

MERIDIAN MAGAZINE

Creating Marital Intimacy in a Non-Intimate World

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The computer and Internet age is amazing in the amount of time it saves and the information made available right in our own home. We have YouTube, satellite TV, and Pay-per-View. We can pause or record our favorite episodes for future watching so we never have to miss a single one. We can stay connected to loved ones by phone, text, or webcam who are thousands of miles away.

Is there any downside to all this technology and convenience? On the surface it may not appear so, however, as a professional, I have found many problems that are a direct result of the age of technology. One of the most significant issues is the loss of intimacy and connection in our relationships. Marriages are deteriorating rapidly because of a lack of emotional intimacy and bonding.

What is Intimacy?

Often when we think of intimacy, we view it as relating to the sexual relationship. The sexual union, however, is only one form of intimacy and doesn't address the much deeper and more significant aspects of intimacy. In fact, one can have a sexual relationship without having any sense of intimacy. Victor L. Brown, a social worker, writes in *Human Intimacy* that "the hunger for intimacy is, next to survival needs, our deepest human longing." A deep sense of intimacy is vital to any marital relationship.

Distinguished psychologist Nathaniel Branden defined intimacy as "the sharing of the self on the deepest and most personal and private level." Therefore, intimacy cannot occur in isolation from other human relationships. Intimacy develops as a result of sharing feelings, insights, and of one's self with another. Another way of defining intimacy is with the word itself – "Into me you see." When we allow others to see into us, it opens up a door for bonding and connection that is unique and mutually rewarding. Others tend to open up more to us the more we open up to them.

Decline of Intimacy in Society and Marriage

When couples marry, their desire is to have a fulfilling and intimate marriage. Why then do so many couples find themselves longing for closeness they cannot find throughout their marriages? True intimacy carries with it a sense of peace and connection that is vital to any marriage and can enhance other family and close friend relationships. However, intimacy also carries with it terrifying risks, which can discourage its pursuit. Since the sharing of feelings reveals so much about us, we then become vulnerable, risking exposure of thoughts and feelings that may be uncomfortable to have others know. What if we are misunderstood or rejected? In addition, it takes a lot of work to build intimacy, and it may be much easier to just go and watch TV or surf the Internet, rather than put forth the effort required to develop true emotional and spiritual intimacy.

With the amount of technological distractions available to us today, particularly within our own homes, it is easy to become caught up in ourselves and in our own interests. C. Terry Warner discussed the dangers of becoming "self-absorbed" and its impact upon intimacy and relationships. He notes two ways we can live our lives. The first is to live for others by being open, generous, and resonant. The second is to live for ourselves by being accusing, self-absorbed, and alienated. With the computer, video game, and Internet age, it is becoming easier and easier to become self-absorbed and alienated, even while in our own homes. We now have access to the whole world from within the walls of our own homes. Have you ever gone to look something up on the Internet or check your email and find yourself hours later still on the computer surfing information on the web? This takes up precious time that could be spent with our spouses or children building a more quality and intimate relationship.

Another contributing factor, which has been increasingly brought on by the advancement of technology, is the increase in the use of pornography. Pornography has been identified as Satan's counterfeit to intimacy. It has begun to invade our homes through movies, magazines, and internet. Viewing pornography results in a loss of the Spirit, which in turn begins to eat away at the physical and sexual intimacy between partners. Pornography generally leads to the keeping of secrets, which is contrary to the creation of intimacy. Intimacy requires trust, open sharing, and mutual respect of one's spouse in all aspects of life including spiritually, physically, emotional, and sexually.

Creating an Intimate Marriage

If creating an intimate marriage was easy, most people would have one. The problem is that it requires a lot of time, hard work, patience, service, sharing, commitment, and risk. President Hinckley emphasized that "Happiness in marriage is not so much a matter of romance as it is an anxious concern for the comfort and well-being of one's companion."

Sister Hinckley referred to their first year of marriage, "We loved each other; there was no doubt about that, but we also had to get use to each other. I think every couple has to get used to each other. Early on I realized it would be better if we worked harder to

get used to each other than constantly try to change each other.” (Church News, 26 Sept. 1998, 4). Intimacy comes when we allow our spouse a direct link and view into our own world. In order to do this, we need to be willing to connect ourselves with them openly and willingly. We also need to develop a deep sense of interest and companionship towards our spouse.

Christ taught us about the true expression of love when he said “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). Jesus Christ demonstrated this in the way he lived and died.

What greater sense of intimacy is there than Christ’s example of giving His ultimate sacrifice for us that we might be saved? His actions have opened the door for us to experience full intimacy with Him, if we choose. The Nephites did just that when He visited them in ancient America. When Jesus descended, he invited everyone to “Arise and come forth unto me, that ye may thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel, and the God of the whole earth, and have been slain for the sins of the world” (3 Nephi 11:14). He was inviting them to know him, fully and completely without reservation.

The Nephites accepted his invitation and afterwards “did cry out with one accord saying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him” (3 Nephi 11: 16-17). The result of this encounter was astounding; 200 years of peace. What intimacy they must have felt towards the Savior and his actions to have such a powerful influence upon their actions for the next 200 years. Imagine what this kind of intimacy could do for our marriages. When we truly love our spouses as “Christ loved the church and gave himself for it”, we develop the intimacy that God intended for marriage.

How to Change the Trend

As technology continues to advance, creation of intimacy may become even more of a challenge with couples. It is essential to the survival of marriage and family for us to maintain intimacy in the home despite all the distractions. This is very possible with a return to basic principles of life and family. Three basic principles that we must live by in order to break the worldly trend are (1) quality family time, (2) genuine interaction, and (3) Christ-like love.

First, in order to increase quality time, we have to begin to put first things first by giving our spouse and children priority over television, surfing the web, reading the newspaper, or watching our favorite sporting event. It’s not that we can never engage in these activities, but that they need to be in balance and not given first priority all the time. In some ways, we can use technology to improve quality relations rather than distract. We can call our spouse from work, we can stay connected through texting or emailing, or we can watch family videos together.

Second, communication must be genuine and sincere. Stay away from negative sarcasm, criticizing, or negative talk about others. Spend a date night talking about each other’s interests, feelings, dreams, or goals. Nathaniel Branden discusses what he refers to as “an experiment in intimacy” where he would propose a homework assignment to couples in which they were asked to spend a day together entirely alone with one another. They were not allowed books, television, phones, computers, children, etc. They were to remain in the same room with each other for twelve hours and discuss only things pertaining to themselves, each other, or the relationship.

He found that the couples that continued on for the full duration of the experiment would move down to a much deeper level of intimacy than they previously experienced, discovering things about their partner that they had never realized before. In order to set up a context for true intimacy, he had to remove all the distractions from the relationship and have couples engage in genuine and sincere interaction.

Third, Christ-like love will keep us out of the world of “self-absorption.” When we love as Christ loved, we naturally consider others feelings and needs along with our own. We will want to share and interact rather than sit and isolate from others. This brings more lasting happiness, peace, and intimacy than any advancement in technology could ever create. As Christ said himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the light, and no man cometh unto the father, except by me.” (John 14:6).

References

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