

Intimacy Shifts by Chris Garner

Counseling couples for over 20 years, I have seen an interesting phenomena in marriage relationships. It seems that often, one spouse or the other pursues intimacy in the relationship, while the other is less interested or focused elsewhere. Different circumstances may cause intimacy shifts in the relationship and couples need to be aware of what may cause intimacy to falter in *their* relationship. Intimacy may shift when the husband begins a new job and is focused on learning and adapting to the new environment. A new child brings a shift in intimacy as the wife naturally bonds with her baby. Career, children, ministry, and, unfortunately, addictions and sin all can shift intimacy away from the couple and toward other things.

A wife may desire the intimacy she once experienced with her “knight in shining armor,” but the husband, engrossed in whatever endeavor he pursues, is oblivious to her entreaties. The wife, at times may become desperate in her attempt to kindle intimacy –sometimes unwittingly even pushing her husband away in her attempts. She may even persuade him to go for counseling, but often, husbands just don’t see the importance of intimacy (other than sex) with his wife. I have heard many men say something to the effect of; ‘work *demands* my attention,’ ‘I *need* a respite from the pressures of work,’ or ‘I *can’t* break this habit.’

A husband may feel disconnected because of career demands, or needs of the children. He may come home from work to an empty house when his wife is shuttling children to activities or is involved in ministry. Men often get angry and make demands of their wives when intimacy shifts away from them. Angry demands do not draw a wife to her husband and she also will tend to pull away from the pressure for intimacy. While a man’s disconnection often is because things going on with himself, women’s disconnection is usually because of demand from others.

Things have changed somewhat over the past thirty years, but more often than not, it is the wife pursuing intimacy with her husband because intimacy has shifted and she does not feel connected with her husband. The husband often is too involved in career, hobbies, or addictions to appreciate her attempts at shifting intimacy back to their marriage. The wife pursues and even may attempt to manipulate, or compel him to connect with her, and after some period time, she may just give up and connect with her children, family, friends, or, unfortunately, sometimes with another man.

It usually takes the husband a while to notice the emotional absence of his wife, but when finally does notice, there is another intimacy shift as he begins to pursue intimacy (emotional intimacy, not just sex) with his wife, but at this point, she may not be interested. One man actually told me that his wife was allowing Satan to destroy their marriage – she had absolutely *no* interest in working on the marriage as he attempted to repair their broken intimacy. Further probing revealed that her disinterest in the marriage stemmed from his long-term drug and pornography addictions. She had pursued him for many years to no avail and when she gave up, he would now “do anything to save the marriage.” I have heard too many men make this statement over the years in similar circumstances.

Sometimes the wife who has checked out will respond to her husband’s desire to connect. This can result in another intimacy shift as the couple now *both* seek to connect and work together. The husband’s earnest work of building intimacy and the wife’s decision to make the effort to connect can lead to rebuilding the marriage and attaining the intimacy the wife always wanted and the husband never knew they could have. Building the intimacy requires time and effort and any couple can bring about an intimacy shift to bring intimacy back into their marriage.

Intimacy shifts *will* occur in marriage. There are enormous demand on everyone’s time and energy; intimacy will fade at times, but healthy couples pull back together and reconnect. Couples need to help each other, encourage each other, and seek to draw each other back into relationship rather than criticize or make demands. They must be diligent about coming together and building intimacy; it requires effort from *both* husband and wife.