



Intimacy in Marriage

A glimpse at 1 Corinthians 7:3

**The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband.
1 Corinthians 7:3**

Conversations about sex can be uncomfortable. Even among Christians, we wonder what should be said. "Less is better" seems to be the advice that many follow. But in the private corner of our heart there is a longing to understand the God pleasing fullness of sexuality in Christian marriage. We desire all its riches, but over time we face a host of insurmountable struggles that attack us at a very personal level. Intimacy can grow cold or loveless and we're haunted by inadequacy. We have misperceptions, unspoken hurts and guilt. Our own flesh and a sinful world keep us from the beautiful life and delightful gifts God has given to married couples.

Then we read our text, "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband." At first glance it seems Paul isn't doing us any huge favors here when he simply states that we have a "duty" to one another. He is talking about sex as if it were like keeping up with dishes or laundry. It's your duty, so... not exactly how we want to describe our sex life. But God is teaching us something here as he speaks of the responsibility we have to one another. In sharp contrast to the familiar message we love hearing, an individual's desire to be sexually satisfied is not the foundation of a healthy sexual relationship. It is sensitivity to the needs of the other that blesses the sexual expression of Christian spouses. Listen to Paul describe this "duty" and note where the responsibility lies! The husband has a responsibility to fulfill his wife's sexual needs and the wife is called by God in marriage to meet the sexual needs of her husband. It is a desire to meet the needs of the other in an expression of love that draws a man and wife together.

And where is love? Isn't it passionate love that drives a husband and wife to each other's arms? Yes, but Paul is making it very clear that self-centered erotic love isn't the foundation of their union. The love that a husband and wife share does create sexual desire, but the focus of that passion is to delight the other person and show love, not to seek personal satisfaction. The marriage bed is a place where love seeks the good and fulfillment of the other. Loving intimacy is entwined with sexual desire, and such desires and personal needs are not wrong or sinful. This is part of the beautiful design given in the perfect Garden of Eden! But Scripture is pointing us to see the loving, giving essence of sex in marriage. It doesn't look like one-night stands glorified as steamy sex between strangers driven by their own desire. Marital love is much deeper, more fulfilling and strengthens the relationship according to God's design. Love, trust and commitment enrich marital intimacy and find their fullest expression as one flesh. When God calls husbands and wives to faithfulness, he is not short-changing them. The gift of



sexuality in marriage is not second-rate; it is rich and shines with beauty like a gem in the perfect setting.

Does marital intimacy for Christians always seem so perfect, selfless and loving? No, it does not. Sometimes it might seem like a duty, but hopefully that is rare. Don't be surprised that even in the life of a Christian, life in a sinful world diminishes what the Lord gave as a holy and precious gift. It's okay to be honest that life, marriage and intimacy aren't perfect; God calls us to work at these things! This can be a reminder of his good gifts and the holy, selfless love he wants us to reflect in our marriages. The Lord is giving us a descriptive picture of how our intimacy seeks to bless each other. But lest we get caught up in all the grace-filled images of marriage, at its core this is a command of God that we are required to keep.

God's demand is that we love each other perfectly and consider the needs of each other before our own, even in the bedroom. We know all too well how hard it is to make marriage and intimacy work and it is no surprise that we cannot do all that is required of us. Sometimes it feels like we can barely do any part of it. This is the weight of sin and the work of God's law. When we see those failures we don't just need to forgive each other, we look to Christ who forgives all our sins - who forgives all our sexual sins and failures - and we embrace his righteousness as we seek to move forward. This is the work of the gospel, peace and forgiveness in Christ that flows over to one another. He alone empowers us to do good in all our duties. So we do love one another. We do try to set aside our own needs and serve one another in Christ-like love. We live in the strength of the gospel to the glory of God, even in the bedroom.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, the gift of marriage and its many blessings come from your loving hand. Thank you for these gifts which enrich our home and strengthen our relationship. Continue to work your love in our hearts that we may grow in grace and our understanding of your plan for marriage and sexuality. Give us an extra measure of selfless love in our intimacy as we strive to set our own needs aside and look to serve one another. Thank you for the grace that forgives us and spurs us on to forgive one another when we fail. Don't let us lose heart in our journey and sustain us when we face overwhelming despair. Bring us your love and mercy every day as we look to honor you in our marriage and reflect your love to the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

For Further Reading: 1 Corinthians 7

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