

## *Pursue Intimacy and Oneness in Your Marriage* by Chris Garner

Didn't we *all* marry thinking that we would live *happily-ever-after*? How many people have you heard say that their wedding day was the happiest day of their lives? Often couples think the happiness they feel will continue throughout their life together. Our culture today feeds the myth that once married, couples will be happy for life. Couples usually don't look past the wedding to the marriage and their life together and they don't understand that the *becoming one* spoken about during the wedding ceremony is a life-long pursuit.

Intimacy often breaks down in marriage as couples become busy meeting the challenges of daily life. Women tend to be the one attempting to engage and connect. When the husband doesn't reciprocate a wife's attempts to connect, she may begin to complain. The Book of Proverbs mentions a *quarrelsome* or *contentious* wife five times. Solomon wrote that this woman is like a constant dripping and that it is better to live on a corner of the roof or in the desert than with such a woman. (See Proverbs 19:13, 21:9, 21:19, 25:24, and 27:15.) Why this would be in the Bible five times? Sure, Solomon had 700 wives, and he probably could have written a book about unhappy women. But seriously, why would God inspire this to be written so often? The answer, I've found, comes from mankind's earliest history and the fall from grace.

God designed marriage to be a relationship of intimacy and oneness. Before the Fall, the first man and woman lived together naked and unashamed and they had the oneness people desire in relationship. God's design was for the husband and wife to work *together*, live life *together*, grow *together* – to be *one* in every sense; spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and physically. It was *not* God's will for wives to be quarrelsome and contentious. Mankind's disobedience marred God's design; the man and woman put clothes on, and began to hide emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually from each other. Genesis Chapter 3 records the Fall and the curse the man and woman incurred for disobeying God. The woman's curse that there would be pain with childbirth and that her desire would be for her husband. The man's curse was that through painful toil he would be able to feed his family.

The result is that a wife's identity tends to be primarily in her relationship with her husband. Men tend to find their identity in their jobs and what they do. Hence, the husband often focuses on his work and neglects his wife, and the wife, attempting to build relationship with her husband, often becomes quarrelsome, argumentative, and contentious. It is a vicious circle that leads to a dysfunctional, troubled marriage in which neither spouse feels connected. The wife wants her husband to come home from work at a decent hour and connect with her, but when he comes home late, she criticizes him for being late. This may lead him to stay late at work more often because at least there he feels appreciated. The subject of the arguments may differ, but the root is usually about feeling disconnected and the result is the same – unhappy spouses. Rather than change to improve the relationship, too many just give up and remain in an unsatisfying marriage or leave.

We experienced this in our own marriage for too many years; my wife attempting to engage in relationship and my seeking affirmation in work or ministry. My wife was *contentious* and *quarrelsome* and I was disconnected and emotionally distant. Our lives and marriage began to change as we learned God's plan for marriage – that marriage is designed to be a relationship of intimacy and oneness. It wasn't always easy, but as I pursued intimacy with my wife and she sought to love me and draw me to herself, our relationship grew. We experience the intimacy and oneness God desires for our marriage, but we still must actively pursue intimacy and cultivate oneness.

The answer to the lack of intimacy and oneness in the marriage relationship? Husbands must pursue connection with their wives and seek to build intimacy into the relationship. And, rather than being critical of her husband, the wife should seek to *win* her husband without a word; loving, respecting him, and building him up. The relationship can change if one spouse changes, it will change quickly if *both* spouses seek to change. God's desire is for marriage to reflect Him and if husbands and wives will purposefully seek intimacy and oneness, they can better reflect God and improve their marriage relationships.

Like Carmen and I, you also must be purposeful about building intimacy and cultivating oneness in your marriage. The busyness of life, children, work, and many other things work against marital intimacy. You must intentionally connect with your spouse. Go for walks, go out, do activities, spend time together – just the two of you. The marriage lived according to God's design is fulfilling and is a blessing to both husband and wife. You can have it, but it requires intentionally making decisions to connect with your spouse. Actively and continually pursue intimacy and oneness in *your* marriage and your relationship will flourish and grow.