

## Love & Intimacy

Marriage statistics can be down right depressing! Just 2 years ago, Life Innovations published in their newsletter that 90% of people get married once, but the “average” divorce rate continues to be 50% and rises significantly higher with subsequent marriages; less than half of all couples will celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the 7-year itch leads to divorce in the 8<sup>th</sup> year.

*The good news is there is hope for married couples;* and with focus on love, intimacy and intentional effort, marriage can be the most meaningful and enjoyable relationship two people experience. So, what is love what does it look like and how do you cultivate them? God's word of course, outlines many things about love. 1 Corinthians 4:13ff gives us a good view of love: it is patient, kind, does not envy or boast, is not proud, rude, self-seeking or easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs and it always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. The Bible also shows us in principle that *love is a choice* since God chose to love us first even though we were unlovable. In marriage, love can be seen like this: when the satisfaction, security and the personal growth of your spouse becomes as significant to you as your own. *Intentionality is the key.* When couples lessen the energy toward the relationship, it is easy for emotional drift to take place and feelings of closeness, intimacy and support to diminish.

John Gottman, a marital researcher, says couples who remain in long-term committed relationships maintain a five-to-one ratio of positive to negative behavioral exchanges. These are demonstrated in simple, small, daily actions that affirm the relationship such as acts of kindness, politeness and basic consideration of the other's needs, acts of sacrifice, conversation, romantic expressions of affection and sexuality, thoughtfulness, compliments and support in difficult times. These simple behaviors can lead to intimacy.

Intimacy is feelings in a relationship that promote closeness and a connection. When couples share meaningful parts of themselves, they are partaking in a dynamic process where they become close and explore their similarities and differences in feelings, thoughts and behaviors. Intimacy means you can risk and will not be destroyed. It means partners will work with each other in a way that allows them be uniquely special and valued. It is safe both to agree and to disagree; there is acceptance, support and commitment. Olsen & Shaefer say intimacy is the experience of sharing and being close in the variety of areas including: **Emotional Intimacy:** feeling close, sharing openly with support and genuine understanding; **Social Intimacy:** having common friends and a supportive social network; **Sexual Intimacy:** receiving and sharing affection, touching, physical closeness, and/or sexual activity; **Intellectual Intimacy:** sharing ideas, talking about events in one's life, or discussing job related issues, current affairs; **Recreational Intimacy:** shared interests in pastimes, mutual participation in sports or any general recreational or leisure activity.

Parrott and Parrott say intimacy is the emotional side of love and without intimacy love is only hormonal illusion. Long term, committed relationships are ones where couples desire to really *know* each other. Intimacy has a *soul mate* or a *best friend* quality about it. It can only be true that part of the problem with today's depressing marriage statistics has to do with too little Godly love and a lack of intimacy. Much of the fulfillment in marriage hinges on love and intimacy. Be intentional to love like God loves us; desire closeness, sharing, communication, honesty and support and make a willful determination to *act out* these behaviors.

**God's best to you!**  
**Mike**