

Strengthening Your Marriage

Review Lesson #7 "Different By Design"

Humbly Being Open To Personal Change:

The problem of blind spots (1 Jn. 1:8)

Begin with ourselves. (Matthew 7:1-5 "Log Eye")

Proverbs 27:5,6 "Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend."

Proverbs 28:23 "He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue."

Proverbs 12:1 "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid." (12:15; 13:1,18; 15:5,12,32; 16:20; 18:15; 19:25,27; 25:12)

Proverbs 9:8,9 "Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man and he will love you. Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still..." (8:33)

Proverbs 15:31 "He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise." (10:17)

Question to ask to your spouse: "Do you have any questions or concerns about my character, behavior, or thinking, or do you see any specific sin in my life that you feel I should confess before the LORD or before another individual?" (1 Peter 5:5,6; James 4:6)

Where are the areas God has been working for good in your spouse's life? How have you encouraged them in these? (Ephesians 4:29; Hebrews 10:24; 3:13) Look for specific ways to encourage your spouse. Rejoice at even small improvements.

Lesson #8

Restoring Romance And Sexual Intimacy:

Romance:

How would you describe your romance before you got married and now after you have been married for several years. What has changed?

Do you feel complacency? Does the marital bliss seem an illusion? It shouldn't. The longer we are married we come to a more realistic understanding of what marriage involves and we need to realize that continuing the romance takes work but is worth it. Finding romance in the midst of everyday circumstance is challenging. Is it possible to love someone even more deeply with each passing year? Absolutely! It will involve humility, a servant's heart, and a fervent desire to know and love your spouse. There is no place for feelings of romance outside your marriage relationship. Marriage is the one place God designed for romance, passion, and the sexual relationship to be enjoyed righteously!

Begin within your own heart to restore romance and sexual intimacy.

Our spouse is the most important, precious, and desirable person we will ever know.

Is romance with our spouse a priority? What needs to change?

Romantic actions will produce romantic feelings. Feelings follow obedience.

Genesis 29:20 Jacob for Rachel "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her."

Ephesians 5:29 "Husbands love your wives... nourish and cherish..."

1 Peter 4:8 "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins."

Romans 12:9,10 "Love must be sincere... Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves."

1 John 4:18 "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."

Sexual Intimacy: Talk With Your Spouse About Your Past:

(Memories of your past may be affecting your present sexual relationship.)

- Have you talked to each other about your past boyfriends/girlfriends or physical relationships? If there was sexual sin in your life prior to marriage, have you confessed those memories to the Lord and sought His forgiveness?
 - Have either of you in the past been sexually active, had any sexually transmitted diseases, or had any previous pregnancies/abortions/fathered any children? If you were sexually active together before you got married to each other, how has that affected your present relationship? Do you completely trust each other or do you question your spouse' self-control?
 - Is there anything hidden that has not been revealed that if known might hinder your marriage relationship? (John 8:32)
 - Have either of you been sexually abused?
 - Have you confessed any past issues of sexual sin or lust? What is your view of pornography? Masturbation? Close friendships with a coed?
 - How have you felt about your physical appearance or features in the past? How have you brought those feelings into your present marriage?
 - What fears or expectations have you had about your sexual relationship?
 - * anxious over spouse being attracted to your physical body.
 - * desiring to satisfy your spouse (concern over personal performance)
 - * physical limitations which affect your sexual relationship.
 - Do you both have a clean conscience before God?

Your mind is your number one sexual organ. If your thoughts are corrupted, your body will not work as God designed and you will not enjoy the pleasure He intended for you to experience.
- ** Christian's should not dwell on the past, but should understand how the past does effect the present. (Philippians 3:13-15 "Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead...")
- ** Issue of guilt/past memories (How much is wise to share?)

Balance of helpful and destructive.

** Life is shaped by our choices. (We need transparency/openness/honesty)
Confession (James 5:16; 1 John 1:9)

False Views Of Sex And Romance: (presented by a sinful culture)

- any time/any place
- constant (it's all you think about)
- you must have the "perfect" body to have a good sex life
- one must be seductive/sensual in dress to be attractive
(Prov. 11:22; 1 Tim. 2:9,10; 1 Pet. 3:3,4)
- a spouse should be open to un-natural, inappropriate, or unwanted sexual behavior (free to do whatever...)
(selfish expectations projected on one's spouse)
(social misconceptions or false thinking about sexual enjoyment because of how the printed or visual media has perverted our thinking about sex and sexuality.)(world ---> you)
(believing that sex should be a little "kinky" or twisted to be fun)

Marital Sexual Intimacy: (passionate, pleasurable, protected)

The physical side of marriage is such a small part of your overall marriage relationship, yet it is a very important part, and is a reflection of the health and depth of your marriage. It is closely linked to every other aspect of your relationship together.

- **Is God-ordained, natural, and without shame** (free from guilt)

Genesis 1:28 "Be fruitful and multiply"

Genesis 2:22,25 "(God) brought her to the man... therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

Genesis 4:1 "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain..."

- **Is an exclusive, protected marital relationship**

Proverbs 5:15-20 "Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well... Let them be only your own and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth....Let her... satisfy you at all times and always be enraptured with her love. For why would you be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?"

Song of Solomon 2:5-7 "I am faint with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me... do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires."

Song of Solomon 4:16; 5:4; 7:12 "Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits." "My heart began to pound for him..." "There I will give you my love."

Hebrews 13:4 "Marriage is honorable among all and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

1 Corinthians 7:2-5,33 "Because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband. Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her and likewise also the wife to her husband.

The wife does not have authority over her own body but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does." "He who is married cares about the things of the world – how he may please his wife. She who is married cares about the things of the world – how she may please her husband."

Sex within the covenant of marriage between a man and woman is delightful, pleasurable, and sacred.

- **Involves undivided attention and unwavering commitment**

Song of Solomon 2:16; 6:3; 7:10 "My beloved is mine and I am his..." "I am my lover's and my lover is mine." (5:9-16) "I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me."

The goal in marriage is to train your attractions, affections, and desires to fit only one person. It is important that your spouse know that no other person or image enters your mind when romantic feelings flood your heart. Romance calls for passionate loyalty and transparency. (Ricucci)

- **Involves eager anticipation and thoughts of affection**

Song of Solomon 1:2,4; 3:2; 7:13 "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine." "Take me away with you – let us hurry." "I will seek him whom my soul loves." (5:8) "That I have stored up for you, my lover."

When passion is rightly focused, the only thoughts that should stir us are thoughts of our spouse. Fostering our thoughts and affections for one another protects us from allowing our thoughts to drift elsewhere. (Ricucci)

- **Involves romantic words**

Song of Solomon 4:1,9,10 "How beautiful you are, my darling..." "You have stolen my heart... my bride... with one glance of your eyes... how delightful is your love... my bride."

Song of Solomon 5:10,16 "My lover is radiant." "His mouth is sweetness itself, he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, my friend."

Song of Solomon 7:6 "How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love, with your delights."

In a marriage rich with romance, love compels us to communicate through words, whether verbally or in writing. Words we should never express to anyone else. Making love to your wife verbally is as important as making love to her physically. (Ricucci)

- **Involves affectionate touch** (tender and gentle)

Song of Solomon 3:4 "When I found the one my heart loves, I held him and would not let him go."

Song of Solomon 8:5 "Who is coming up from the desert leaning on her lover?"

- Never use touch to manipulate for selfish desire. (1 Thess. 4:4-7)
(a means to desired end)

- Husbands, you must touch the heart and mind or your wife before you touch her body." (Mahaney)

- One of the greatest gifts you can give your children is to openly express tender love for your spouse. Model a healthy romance before them. Their security is in mom and dad's relationship going well.

Questions To Ask Your Spouse At Home:

1. Does your spouse know what really brings you physical pleasure/satisfaction?
2. What do you long for in your sexual relationship?

- **Understanding and enjoying the difference:**

Men - sight/on-off/able to separate issues from present

Men are able to compartmentalize & are driven by desire

Men struggle with lusting for a woman. (men want)

Men enjoy pursuing (the chase). Men arouse quickly.

Women - touch/flow/encompasses all issues/needs time/patience/

Women are not driven by desire/they need to be cherished/held

Women are stimulated by inward emotions as well as by gentle and affectionate physical contact. Women arouse gradually.

Women struggle with wanting to be lusted after.

(Women want to be wanted)

Women enjoy being pursued... (being chased)

- **Ingredients Of A Good Romantic And Physical Relationship:**

- Creative romance (Break from the usual/predictable)

"How can I surprise him/her with a fresh 'I love you'." (spontaneous)

- Even the little things count (simple gestures)

- The priority of romance is reflected in our choices about how we structure our time. Here are ways to communicate "I love you."

- * consistent date nights (Husbands need to take the initiative.)

- * weekend getaways

- * celebrations or traditions

Your anniversary

Your birthday or Christmas

Valentine's Day

- * gift giving (What does your spouse gravitate to/delight in?)

Study your spouse!

- * completed projects/tasks

- * keeping a picture of your spouse in a prominent place.

- * special affectionate terms/names

- Transparency/openness/honesty (be 100% present in mind and body)

- Complete privacy (lock the door/pull the shades/light a candle/soft music/shower/shave/spice it up)

- Time, Timing, and Transition

- * You need both quality and quantity

- * Don't over schedule each day's events prior to time together.

- * Retire early/protect your time together

- * Plan around her menstrual cycle (Leviticus 18:19)

- * It starts in the kitchen (it encompasses the whole day)

- * schedule times of intimacy, but be open for being spontaneous.

- Eager anticipation/uninhibited (we desire time together), responsiveness

- * Don't give your spouse the leftovers. Don't crowd out your spouse.

- Have an attitude of mutual discovery (no one is an expert)

“What do you especially enjoy...?” “What stirs your passion?”

There should be a total freedom to give yourselves to one another in any way that is pleasurable, as long as it is not offensive to your spouse.

- Be willing to sacrifice your desire for the good of your spouse. (illness, fatigue, frustration, etc.)
An occasional delay in order to serve your spouse won't hurt you. In the marriage bed, the choice between servant hood and selfishness may determine whether your wife feels cherished or used.
- Remember, your physical relationship will get better as time allows you to adjust to each other and enjoy one another.
- Spend time together in God's Word/Bible study (total intimacy)

- **Hindrances To Sexual Intimacy:** (IFP p. 133-137)

Song of Solomon 2:15 “It's the little foxes that ruin the vineyard...”

Protect marriage sexual intimacy – let nothing spoil it.

- Criticism (Prov. 10:19; 13:3)
- Comparison
- Self-reliant pride
- Unresolved anger/hurt/bitterness (Ephesians 4:26; Hebrews 12:15)
If possible, never go to bed with unresolved conflict.
- Little or no communication/absence of time together (feeling distance)
- Lack of complete trust in each other
- Anxiety about one's physical appearance (fear - 1 John 4:18)
- Mechanical sex/distorted view of sex
- Absence of physical touch throughout the day
- Too much computer, TV, or late nights out
- Unresponsiveness, apathetic (no interest), passive (just endured)
- Selfishness/insensitivity (Philippians 2:3-5)(mutual release/not one sided)
- Never refuse time together as a punishment against your spouse.
1 Corinthians 7:5 “Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer, and come together again, so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”
 - * Consistent refusal and rejection could tempt your spouse in ways you might never imagine.
 - * Increased time together will decrease temptation to look elsewhere
- Over-commitment to other things/exhaustion/unavailability
Deuteronomy 24:5
Making something else more important than one's spouse.
What we do reveals what we most want (desire).
Busyness can regularly crowd out romance. Romance can tend to fall by the way side and ultimately get run over by other things if we don't intentionally plan for time.
- Stress/anxiety over other issues (children/debt/parents/illness)
Couples need to talk through issues before time together.
- Putting the kids' needs before your spouse's. (spouse first)
- Unattractiveness (take a shower, spice it up, shave, comb the hair)
If we want our spouse to desire us, we need to look desirable.
Get some exercise. Lay off the sweets. You will look and feel better.
1 Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:18-20

- Jealousy (fear of being displaced/replaced)
Don't let anything/anyone take your spouse's rightful place!
- Seek Godly counsel if you are unable to resolve any conflict.

Family Planning:

- What Does The Bible Say About Life?
 - * God is the author of life! (Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 11:5)
 - * God controls life and death (Deut. 32:39)
 - * God opens womb (Gen. 29:31; 30:2,22; Rom. 4:19,21)
- How Does God View The Unborn?
 - * Psalms 139:13-16 (greatly valued)
- God's View Of Children
 - * Psalms 127:3-5 Children are a gift from the LORD.
 - * Genesis 1:28 Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.
- Issue of birth-control/contraceptives (pros/cons)(dangers/side affects)

Remember Your Marriage Covenant To Each Other.

Proverbs 4:23,25-27 "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. Let your eyes look straight ahead... ponder the path of your feet... do not turn to the right or the left. Remove your foot from evil."

Malachi 2:15 "So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth."

Proverbs 2:9-12,16,17 "Then you will understand what is right and just and fair – every good path. For wisdom will enter your heart... discretion will protect you and understanding will guard you. Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men... it will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God.

Questions For Couples:

1. How can you begin today to creatively tell your spouse, "I love you and I am so glad you're mine?"
2. Where do you need to improve in order to serve your spouse more effectively in your sexual relationship?

Reference Books:

- Love That Lasts, Gary and Betsy Ricucci
- Sex, Romance, And The Glory Of God: What Every Christian Husband Needs To Know, C. J. Mahaney
- Feminine Appeal, Carolyn Mahaney
- Solomon On Sex, Joseph Dillow
- Intended For Pleasure, Ed and Gaye Wheat
- The Secret Of Loving, Josh McDowell