

Intimacy Deprivation

Are you withholding love?

by Gary Delaplane

What do you think of when you hear the word *intimacy*? In our society, intimacy has often become a euphemism for sex, but true intimacy implies a deep, personal connection between two people. Nowhere is that intended to be deeper than in the marriage relationship. How would you characterize the depth of intimacy in your marriage? Is it growing deeper and more passionate or is it growing colder and becoming a distant memory?

We often walk couples through an exercise in which I simply write the word *Intimacy* on a white board. I then ask them to list words and characteristics that come to mind when they think of a truly intimate relationship. Their reactions are always interesting. Some start out slowly and then pick up momentum as their imaginations kick in. Others simply look at one another – expecting his or her spouse to show initiative by starting the process. Almost always, however, the final list contains a combination of words and phrases that are unique to that couple. At that point, I write the word “vision” above the random array of words. Through this brainstorming exercise, the couple has painted a picture of what their marriage can be. There is not a single word or phrase on the board that cannot be realized in the relationship...if they always choose intimacy over pride, being right, unforgiveness or spitefulness.

Every interaction we have as a couple – from the way we greet one another first thing in the morning to how we say goodbye as we walk out the door to the tone of our voice when our spouse calls us unexpectedly in the middle of a busy day at work to our willingness to support her around the house and with the kids – either leads us to deeper trust and intimacy or it drives a wedge into the intimacy we so desire. It is 100% your choice. It is choosing to love your wife when she’s not particularly lovable. It is choosing to be gentle and compassionate when things don’t go your way.

God’s plan is that we truly “become one” through deep intimacy in all three dimensions of our humanity – spiritual, emotional, and physical. Most couples understand the types of things that will build spiritual intimacy even if they don’t do them regularly – things such as praying together, going to church together, reading the Bible together or having a family devotional time. The impasse encountered by most couples, however, comes in the areas of the emotional and physical connections. So many marriages are stuck in the cycle of “if only he would talk with me and make even a modest attempt at connecting with me emotionally, then perhaps I would feel more like making love with him” and “she expects me to be ‘sensitive’ to everything in her world and to sit and talk with her when all I can think about is the fact that we haven’t had sex in days (or weeks or months)!” Both men and women need physical *and* emotional connection, but the way in which we process those needs definitely varies by gender.

If you find yourself even remotely in this cycle, the question I have for you is, “Are you intentionally withholding those things that your wife needs because you feel that your needs are not being met?” So how is that working for you? You have a choice – to pursue your wife’s heart and leave the rest up to God...or...continue in this dysfunctional cycle which will ultimately kill all intimacy in your relationship. You wouldn’t withhold air or food from a child. Are you withholding the love your wife needs in a no-win battle of stubbornness? Be the leader and choose intimacy.