

13. Intimacy

- ✓ Physical
- ✓ Emotional
- ✓ Spiritual
- ✓ Intellectual

The opening paragraphs for this Fathering in 15TM lesson put it very well - men frequently believe that intimacy is only about having sex. This is not surprising because that is the message that today's culture often tells us. So many young men lack the knowledge and skills to develop the other forms of intimacy that make up a healthy romantic inter-personal relationship, those other forms being emotional, intellectual, and spiritual intimacy. And just like trying to drive a car with a flat tire, when any one of these four areas of intimacy is missing or broken the entire relationship suffers. The previous lesson on Sexuality took an in-depth look at the physical aspect of our marital relationship. Now we'll take a look at these other areas, and we'll look at how they affect our relationship with our wife or girlfriend, as well as how they affect our relationships with our children and with the other people in our lives.

As one writer put it, "Intimacy means deeply knowing and trusting someone, while also feeling deeply known and trusted yourself." Let's take a closer look at each of these other three types of intimacy.

Emotional intimacy is when both people feel secure and loved, and there is honest and open trust and communication. When you are emotionally intimate, you will know the other person's hopes, dreams, and fears and will understand them at a deep level; and they will know the same about you.

Intellectual intimacy is when both people are not afraid to share their thoughts and ideas, even when their opinions or viewpoints are different. When two people have intellectual intimacy they know each other from the inside, and they know it is safe to be honest and open.

Spiritual intimacy is a sense of unity and mutual commitment to God's purpose for your lives and marriage, along with a respect for the special dreams of each other's hearts. It is when two people who are created in God's image join together to help each other fulfill God's call on their lives.

Now imagine for a minute how it would feel to have a relationship that has emotional, intellectual, and spiritual intimacy. The word I would use to describe such a relationship would be "loving", and the Bible has much to say about love. In the 22nd chapter of the book of Matthew in the Bible some spiritual leaders asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment in the Bible. In response Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" In other words, have an intimate relationship first with God, and then with the other people in your life. And what does that look like? Well, this is how the Bible defines love in the 13th chapter of the book of 1 Corinthians:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Doesn't that beautifully describe the kind of relationship we all want to have with our wives, with our children, and with the other people in our lives? And just as God loved us before we did anything to earn or deserve that love, as men we should be the first to show that kind of love to others.

Does all of that sound hard? It may, particularly if you were not raised in a family that showed that kind of love and intimacy. But as you try to improve in each of these areas all of your relationships will grow and everyone will benefit. And, as we read above, this is the kind of relationship God wants to have with us, and wants us to have with others. So he will help you grow in knowledge and skill in all of these areas. To do this we can count on another promise from the Bible:

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Philippians 4:13

Questions for thought and discussion:

- a. Do you think it will help your marriage if you can improve in the areas of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual intimacy? What small steps can you take right now in each of these three areas?
- b. Do you feel free to share your hopes, dreams, and fears with your wife/partner? Does she feel free to share in these ways with you?
- c. Are you and your wife/partner "one in spirit"? Do you both believe that God has a great plan for you together as a couple? Are you seeking after that plan together?
- d. Are there steps you can take to develop this kind of intimacy with each of your children? Will they feel more loved when you do?