

FAMILY MATTERS 2 **“Experiencing Intimacy”**

Last week I introduced us to this year’s theme: **FAMILY MATTERS**, as we considered some Biblical examples of marriage and family. The venture was a bit unsettling wasn’t it? I want to continue this morning by considering with you the subject of Experiencing Intimacy. I read a book a few years ago that espoused the theory that there are two most basic needs that all human beings share. I know that is dangerous because we are all so different. But as the years of my ministry march on, and with the number of different folks (and different needs) which I have and am encountering along this journey; I’m becoming more and more convinced that indeed these might actually be the two most basic needs we all share. They are: intimacy and identity. The need to know that we are loved, and the need to know who we are, are two of the primary (though certainly not the only) needs we seem to share. I know those needs may shift in significance as the years go by, but they remain two of our most basic human needs.

I mention this because in the next two weeks I want to explore with you how being in a healthy family (even a family of one) can go along way to meeting the needs for intimacy and identity that we apparently share. Next week we’ll talk about our various roles in the family as one of the ways to address our need for identity. Today, I want to explore how being part of a family can help us understand intimacy, and meet that need for someone, or something with which we can share our love, and be loved.

The most amazing part of what I’ll share today is this, though. The human need we have, for an intimate relationship with other humans, is merely a reflection of a deeper need that each human has to intimately relate with our Spiritual Source, our Heavenly Father, our creator, sustainer, and savior. Listen:

As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one. Ephesians 5: 31

As much as we need other humans to give love and receive love, we also need to be intimately related to God. As we explore 5 steps to building familial intimacy, I want you to keep in the back of your mind that these are also ways we grow intimate with God. Don't be scared of becoming intimate with God, because as much as we need this, and as scary as being close to God might be for us...GOD wants to be intimate with us too! Remember that. Now, here are 5 steps to building intimacy in our families.

1. TELLING OUR THOUGHTS BUILDS INTELLECTUAL INTIMACY

As they listen, their secret thoughts will be exposed, and they will fall to their knees and worship God, declaring, "God is truly here among you." I Cor. 14:25

All healthy families and relationships within families must relate to each other, and develop within each member; intellectual intimacy. This is not to say that all conversations must be intellectually stimulating, revolutionary and thought provoking, but some of them must. In our quest to know each other, whether as husband and wife, or parent and child; it's nice to know what others are thinking, what others believe about various things. When every conversation begins and ends with who's picking up the kids where and when, and who's buying the groceries, and what events are scheduled next week; that's a sign of impending problems.

As the scripture reminds us, as we listen to each other, our secret thoughts will be exposed, and when they are, we'll fall on our knees and declare: "God is truly here among us." I know these kinds of conversations are challenging, especially when the children are young, and lives are hectic, and schedules are full. So look for creative ways to build even small or short conversations with your spouse, or with your kids, or even with yourself while reading thought provoking books.

Maybe start a habit at the dinner table of introducing a question or subject for discussion that goes beyond what happened that day. Look for moments in the car, or

out for a walk, or before retiring for the evening, when you can tell your thoughts and inquire of the thoughts of others in your family.

God wants to be known by us, intellectually. Our knowledge of God can't and won't save us; knowing stuff or facts or things about God is never a worthy substitute for actually KNOWING God. But I just want to remind us that God created all of us with a brain, designed for more stimulation than just sports scores or sales prices! Thinking and knowing about God, will help us get to know God deeper, more intimately. Telling thoughts will help build intimacy in families.

2. DISCUSSING OUR FEELINGS BUILDS EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

"I cannot keep from speaking. I must express my anguish. My bitter soul must complain." Job 7:11

Job reminds us that honestly sharing our feelings is a must! Learning to talk about emotions is one of the most rewarding (and most frightening) aspects of any relationship. I find it interesting in my counseling how many couples have difficulty in this area. Seems while we are dating we're experts at telling each other how things make us feel, and what emotions we're experiencing. Then we marry and as the years go by, it gets harder and harder to be emotionally honest with each other. And don't think that for a minute that your kids don't learn from that. What would it take for you to be completely honest, emotionally, with your spouse? For some it's a leap you can't, won't fathom, for others, who'd like to try...

First, it'll take a commitment from each of you to accept and receive the others feelings, without judgment or critical response. It seems to me that patterns or cycles are created in relationships that go on for some time. Some of those cycles can be harmful, painful, and even destructive.

"He laughed when I told him I feel abandoned while he plays tennis every night, so I'm not going to tell him about that co-worker who is taking an interest in me." A

downward cycle begins to escalate and soon no one knows who or how it started, and worse, no one knows how to stop or reverse it!

One party, husband, wife, or sometimes even a child or youth needs to say: ENOUGH, it's time to reverse the cycle. Sometimes acting in loving ways even when you don't 'feel' loving toward the other is all it takes. Rebuilding emotional honesty often begins with the first: "I'm sorry". I'm continually amazed how hard that is for some folks to say! Reminds me of another who had trouble saying; "I was wrong."

3. SPENDING TIME TOGETHER BUILDS SOCIAL INTIMACY

All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. Acts 4:32

I have a couple simple beliefs about family relationships. 1- there is room for individuality in a family...but there is no room for secrets. 2- there is room for individual activities within the family or relationship, but there must also be common interests. Years ago at weddings I used to have the couple blow out the candles representing their individual lives during the unity candle ceremony. I've stopped doing that now. You are not dying when you marry, you are still you; you are just, not just you! You are part of another, and they a part of you. It's fine that I play golf and Susan doesn't. It's fine that she sings in Civic Chorus, and I don't, we don't have to share everything, but we have to share some things.

We try to spend time discussing our individual interests without recruiting the other to join us. All of us need social interaction to be interesting, if not whole people. I often say, I'm not a big fan of the symphony, but Susan is, and I'm a big fan of Susan, so we go to the symphony!

Families must build common bonds, establish family traditions, and grow together instead of always apart. I'm troubled by how many activity options young children have these days. It's fine, I suppose but sometimes I see those activities

fragmenting the family, instead of drawing them together. I don't think God placed children in our families so we can spend every waking moment of their time shuttling them to their next game, or practice, or recital or performance. We don't have to do everything together as husband and wife or even as parents and child...but we have to spend some time together to fulfill the need we all have for social interaction and intimacy. We need to find or develop common interests, maybe even learn some new ones.

4. OPENING OUR SOULS TO EACH OTHER BUILDS SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

Once you were like sheep who wandered away. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls. 1Peter 1:25

Again, not all family spiritual life must be done corporately; we all need to develop and maintain our own spiritual life; but, there are experiences that we can have and create that will enhance our family life, and grow our spiritual lives. Praying together, attending worship together, even coming to FOCUS and eating together in a context of God and God's people all can help us build Spiritual intimacy in our lives.

I've heard from many of you parents speak about the blessing of being involved in your child's spiritual development as you work on the children's ministry team and watch your own child interact with other children and caring adults. I've seen the effect on parents when their young people come to know and love Jesus...it can be profound.

I try to live my life having no regrets, but I have one I must confess. I wish Susan and I could have been in Bolivia when our boys went there that first time. To see them work, and share and interact with those great friends there, and see first hand the life-changing experience that was for them; would have been a blessing to us, I know.

I would encourage all of you parents to find a way to experience a third world country with your children before they graduate from college.

Helping children see the Spiritual world is all around them, and all of life can be interpreted, seen, experienced through a spiritual prism, may be the greatest challenge

and joy of being a parent. Families are great avenues for individual souls to learn about and experience God. It begins when we can open our souls to each other, and share this important 'spiritual' part of who we are.

5. SHARING OUR BODIES BUILDS PHYSICAL INTIMACY

But you can't say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies...Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never!...The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. 1 Cor. 6:13,15 & 7:4

We've all probably heard the statistics of the healing power of touch. God has made our skin to respond positively to human touch, we all need physical intimacy. Infants need lots of touching; and even as we grow older, we revert to needing that same touch. Visit a loved one in the nursing home and watch how they often want to continually hug, or hold your hand. Throughout the stages of life, sharing our bodies with one another builds physical intimacy. This is probably an exaggerated human need because it is the one of the five that we cannot directly share with God. Sometimes we need to see Jesus...with skin on! By appropriate touch we can actually be the hands of Jesus, touching those we love.

Garrison Keillor once eloquently addressed this topic saying: "In fact there are 4 great joys in life. Number one is the joy of knowing God. Number 2 is the joy of learning. Number 3 is what you thought would be number one! And number 4 is the joy of eating fresh sweet corn!" Whether you rank it #1 or #3, physical, sexual intimacy is certainly near the top most people's list of needs.

We must remember here, though, the basic difference between men and woman. Women interpret intimacy primarily emotionally, and men interpret intimacy primarily physically. If we can keep that in mind it would be good.

Bear also in mind that families share touch in a variety of ways. Some families are huggers...everyone hugs, at every greeting or departure. Some families are kissers;

even the men and boys kiss moms, grand-moms, sisters and even each other! Some families are wrestlers, there is always a wrestling match going on in some homes. Some families are physical in their play, their work, and their lives. Watch and observe, but don't over look that each healthy family needs to include some kinds or types of physical touch.

For single member families, this is a challenge. Sexual Intimacy has been placed by God in the context of marriage, and there it is most appropriately experienced. For those single folks, having good friends can help this. Having physical activities can be a substitute, and developing a deeper level of understanding that Jesus himself experienced all of life as a single person, ought to remind us that God has a plan for us to experience Him at great depth, and sometimes being single is a gift that enables that to happen.

Intimacy in family life brings great security. Working together as a family on a specific project; from washing dishes to raking leaves to volunteering at Ruth Meiers; builds great intimacy. Husbands and wives expressing appropriate intimacy within the home might be embarrassing for a teenager, but it is a source of great comfort for a child.

And remember. The family is a model of the Trinity, and being part of a healthy, intimate family is really just an invitational reminder of the kind of relationship God wants to have with each of us. I hope we all can continue to grow ourselves and our families and our experiences with God into intimate and fulfilling relationships. It's a Family Matter.

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