

Spiritual What?

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

It isn't something we hear much about. Haven't seen many books about it. Haven't heard any preachers preach about it. And yet, it's probably one of the most important issues in a Christian couple's relationship....*Spiritual intimacy*.

We hear a lot about physical intimacy -- the uninhibited sharing of ourselves through our bodies. All one has to do is turn on the television set. And emotional intimacy -- the open sharing of our feelings with each other -- has a more prominent profile than it used to. But...spiritual intimacy? What's that?

If you don't quite know what we're talking about, you're not alone. Charlie and Martha Shedd say, according to their studies, only 4% of all Christian couples pray together on any kind of regular basis (not including grace before meals). Shocked? This includes pastors and missionaries. Now are you shocked? We're shocked. No, we're broken hearted!

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A few years ago, we took our own survey on spiritual intimacy. We think most couples have just never been taught how important it is. So, we want to take this opportunity to explain to you what spiritual intimacy is, what you will get out of it, and how you can get

it. (By the way, our survey ran about 10% praying together.)

First of all, let's think about what spiritual intimacy is. What are its ingredients? We think it has seven dimensions.

1. Shared purpose and goals in life. God says He has a purpose for us as a couple...we are to show the world what Christ's relationship with His church looks like. And beyond that, He has a very special, unique plan for us to fulfill. This gives our relationship great significance. A shared purpose in our life together is the first element of spiritual intimacy. (Philippians 2:1-2; Amos 3:3)

2. Sharing the Word and prayer. This is what we usually think of when someone mentions spiritual intimacy. It's not ALL of it, but it is a very important part of it. Jesus said there is power when two people pray in His name. What a resource of power we have in praying together as a couple! We'd be crazy not to use such a wonderful resource! Matthew 18:19, 20 — *Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*

And we are commanded to "*let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly*" (Colossians 3:16). Together let God's Word reach deep inside and change you both into the image of His Son. This is part of how He does that.

3. Shared growth in Christ. In Hebrews 10:24, God commands us to spur each other on to growth in our Christian lives. We sometimes forget this means our spouse, as well as the people at church. God put us together to help each other grow into the character of His Son. That is part of spiritual intimacy. (Ephesians 5:19)

4. Shared faith, even through tough times — holding on together. And tough times will come! In our 50+ years together, we've faced a lot of life's hardness together. But the rope that holds us intact (as a couple and as a person) has three strands. And that strong rope can not easily be broken. (Galatians 6:2; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)

What a resource of power we have in praying together as a couple!

5. Shared ministry. What's Chuck Swindoll's wife's name? That's right...Cynthia. What's Jim Dobson's wife's name? Yes... Shirley. Do you know why you remember their names? Because they share their husbands' ministries. Now, we share a ministry — GTO. But even when we're ministering in different ways, we still are sharing each other's ministry...praying, giving ideas, helping each other work things through. God wants to use us as individuals, but He also wants to use us as a couple. Ever

heard of Priscilla and Aquila? Read Acts 18, and follow their exciting lives as they ministered together, with an open home, for the Lord. And then look at Romans 16:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 16:19. How grateful Paul was for them...and how much we, as gentile believers, owe them!

Acts 18:24-26 — *Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos...came to Ephesus ...He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.*

Rom. 16:3,4 — *Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.*

I Cor. 16:19 — *Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.*

6. Shared hope of eternity together with Christ. Take a long, hard look at that person you married. If you are both Christians, then you are going to spend all eternity with her or him. We have a shared hope that we'll

be together with Christ forever. 1 John is very plain that if we have this hope in us, we will be serious about the job of diligently purifying ourselves, inside our front doors as well as outside them. (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18; 1 John 3:2b-3)

This is real bonding!

7. Sharing at the core of our being — complete transparency before God and one another. We hear a lot about bonding nowadays. Well, this is real bonding. Because as we share ourselves with each other and God, a strong trust grows between us. And trust is the basic ingredient of our relationship. It's the foundation that everything else is built upon. (Acts 24:16; James 5:16)

Everybody wins when you grow in spiritual intimacy: you, your mate, your children. It builds trust in your relationship and in your home. It bonds you together. It means you'll be able to hold on, whatever life throws at you. It gives your relationship endurance

and steadfastness. And it gives you confidence that your marriage is significant...that God has great plans for you as a couple.

But where do you start in this process of spiritual intimacy? Probably the best place to start is to covenant with one another to read God's Word and pray together at least three times a week. If you do this faithfully, the rest can grow from there.

We talked about how to make a covenant in our last Seeds for Growth. But let us refresh your memory. Just remember that in order to make this binding agreement work, you must POPA. That is, have a *PLAN* to accomplish having devotions together (time, place etc.). *OBLIGATE* yourselves to work the plan. *PROMISE* to keep the covenant (Ecclesiastes 5:4). And, finally, make yourselves *ACCOUNTABLE* to each other to hold to your agreement. That's POPA.

Do you want spiritual intimacy in your marriage? Do you want all its benefits? Then it's time to decide to **DO** something about it today.

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