

One: Marriage Intimacy

Series: 5 Words --- Week 5

Genesis 2:24-25, 3:7; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- September 19, 2021

Well, good morning. Guess what we're talking about today? You know, when you consider the doctrine of the fall, there are very few things that display the depth of the consequences, or even the contrast of the before-and-after as graphically as that contrast between marital intimacy and sex.

Marital Intimacy as Contrasted with Sex

Marital intimacy is mysterious. It lifts into heaven in the presence of God. It says that we are made in the image of God.

And sex plants us in the dirt and reminds us that we were made from this crude thing. We are in the image of a beast.

Marital intimacy is profound. Sex is just about lust and control.

Marital intimacy is about respect and giving. And sex is ... the band Supertramp—they're not just tramps, they're super tramps—consider that. "Take a look at my girlfriend. She's the only one I've got. She's not much of a girlfriend. You know why? I never seem to get a lot." It's all about me getting, and she's not a good girlfriend. I mean, that's how we define it.

So, how about today we go against everything we might have known about the subject and rethink and see what the Bible says and have a biblical view of marital intimacy? That's what I'm trying to get us to do—to get us to think differently about this topic.

Genesis 2:24

Therefore shall a man break from his father and his mother, and shall bond to his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

And it starts with the formula for marriage. We know this verse now—Genesis 2:24: "Therefore shall a man break from his father and his mother, and shall bond to his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

Break—that means start over. You’ve got a new start, fresh, altogether untethered. Bond—joined with each other as you mutually try to become like Christ in all of life. You can only bond as well as you break. And then this third word that we’re working on is “one”—“... that they might become one flesh.” And this “one flesh” is a powerful symbol of unity. It’s like the power of a nuclear reactor. Think, a nuclear reactor contains a nuclear bomb and it uses all of that power for good. It has that capacity to do that. The marriage covenant has that kind of power. The marriage formula has spectacular results. You’re going to love what happens when you break and bond and become one.

Genesis 2:25

Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

The next sentence says this: “And Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.” Look at the psychological and spiritual influence of the marriage covenant. Look how they just unite, body, soul and spirit. They’re safe, they’re protected. As we saw last week—I love that phrase—they have unzipped their very souls. And they’re going to be fine with that.

This is like a climactic expression of what it means to have human innocence here. It means that you are naked and without shame. It means that you can be completely known and accepted. And you can know someone else completely and enjoy that. It means that you can be loved absolutely and feel that there’s a trust there. It means that you can love someone else and enjoy that trust as well. I mean, who wants some of that, right? That’s what it’s all about. That’s the way God designed it.

So, what happened? How did we lose all of that? Well, in the creation story, it goes to the story of the fall. Adam and Eve, who had a freedom that no human has had since then, freely chose to violate the only prohibition they were given: not to eat from the tree that would kill them—kill their body, soul, and their spirit. And they took from that fruit, and the heavens and the earth itself shook. And there was damage done. Rattling took place.

Genesis 3:7

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Look what it says in chapter 3, verse 7: “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” See what happened? Naked without shame, and then they violate God’s prohibition and it goes straight to this. Now they’re ashamed.

Milton in *Paradise Lost* tells a beautiful picture of this event where Adam and Eve engorge themselves on the forbidden fruit. They become drunk, and their first expression of sin is to have completely self-centered, self-gratifying sex. Sex—not marital intimacy. And when they wake up, they hate each other. But not as much as they hate themselves. They’ve lost everything.

And so, shame enters human experience, and the idea that I must protect myself at all cost. God comes in and says, “Who said that you were naked? You didn’t even know that before.” They didn’t know that in that climatic expression of human innocence, but now they have to run from God and from the people that they love.

Blame—boom! “Did you take from the fruit?”

And Adam says, “She did it.”

One chapter earlier it was “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.” And now—*I don’t care what it takes, I’ve got to get out of here.*

In summary, marital intimacy became sex. It was this, and now it’s this. And so, today I want us to learn how to transform this spectacular gift from God and bring it back to where it was meant to be in the first place--the power of human intimacy and the way it was meant to be done. And to do that we have to know things about human intimacy.

Intimacy Is Sacred

The first thing you need to know is that intimacy is sacred. Sacred means “set apart.” It’s different. In the human experience we are different in kind, not in degree. Mortimer Adler, who was the chief editor in charge of *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *Great Books of Western Civilization*—yeah, a very intelligent man—wrote a book called *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*. And he’s bringing out that humans are not like other mammals. Here’s a great insight from him. He says, “The great difference—there’s no more obvious example of a great categorical difference than the human expression of sex compared to all other animals.”

Philip Yancey, a very popular writer, says this about the difference, the sacredness, the set apart-ness of human sexuality: “Humans are designed completely different compared to other mammals. We are vastly overequipped for sex.” In other words, clearly, we’ve been designed to enjoy this.

He interviews a zoologist and says, “Compared to all other animals, is there a distinction?”

And the zoologist said, “Oh yeah, absolutely. Humans in their intercourse are designed for relationship—not like other animals.”

First of all, we’re the only animals that have sex face to face with our full bodies touching so we can see each other and enjoy each other. When humans mate, they’re supposed to be modest; they’re the only animal that does this in private, because it’s something different. The zoologist says this: humans love a person, not a body.

Humans’ intimacy is sacred. It’s set apart. Our body parts aren’t created like other animals. Our body parts aren’t created equal. Some of our body parts (like our private parts)—we call them “private” parts. And they are wired directly to our souls. And any type of criminal action that involves sex and private parts, those crimes are more harshly punished—rightly so—than crimes of theft or battery. Why? Because something happened to their soul. Because all body parts are not created equal. Because we’re like no other created thing.

Sexual intimacy in human beings is sacred. It’s set apart. It’s different.

Intimacy Is a Sacrament

Another truth that you'll find in the Bible is that intimacy is a sacrament. Now, to define sacrament, especially in this church as opposed to, for example a Catholic church: a sacrament is a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality that's universally true. A sacrament is also a means through which God provides grace. That's true with marital intimacy as well. Not for salvation, which is a little bit different in this church—it's not for salvation—but it's a means of distributing grace. It's a sacrament.

Intimacy points to home—that we were made for heaven. It transcends things that are just here. It is the metaphysical, it is the spiritual invading the physical. We're like Christ in true marital intimacy. Think about the nature of Christ and the nature of the definition of marital intimacy. It's about being vulnerable, even if you have power. It's about giving and serving, not about taking. It's about communion. Just think about the non-physical part of communion. Two become one, but it is not less—it is more.

That's not like other animals. That's not like other things.

And it's no wonder that old Anglican marriage vows included the man saying to the wife, "With my body I thee worship." It's an expression of the fullness of what he could be.

So, in just this part, if marital intimacy is both sacred and a sacrament, you can see why God puts up parameters and fences—for protection. Again, it's like the way you design and build a fireplace—to contain a raging inferno so that it doesn't abuse any other part of your house. So, God in His mercy is saying, *Look, I've got to protect body, soul, and spirit here. I'm not sure you guys understand what this is. It's meant for so much more.*

And so, that's why we have the prohibitions we have in the Bible—not for a joy-kill, but for our own protection. Outside of marriage, what happens over time is we become callous and we become more like the beast, and we become callous to the holiness of the potential of marital intimacy. It dulls our sense of a deeper meaning of something more happening here.

Marital intimacy will make us feel like we were made for heaven, and sex will make us feel like we're part of the animal kingdom.

Intimacy Is Worship

It's not just sacred, and it's not just a sacrament, but marital intimacy is actually worship. God made intimacy. He overly equipped us to enjoy this. The devil didn't invent sex. He did not invent marital intimacy. In the biblical view, marital intimacy goes way beyond procreation. Again, some of you that might have a Catholic background might understand St. Augustine brought this in and said it's only for this one thing. But that's not what the Bible says. As a matter of fact, ancient scholars in ancient Israel required and insisted that married women have three rights: the right to be fed, the right to be clothed, and the right to have marital intimacy, pleasure, with their husband, without the duty of procreation. Wow. Sure.

A medieval Jewish scholar and philosopher, Nahmanides—he was functionally a rabbi—wrote prolifically. And he said this about marital intimacy and its act of worship. He said, “It should be part of every Sabbath because it is a form of worship, because it is a celebration of faith.” Maybe you just heard it here for the first time. That's what we're supposed to do on the Sabbath from now on. New rules around here. *[Laughter.]* How do you like our church now? *I'm going to invite my friends.*

Through the act [of intimacy] they become partners with God in the act of creation. This is the mystery of what the sages said, “When a man unites with his wife in holiness, the presence of God is between them in the mystery of man and woman.”

---Nahmanides

Think about how strange the idea of conception is and how that's worship itself because God's Spirit is present. Again, here's another quote from the Jewish rabbi philosopher: “Through the act of intimacy the two partners become one with God in the act of creation. This is the mystery of what the sages said, ‘When a man unites with his wife in holiness,’” the *shekinah*, “the very presence of God is between them in the mystery of man and woman” that ultimately becomes a new human soul and spirit.

Application #1: Change Our View

The application for today is to change our view of human intimacy, of marital intimacy, and not to get it caught up with this word “sex.” Marital intimacy versus sex—those are two different things. And I’ll just say this. When I was in my twenties and thirties, I read this sort of material from numerous authors, and from age twenty-five to thirty-five, in the first ten years of marriage, I just kind of thought, *It sure is fun. But the soul and spirit part? I don’t know.*

But here’s the thing. I said, *You know what? These men and women know more than I do. They have lived longer than I have.* So, I guess in some respects, my attitude—what I would like you to do, especially if you’re younger, is just to consider, palms up, saying, “I will receive the potential that there is so much more to intimacy within marriage other than physical pleasure. I’m going to start going into this with gratitude and not with guilt. I’m going to allow God’s Spirit to invade this event in our life and make more of it.”

And I would ask that you would do one of the things I did. I just prayed about it. I prayed to God, “Dear God, I don’t understand this. These men and women keep writing about it. I don’t have that. Could you make that part of our lives?” You can pray that alone, by yourself. You can bring your mate into this and say, “There’s got to be so much more—there clearly is. Would you bring us to a place where we can feel that Eden-like experience where we are naked and unashamed, where we unzip our souls and we feel the sacrament of marital intimacy?” Just pray for that.

When you know and you start believing that marital intimacy is sacred, different, that it is a sacrament and that something very spiritual is happening, and that it is worship, then you can start using it for the way it was meant to be used.

Intimacy Is a Reminder

One way is that intimacy is a reminder of a covenant that you made. In the Bible, covenants are promises between two parties that are promises of faithfulness. And in the covenants that God makes with mankind, He makes sure that they remember that He’s made these promises. One that you might know of is after the Lord flooded the earth He made a covenant to Noah, the Noahic covenant, and said, “I’m not going to do this again, and the rainbow will remind you of that.”

In the marriage vows “a man shall leave his father and mother, bond with his wife and become one flesh”—that’s a covenant with God. And in the wedding vocabulary in this covenant event, we’ll say “consummate the marriage.” “Consummate” means literally “to complete it.” In other words, in our language, that event is signing the contract.

So, in the context of marital intimacy, we are reminding ourselves of a covenant of unconditional love that we made. And we are resigning that covenant.

Hopefully, maybe you can understand this in an experiential way. Have you ever had a cold war between you and your mate go on for prolonged periods of time? Or maybe a hot war where there are arguments and some things get thrown or something? Then you make up, and then you have marital intimacy later, after that. Have you ever had an experience where that took place and you kind of thought, *What was that?! That wasn’t just physical*. And I’m telling you, yeah, it wasn’t. It was sacred, it was sacramental, it was worship. You just renewed a covenant vow. That’s the power of this. It’s a worship experience.

Any marriage, happy or unhappy, is infinitely more interesting than any romance, however passionate.

--W. H. Auden

Here’s a great perspective in the difference between sex and marital intimacy, between romance and real life. Here’s a great quote: “Any marriage, happy or unhappy, is infinitely more interesting than any romance, however passionate.” Let me read it again: “Any marriage, happy or unhappy, is infinitely more interesting than any romance, however passionate.”

Why? Because romance is just obeying your passions and your lusts. You’re just going with the flow. Marriage, good or bad, is an act of the will over time. I mean, it’s work. Marriage says that independent of circumstances, independent of condition, I will love you. Marriage is a steel beam going through a relationship. It stabilizes it and it says, “You shall not pass. This is it.” Marital intimacy and marriage itself strip away all the lies that we see as sex is defined by the media. Right? We know the lies. It’s fun and sexy and pretty and all that stuff. Here’s the truth—here’s marriage truth, okay? It’s two ordinary people, probably not all that good-looking. They have body odor, bad breath. As you grow older your body starts breaking and leaking places. It’s

bad. There are mood swings in a marriage, in a relationship. There's kind of a continual embarrassing each other in front of people.

Let me say it another way. Marriage is for grownups. It's work. It's sacrificial love, it is sacrificial compassion, it is tolerance over time, it is endless forgiveness. And that's why marriage, whether happy or sad, is way more interesting than romance, because it shows what true love is. True love is focusing on your mate's happiness, your mate's joy. It's focusing on how my life will be contributing towards my mate's holiness. That's way more interesting than some pretty fling that's here and then gone.

Marital intimacy is supposed to remind us the marriage covenant and remind us of the seal and the power of that covenant. Marriage intimacy is also like a well check. Intimacy is a sign of how that oneness thing is going. Because if there's a problem with oneness, it's going to show up in the bedroom. It can show up maybe because of our past and we have guilt or regret or anger for something that we've done. It's going to show up, and now you guys get to work on that together. It can show up in your current relationship with your current husband or wife. If there's mistrust, disrespect, unresolved issues—oh, it's going to show up in the bedroom, isn't it?

Marital intimacy is lost because naked and unashamed is lost. Marital intimacy is like a computer that—modern cars—you drive in and say, *I think it's running fine*, and they plug it in and there's a 250-point checkup and they say, *No, no, there's seventeen things wrong*. That's what marital intimacy is. It finds those things. It seeks it out. And it goes to those deeper issues.

So, there's your clue on maybe how you can become like Christ in all of life. It shows up there. Not a bad place to start.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5

The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. ⁵ Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

And that's why the Bible says, *Look, keep your car tuned up*. I'm sorry, the Bible says, *Keep your married life tuned up*—body, soul, and spirit. You need to know how to do this, so Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7, “The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife’s body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband’s body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife.” Sure. So therefore, “Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer,” for example. “Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

The Bible is saying, *Look, this is a way to tune up your car, tune up your soul, tune up your marriage, and to keep it tuned up. Your body is not yours alone; it is to be used for your mate's pleasure. Her body is not her own. It is to be used for your pleasure*. And you're working out how often, when to do that, what is the most effective ways of doing that. You're serving each other in marital intimacy. And it's bringing to light the things that need to be resolved.

Tim Keller, a famous pastor, comments on this passage. He says this—first of all he quotes Lewis Smedes and he says, “As time marches on, you don't marry one woman or one man, but many.” And what that means is, you know, when I got married at twenty-five—I'm not that guy anymore. You know, things are starting to leak. I'm not that same person anymore. When you go through life with children and illness and aging, all that stuff—everybody's evolving over time. But that steel beam of the marriage covenant is keeping all things together—the power of the marriage covenant.

And so, Keller applies this passage to that truth by saying, “Intimacy is the oil in the engine that keeps the friction of life away. The need for joyful, loving intimacy is required in a good marriage, or anger, resentment, and disappointment will find their way in.”

Conclusion

So, here's our conclusion on this topic. We need to change our view of marital intimacy—change it from sex to what God planned it to be. And when we see that, we can see immediately why God builds boundaries around it. He wants us to have the power and the protection of a marriage covenant, swearing to God till death do us part. Now it's safe. Now it can be contained. Now you can be naked and without shame.

And whatever it takes to maintain your innocence before those vows are said is worth the cost. I know of no person who has regretted the cost that they paid for their innocence. No one regrets their innocence.

The second thing we can see is that I want us all to choose to think differently in this context of marriage and intimacy—that it is sacred, that it is sacramental, it is worship. It is worship. And in my story in my twenties and thirties, I didn't believe it, but was open to it. And over the decades, I'm a big believer now. I'm asking you to consider the same thing. What else are you doing for the next twenty years? How about this? Commit to this.

I want to show you a video of a couple who have a powerful story. It displays the formula for marriage—break and bond and one. It's showing what that looks like. I want you to listen for that. I want you to listen for how they see that God is the source of all things good; that it is the power in Jesus Christ that brings healing and safety. I want you to listen for their values. Their values, their convictions, are that God predestined them to become like Christ in all of life. I want you to hear that they understand the formula of how you become disciple, that it is Truth + Spirit + Relationship. And their marriage relationship is the primary relationship to help them become like Christ in all of life. I want you to listen for how they don't grow closer to each other; they grow closer to Yahweh. And in their quest to becoming closer to Yahweh, they become closer than they ever could have gotten any other way.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is Grady and Amy Bruce.

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Video of Grady and Amy Bruce

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/y5l1e7jshbotgmr/Grady%20%26%20Amy%20Bruce%20Final.mp4?dl=0>

Grady: Hi, we're Grady and Amy Bruce. We've been married for twenty-eight years. We met in college, and then got married my last year of medical school and moved away to Kentucky, which was really a good thing for our new marriage. By the time we moved back, we had three children, all within twenty months.

Amy: I think that's probably when some of our greatest challenges entered our marriage. Like Grady mentioned, we had just had twins and our son was twenty months old. And about a year after we moved home, he was diagnosed with autism. And that was a pretty devastating diagnosis at the time. And then we had more challenges that arose. And one of those was when our son hit adolescence. He became very aggressive, and very aggressive towards me in particular. And that caused a time of isolation.

Grady: We leaned on Amy's family even more, to the point that we had changed where we had gone to church to be closer to them and have more time with them, and they could help us with our kids more; which allowed me and my selfish tendencies to pursue other things if I wanted.

Amy: So, I guess it was about three years after the aggression started and we were really going through that challenge, I discovered that Grady was having an affair with a nurse that worked under him at his office. And ... wow ... that was quite devastating. I was shattered. I didn't know who he was, I didn't know who I was, I wasn't sure where God was. It was very all-consuming.

Grady: I reluctantly agreed to go to counseling into this extensive weekend. And in the course of that, I realized that if I believe there's a god, which I did and I do, then God's way has to be better than my way. And I'll have to admit, it was with reluctance that I said, "Okay, then I'm going to try God's way." When I realized that God loved me in that place, I think that's the first time I really began to understand the gospel.

Amy: In my effort, in my flesh, I couldn't forgive it. But it is a seventy-times-seven, every day giving it to God and Him saying, "I can do this in you. Give me Grady, give me your pain, give me all of it, and let me do this transformation" that only He can do. And that He did. He did it. Wow, you talk about being set free ...

Grady: One of the exercises that I actually had to do was go back and tell Amy face to face every sexual indiscretion I'd had. One of the things that we learned and began to realize is that you can't be fully loved unless you're fully known. And the fact that she's sitting here next to me

doing this right now is testimony to the fact that even though I'm fully known, and sometimes it's not pretty, I cherish the fact that I am fully loved. It's an amazing feeling.

Amy: And it really is such a freedom to be fully known. I had to do the same activities with you, and it really does lead to oneness. There is just this freedom and this newness to our relationship that's something that I don't think either one of us really knew existed; that you could have that kind of oneness; that we are doing this thing together, this journey, helping each other on our journey with God and becoming more like Him.

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Wow, let's give them a hand. I mean, that's a courageous act. See how they had to have that relationship with Christ to be able to be healed and to be known and to be accepted and be forgiven and to forgive? See how they became like Christ and they closer to one another? What a story of redemption.

And that's the story of the Gospel. The Gospel is not just about salvation. It doesn't just mean justification, you're one and finished. It means sanctification. It means the process of becoming like Christ in all of your life. It means that He can still do miracles in your life at any time. Let Him. Just let Him.

You know, most of us, many of us, and maybe most of us, were introduced to sex—not marital intimacy—but we were introduced to sex in a shameful way, maybe before we were able to handle it the weight of it with our intellect, emotion, will, insight, spiritual understanding. And the internet has only made that faster. There is no faster trip to Pleasure Island than the internet right now. And because of that, we bring stuff with us. And I want to say that it is worth every effort to make those things right, whatever it costs, whatever door you have to go through, whatever conversation you need to have. You need to let the power of Jesus Christ, that spirit, set you free from those lies, from that experience or those experiences.

And I'd like to invite you to let this church be a way of helping heal you. We have ministries like ReEngage. We have counselors. We have resources. We can help financially—pay if that's necessary. If it's just money that you need to have a counselor, let us do that. Let us be the church. Let the church be the instrument of you becoming like Christ in all of life, in this

particular area especially, because of its power. We are so different than any other animal. We are in the image of God. And when it's violated, it's violated to the soul and spirit.

God wants you to look at your mate as a temple where the Holy Spirit himself dwells. He wants your intimacy with your mate to be prayer-like. When you go into your bedroom, He doesn't turn away and blush. It was His idea. He wants you to enjoy that. He wants you to enjoy the fullness of what was lost in that garden when we left around the east gate. He wants us back there. Let's pray to that end, okay?

Lord, first of all I want to thank you for marital intimacy, the original design, the way it was meant to be. And now, the more I study, the more we look at it biblically, the more we long for that. And it's become cheap and counterfeit and prostituted—literally prostituted in our experience. And I'd ask that You would forgive us in our expressions of that. But also, for just believing that. And I'd ask that You would give us courage and endurance and perseverance to set those things right, or maybe just to change our view of this.

Lord, I'd ask with hands open, palms up, that You would help us enjoy this; that we would not bring in baggage from a previous church or our family or of origin, or an experience, or just a myth that would keep us from enjoying the body/spirit/soul oneness, the naked-without-shame-ness of what You have for us in marital intimacy. We ask that You would bring that to us, and that would be worship and it would glorify You in those moments. We pray this in Jesus' holy name. Amen.