

# Sex and the Search for Intimacy

*What does it take to experience real intimacy with someone? What is love? What is intimacy?*

*By Dick Purnell*

Christian marriage counsellors can describe a syndrome or pattern when couples come to them. They say, "At first, sex was exciting. Then I started feeling funny about myself, and then I started feeling funny about my partner. We argued and fought and finally we broke up. Now we are enemies."



This syndrome is what I call the morning-after syndrome. We wake up and find that intimacy is not really there. The sexual relationship does not satisfy us anymore, and what we end up with is not what we really wanted in the first place. All you have is two self-centred people seeking self-satisfaction. The elements of genuine love and intimacy cannot be obtained "instantly," and you find yourself in an unbalanced state, searching for harmony.

Each of us has five significant parts in our lives. We have the physical, the emotional, the mental, the social, and the spiritual. All five of these parts are designed to work together in harmony. In our search for intimacy we want the solution today, or yesterday. One of our problems is that we want "instant" gratification. When the need for intimacy in a relationship is not met, we look for an "instant" solution. Where do we look? Physical, mental, social, emotional or spiritual? It's the physical. It is easier to be physically intimate with someone than to be intimate in any of the other four areas. You can become physically intimate with a person of the opposite sex in an hour, or half-hour -- it just depends upon the urge! But you soon discover that sex may only be a temporary relief for a superficial desire. There is a much deeper need that is still unmet.

What do you do when the thrill wears off and the more you have sex, the less you like it? We rationalise it by saying, "We are in love. No, I mean really in love." But we still find ourselves feeling guilty and unsatisfied. In universities all across Australia one can see men and women searching for intimacy, going from one relationship to another hoping, "This time will be it. This time I am going to find a relationship that will last."

I believe that what we really want is not sex. What we really want is intimacy.

## **What is Intimacy?**

Today, the word intimacy has taken on sexual connotations. But it is much more than that. It includes all the different dimensions of our lives -- yes, the physical, but

also the social, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects as well. Intimacy really means total life sharing. And haven't we all had the desire at one time or another for closeness, for oneness, for sharing our life with someone totally?

Marshall Hodge wrote a book called *Your Fear of Love*. In it he says, "We long for moments of expressions of love, closeness and tenderness, but frequently, at the critical point, we often draw back. We are afraid of closeness. We are afraid of love." Later in the same book Hodge states, "The closer you come to somebody, the greater potential there is for pain." It is the fear of pain that often drives us away from finding true intimacy.

I was giving a series of lectures at a university. After one of the meetings, a woman came up to me and said, "I have to talk to you about my boyfriend problems." We sat down, and she began telling me her troubles. After a few moments, she made this statement: "I am now taking steps never to get hurt again." I said to her, "In other words, you are taking steps never to love again." She had thought I misunderstood, so she continued. "No, that's not what I am saying. I just don't want to get hurt anymore. I don't want pain in my life." I said, "That's right, you don't want love in your life." You see, there is no such thing as "painless love." The closer we come to somebody, the greater potential there is for pain.

I would estimate that you (and around 100 percent of the population) would say you have been hurt in a relationship before. The question is, how do you handle that hurt? In order to camouflage the pain, a lot of us give people what I call the "double-sign." We say to a person, "Look, I want you to come closer to me. I want to love and be loved . . . but wait a minute, I've been hurt before. No, I don't want to talk about these subjects. I don't want to hear those things." We build walls around our hearts to protect us from anyone on the outside getting in to hurt us. But that same wall which keeps people out, keeps us stuck inside. The result? Loneliness sets in and true intimacy and love become impossible.

### **What is Love?**

Love is more than emotions, and it is much more than a good feeling. But our society has taken what God has said about love, sex and intimacy and changed it into simply emotions and feelings. God describes love in great detail in the Bible, especially in the Book of First Corinthians, chapter 13. So that you catch the full weight of God's definition of love, let me present verses four through seven (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) to you this way. How much would it meet your needs if a person loved you as God says we should be loved:

- if this person responded to you with patience, kindness, and was not envious of you?
- if this person was not boastful or prideful?
- how about if this person wasn't rude toward you or self-seeking or easily angered?
- what if this person didn't keep a record of your wrongs?

- how about if they refused to be deceitful, but always were truthful with you?
- what if this person protected you, trusted you, always hoped for your good, and persevered through conflicts with you?

This is how God defines the love He wants us to experience in relationships. You'll notice that this kind of love is "other-person" focused. It is giving, rather than self-seeking. And there's the problem. Who can live up to this?

For us to experience this kind of love in relationships we need to first experience God's love for us. You can't consistently demonstrate this kind of love toward someone if you've never experienced being loved in this way. God, who knows you, who knows everything about you, loves you perfectly.

God tells us through the ancient prophet, Jeremiah, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; and I have drawn you unto Myself" (Jeremiah 31:3). So God's love for you is never going to change.

God loved us so much that He allowed for Jesus Christ to be crucified (an ancient form of execution) for our sins so that we might be made clean. We read in the Bible, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). When we turn to God and accept His forgiveness, then we begin to experience His love.

God tells us, "If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Not only does God forgive our sins, but He forgets them and cleanses us.

God continues to love us no matter what. Often, relationships end when something in them is altered, such as a damaging accident or the loss of financial position. But God's love is not based on our physical appearance or who or what we are.

As you can see, God's view of love is totally different from what society tells us love is. Can you imagine a relationship with this kind of love? God simply tells us that His forgiveness and love is ours for the asking. It is His gift to us. But if we refuse the gift, we are the ones who cut ourselves off from finding true fulfillment, true intimacy and true purpose in life.

### **The Answer**

God's love provides the answer. All we have to do is respond in faith and commitment. The Bible says about Jesus: "That as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those that believe on His name" (John 1:12). God sent His only Son, Jesus, to die in our place. But that is not where the story ends. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead. As God, He is alive today and wants to put His love in your heart. Once you accept Him, you will be amazed at what He can do in your life and in your relationships.

God's word tells us, "He who believes in the Son (Jesus Christ) has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36). What God wants for us is to have life, not only for today, but for eternity. If we choose to reject Him, then we have chosen sin's consequence which is death and eternal separation from Him.

It is the reception of Jesus Christ, receiving Him into our lives and trusting in Him, that brings our lives into balance. Faith in God unleashes the forgiveness of God. No more hiding, and no more going our own way. He is right there with us. We have peace with Him. After we place our faith and dependence on Him, He takes up residence within our lives and we have intimacy with Him. His forgiveness is there to cleanse us from the deepest sin, the deepest self-centeredness, the deepest problem or struggle we ever had or will have.

### **Intimacy That Satisfies**

Throughout the Bible, God's attitude toward sex is very clear. God has reserved sex for marriage and marriage only. Not because He wants to make us miserable, but because He wants to protect our hearts. He wants to build a security base for us, so that when we enter into a marriage, its intimacy can be based upon the security of God's love and wisdom.

When we entrust ourselves to Jesus Christ, He gives us new love and new power day by day. This is where the intimacy we are looking for is satisfied. God gives us a love that will not quit, and will not stop with the growing years and the changing times. His love can bring two people together, with Him at the center of that union. In a dating relationship, as you grow together, not only spiritually, but socially, mentally and emotionally, you are able to have an honest, caring and intimate relationship which is fulfilling and exciting! And when the relationship comes along which culminates in marriage, the sexual union can only enhance the foundation that has been established.

You can receive Christ right now by faith through prayer. Prayer is talking with God. God knows your heart and is not so concerned with your words as He is with the attitude of your heart. The following is a suggested prayer: "Lord Jesus, I need You. Thank You for dying on the cross for my sins. I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord. Thank You for forgiving my sins and giving me eternal life. Take control of my life and make me the kind of person You want me to be."

Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If it does, pray this prayer right now. Placing your faith in Christ will result in His coming into your life as He has promised. This will begin a relationship with Him that will grow more intimate as you come to know Him better. And with Him at its centre, your life will take on a whole new dimension -- a spiritual one -- bringing more harmony and fulfillment to all of your relationships.

Dick Purnell has spoken to students on over 450 university and college campuses. He is the author of 12 books, including *Becoming a Friend and Lover* and *Free to Love Again: Coming to Terms with Sexual Regret*.

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