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Cultivating Closeness

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

According to Scripture, God intends for marriage to be a relationship in which husband and wife truly connect and experience a deep sense of intimacy that can be described as becoming one flesh.

While many would describe this as true in the spirit of their marriage, it is not the reality of their day-to-day lives. What hinders many couples from enjoying this deep level of intimacy is their communication style. They talk, but only on a surface level.

He doesn't know how to express his innermost thoughts and feelings. He may be more than a little afraid of them, so he doesn't allow himself to get in touch with his inner self. She is more conscious of her inner self, but may be no more able to

share than he is. Her reasons are different, but no less inhibiting. The risk involved in disclosing a deeply intimate experience may be rated with indifference, and that's too big a risk for some to take.

Paul Tournier suggests, "Deep sharing is overwhelming, and very rare. A thousand fears keep us in check. First of all, there is the fear of breaking down or crying. There is especially the fear that the other will not sense the tremendous importance with which this memory or feeling is charged. How painful it is when such a difficult sharing falls flat upon ears either preoccupied or mocking, ears in any case that do not sense the significance of what we're saying."¹

When love is nurtured, communication can be cultivated. As one shares, the other feels more safe to share. This is not one act, it is a style of communication that becomes the very fabric of the relationship. Trust builds trust. The little things, the seemingly insignificant happenings of a day, the shared memories — these are the building blocks of emotional intimacy.

"For the couple who dares to plumb the depths of their thoughts and feelings, there remains an intimacy that can only be described as a blessed oneness. This is the ultimate achievement of marriage — the merging of self into self. ... Freed from the fear of misunderstanding or rejection, they

can truly be the self God meant them to be."²

If this description reflects on your marriage relationship, rejoice! If you desire deeper intimacy within your marriage, I invite you to contemplate these questions suggested by Exley:

- ▶ What are one or two words that best describe the interaction you had with your partner today?
- ▶ What activities have you shared with each other this week?
- ▶ How would you describe the nature of the time and activities spent with each other — worship, leisure time, household tasks, problem solving, in conflict?
- ▶ Is this the kind of interaction that enables you to reach the level of sharing that brings the deep intimacy you truly desire? If not, what changes do you need to make to cultivate that kind of sharing with one another?

As Paul said, "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5,5 NIV).

1. Exley, Richard, *Marriage in the Making: Devotions for Living Happily Ever After*, (Tulsa, OK: Honor Books, 1994).

2. Tournier, Paul, *To Understand Each Other*, (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1962).

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