the only way to truly get closer to you spouse is by moving closer to God.

The world tries to get us to believe that other things can take His place, and as a consequence, couples are regularly seen striving to make house or car payments they can hardly afford in the name of happiness. They attempt to find comfort in alcohol use or self-medicate through video games and books. The truth is that only God can fill that God-hole in our souls, and until we focus on growing that relationship with Him, we can't be healthy enough to have a stable relationship with anyone else.

When we have that one-ness established with God, we can have it with our spouse, and

that is where the passionate part of intimacy comes in. God created sex to be the culmination of our one-ness with each other. We can't achieve that unless we also regularly experience companionship, commitment, and spiritual growth. The goal of sex isn't to satisfy the husband's needs, or to satisfy the wife's desires; the ultimate purpose of sex is to honor God through the celebration of our unity with each other. If we are striving to do that, the bonus is that both the husband and the wife will find their needs completely met and discover themselves to be completely satisfied. This can only happen in a monogamous relationship.

Our culture tends to condone sex outside of marriage. People tend to think that it's not a big deal; that they aren't hurting anyone because both parties are in agreement on the issue. They falsely believe that as long as there isn't a baby as a product of the union, there will be no long term consequences. They are wrong. God designed sex to be for husbands and wives; He designed it to be the ultimate giving and sharing of one body with another. Every person that you are sexually intimate with receives a little piece of you, and you receive a little piece of them. The unfortunate truth is that many people are scattered all over the place, having given little pieces of themselves to many different people. The problem is that you don't have your whole self to give to your spouse, and there are all of the other pieces of the people you were with clogging up the area that is supposed to be reserved for your husband.

This damage can be undone, but it is so much easier to just avoid it in the first place. If you are in a situation that there has been infidelity within your marriage, I would encourage you to seek specific marital counseling for this issue. You will need to work through the complete confession of your past and receive forgiveness from your spouse. I know that a lot of you are thinking that is unfair since it happened before you even met; however, your actions, even the actions of your past, always have consequences. God wasn't kidding when He said that sex was to be kept for marriage. By ignoring that, you have cheated your spouse out of the gift of being able to give yourself completely and fully to her or him alone. The amount of help needed to heal from extramarital sex will depend on your unique circumstances; if everything happened in the past and if you have been honest about it up until this point, most likely you will be able to work through it without additional help. If you have been harboring secrets or have out-and-out lied to your spouse about your sexual history, you may want to seek help from an outside source. Healing is possible when we are

honest and work together to re-establish trust. The forgiveness we need to extend to each other is made possible through our faith in Jesus.

Please join me in prayer. God, thank you for creating sexual intimacy as a way for us to celebrate our unity with our spouse. Help us to always keep the marriage bed pure, and give us the courage to heal any damage that has already been done. Be with us daily and guard our minds and actions to keep us from wandering into areas that we have no business exploring. Thank you for the perfect gift you have given us in our spouses. Let us honor You through our treatment of each other. In Your Son's Name we pray. Amen.

If you are currently dealing with issues of infidelity in your marriage, it would be wise to contact a counselor to lead you through the healing process. Attempting to have a discussion such as the one outlined for this week could do more harm than good if you are in the midst of a crisis at this time. You will need to decide if you are in a place that you can have a discussion like this, or if you need to postpone it until you have worked through the healing process. Your church can help you find a qualified Christian counselor to work through those issues.

During the project this week you are asked to get very honest with each other about your feelings and impressions surrounding intimacy. You will be discussing topics such as:

- Your perception of feeling accepted and honored during the sexual experiences
- The overall quality of your relationship
- The level of commitment each person feels
- The depth of your honesty and intimacy with each other
- Your overall attitude toward sex: is it dirty, duty, or desire
- The frequency and variety of sexual experiences you have
- The amount of gentleness and tenderness you receive from your spouse and
- How well you understand each other's likes and dislikes

You will need to use all of the skills we have been working on so far when you have this discussion. It may be a bit uncomfortable, but it will be worth the work you put into it as you and your spouse move to deeper levels of intimacy. Have a wonderful week, and God bless you both.