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Cultivating Spiritual Intimacy

By Omaudi Reid

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When two people – destined for each other, come together, there is often an incredible amount of combustibility. Combustion occurs when two or more substances react chemically together, resulting in the giving off of heat and light; often called burning. In the same manner, two people joined together by God can spiritually set each other on fire.

However, after being married a while that sense of combustibility can easily be lost if the spiritual life of the marriage is not cultivated. But, a couple that intentionally, and actively engages in maintaining the spiritual life of the marriage continues to be a strength one to another, and ignites new sparks that blazes through every area of marriage and family. I believe that through personal devotion, mutual support, joint devotions, spiritual dialogue, and spiritual activities, a Christian couple can maintain spiritual intimacy in their marriage.

First, each spouse must keep their fire burning. Each partner keeps their fire burning by maintaining a growing and intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus, through personal prayer and Bible study. When we first got married, my wife and I mistakenly thought we could depend on each other's spiritual life for our personal growth. I thought to myself "my wife is such a great Christian, she will be able to help me solve my spiritual struggles". The mistake we made was instead of pursuing the Lord for our personal growth, we began to depend on each other. Eventually instead of helping, we began to drain each other. What we learned is that we must maintain intimacy with the Lord in order to have true spiritual intimacy with each other.

Once our personal lives are burning with spiritual fire, then we can conduct that heat to our partners. If you have ever touched a hot pot, then you understand what a conductor is. Metal pots are good conductors because they transmit the heat coming from the stove. The person whose spiritual life is hot and on fire can conduct that spiritual strength to their partner.

To be spiritual heat conductors we must intercede for our mates in prayer, and support them with our encouragement. An effective intercessor believes God for the success of their partner. Exercising faith in prayer for your partner is crucial. Why? Well, we know more than anyone else the strengths and weaknesses of our partners. We see their faults, joys, and sadness. Thus, not only do we have the

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opportunity to intimately intercede in faith for them, but also our encouragement means a lot to them. Essentially, we must be our partner's own spiritual cheerleader - fanning the flames.

In addition to the above, a Christian couple spreads the spiritual flames through joint spiritual habits. The most obvious of these is having scheduled devotions. In devotions couples pray and share biblical truths with each other in an open and transparent way. I recommend not only having a scheduled time of devotion, but also allowing that time to develop into a natural habit. In our experience, my wife and I, have found it best not to allow our scheduled time to become a rigid formality; instead, it serves as a training time for the natural flow of our spiritual connection. So that in times of difficulty praying and sharing together will be as simple as breathing.

A natural outflow of a joint spiritual life is spiritual dialogue. Although often neglected, spiritual dialogue

is an important part of spreading the flames of spiritual intimacy. I define spiritual dialogue as qualitative and interactive conversation concerning our application, thoughts, feelings, and conclusions on spiritual matters as it relates to our life and society. Put simply, it is enjoyably talking about how spiritual things affect our life and the world around us.

Spiritual dialogue is qualitative and interactive. It is more than surface talk, such as "Pastor preached a good sermon today". It involves sharing our deep spiritual thoughts to each other, such as "this is how I'm going to apply the sermon to my daily life..", or "the Lord showed me weakness in that area". Remember to interact, and allow each other ample time to share insights and thoughts.

Going to spiritual events together provides opportunities for spiritual dialogue. Sometimes we can make religious activities such a duty that we drain all the joy out of it. Couples, however, can enjoy spiritual activities together. The spiritual activities couples can share together goes beyond the regular Sunday services, and weekly conferences. Volunteering to work side by side in a Christian ministry, and working together on Christian projects are good activities to share together. Along with that, today there are Christian movies and television programs that you can watch. Many Christian organizations today are making Christian videos more than ever. Perhaps you and your mate can buy a video, and watch it together, then discuss it afterwards. Simply enjoy your joint spiritual life; you are heirs together of God's promise.

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Fear of Intimacy

By Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

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Emotional intimacy is one of the most wonderful experiences we ever have. Nothing else really comes close to the experience of sharing our deepest thoughts and feelings with another, of being deeply seen and known, of sharing love, passion, laughter, joy, and/or creativity. The experience of intimacy fills our souls and takes away our loneliness.

Why, then, would someone be afraid of intimacy?

It is not actually the intimacy itself that people fear. If people could be guaranteed that intimacy would continue to be a positive experience, they would have no fear of it. What they fear is the possibility of getting hurt as a result of being intimate with another.

Many people have two major fears that may cause them to avoid intimacy: the fear of rejection - of losing the other person, and the fear of engulfment – of being invaded, of being controlled and losing oneself.

Because we have all learned to react to conflict with various controlling behaviors - from anger and blame to compliance, withdrawal, and resistance – every relationship presents us with these issues of rejection and engulfment. If one person gets angry, the other may feel rejected or controlled and get angry back, give themselves up, withdraw or resist. If one person shuts down, the other may feel rejected and become judgmental, which may trigger the other's fears of engulfment, and so on. These protective circles exist in one form or another in every relationship. When the fears of rejection and engulfment become too great, a person may decide that it is just painful to be in a relationship and they avoid intimacy altogether.

Yet avoiding relationships leads to loneliness and lack of emotional and spiritual growth. Relationships offer us the most powerful arena for personal growth, if we accept this challenge. So what moves us beyond the fear of intimacy?

The fear exists, not because of the experience itself, but because a person doesn't know how to handle the situations of being rejected or controlled. The secret of moving beyond the fear of intimacy lies in developing a powerful loving adult part of us that learns how to not take rejection personally, and learns to set appropriate limits against engulfment.

When we learn how to take personal responsibility for defining our own worth instead of making others' love and approval responsible for our feelings of worth, we will no longer take rejection personally. This does not mean that we will like rejection - it means we will no longer be afraid of it and have a need to avoid it.

When we learn how to speak up for ourselves and not allow others to invade, smother, dominate and control us, we will no longer fear losing ourselves in a relationship. Many people, terrified of losing the other person, will give themselves up in the hope of controlling how the other person feels about them.

They believe that if they comply with another's demands, the other will love them. Yet losing oneself is terrifying, so many people stay out of relationships due to this fear. If they were to learn to define their own worth and stand up for themselves, the fear would disappear.

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The Inner Bonding process we teach is a process designed to create a powerful inner adult self capable of not taking rejection personally and of setting limits against loss of self. Anyone can learn this six-step process and, with practice, heal fears of intimacy. Through practicing the Inner Bonding process, you learn to value and cherish who you really are and take full responsibility for your own feelings of worth, lovability, safety, security, pain and joy. When you deeply value yourself, you do not take rejection personally and become non-reactive to rejection. When you value yourself, you will not give yourself up to try to control another's feelings about you. When you value yourself, you are willing to lose another rather than lose yourself.

You can start to learn the powerful Inner Bonding process now by downloading our Free Inner Bonding Course. Moving beyond your fears of intimacy will open you to the deep personal and spiritual growth that relationships can provide and the profound fulfillment and joy that loving relationships can offer.

Margaret Paul, Ph.D. is the best-selling author and co-author of eight books, including "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You?" She is the co-creator of the powerful Inner Bonding healing process. Learn Inner Bonding now! Visit her web site for a FREE Inner Bonding course:

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