



## More About Intimacy in Marriage

A glimpse at 1 Corinthians 7:4

**The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.**

**1 Corinthians 7:4**

The beauty of marital intimacy doesn't shine very brightly in this unfamiliar passage and we wince, imagining this is about a power struggle. Our flesh will see an excuse for selfishness and our renewed heart simply doesn't understand. What place do these words have in the setting of a Christian marriage? Do they really apply? Maybe that's not the right question because these words are from our Savior who knows more about yielding rights than we could ever imagine; so perhaps we should listen. The Lord is calling husbands and wives to look at the needs and desires of each other and yield their rights out of love. He is also making it clear that each belongs to the other and both made a promise to live as one flesh. Sexual intimacy is not a manipulative bargaining tool or spiteful move in a power play. There is no withholding sex to prove a point or get pay back. It is part of marriage - to fulfill needs, draw couples together and build love, a very special love.

You see, the love God has given us for life and marriage affects every part of our lives, including our intimacy. The Greek word for this love is "agape" and we see it most clearly when Christ laid down his life to earn our salvation. It is self-sacrificing love that looks for the benefit of the other. It is love that asks, "What can I give? How can I bless you?" It longs to see the other person grow and thrive. This beautiful, self-sacrificing love influences the sexual intimacy between a man and wife by compelling them to put the needs of the other before their own needs. Each is willing to yield to the other in love, understanding God's design for sexuality in marriage. A wife will yield to her husband. A husband will yield to his wife. Personal rights are set aside as each serves the other. Christians reflect Christ in their marriage with this love and it is radiant in their intimacy as well. Each understands the important part that sexuality plays in their Christian marriage and the responsibility they have to one another.

It is a perfect design - but living it is much more difficult than understanding it. The reality is, this is really, really hard. The daily life of a Christian is often spent working hard in or out of the home. It is unrealistic to think that after a long day of work the powerful desire for sexual intimacy can simply be set aside as one considers the needs of their spouse. The husband may face a thousand sexual temptations in a day: glances, flirtatious laughs, suggestive comments and unsought images that focus his thinking on one thing. The wife may face a thousand temptations in a day as men appreciate her work, make comments about her

femininity, or show interest in who she is as a person. Perhaps the wife is home all day with children who absorb every ounce of her energy and share more than enough physical contact but not a bit of meaningful conversation.

Paul doesn't address the daily collision of needs at 9pm. The husband does have sexual needs. He comes home to his wife and wants to want her – this is his faith in action! Marriage is the place that God has given for sexual intimacy. But even now, he is called to set aside those needs to think about his wife. It is an incredible concept, that the powerful motion of love can not only pause, but defer to the needs of another. And the wife has needs too, which are often a bit more complex. She may have sexual desires but they are buried under a list of more tangible needs, like help in the kitchen or time to talk about her day. She may recognize her husband's sexual needs but what about her exhaustion? Now whose needs are more important? Who yields? The Lord answers by giving husbands *and* wives the directive to consider the needs of the other and yield. Conflicting needs will call each of us to be self-sacrificing in our love. Compromise, consideration, and communication are all so important, especially in times of exhaustion and hurt. Sighs of frustration and emotional isolation don't resolve conflict. Spouses cannot guess or assume they understand each other's needs. Talk about it and listen to one another! Speak in love to find a way through it.

A husband can come to see how his help in the kitchen communicates love to his wife and makes her yielding a joy. A wife will begin to understand the importance of her husband's needs and speak the language of love he longs to hear. Each yields to the other and the bedroom is a continuation of selfless love. It all starts with Christ in each heart as we are washed clean and filled with agape love. Forgiven and empowered with the gospel, we live according to his calling and find new strength and joy every day. Yes, there will be hardship, failures and hurts, but they have all been covered by the blood of Christ. It is God's love that spurs us on to love one another. Live in his peace, be blessed by his love.

### **Prayer**

**Lord Jesus, you are the perfect example of selfless love that blesses others. The sacrifice you made brought us that love as it covered our sins and gave us peace with God. We want to live in that love but it is so hard. How do we give when we feel like we can't give any more? How do we yield when there are so many reasons not to? Call us to hear your voice and follow, for we know that your words are true and give us the strength we need. Forgive us for the many times we fail. Continue to teach us, remind us, and bless us so that we may honor you in our marriage and intimacy, and in all we do. In Jesus name, Amen.**

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