

Leadership Empowerment Resources

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John 15
Abide in Me

INTIMACY WITH GOD ILLUSTRATED BY MARRIAGE

“. . . For your Maker is your husband - the Lord almighty is his name - the Holy one of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth. The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit - a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God. "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion will bring you back . . ." Isaiah 54:5 - 7

I Introduction: Metaphors help us understand abstract truth by the use of concrete items. They are used often in the Bible to help us understand the relationship between God and humans, e.g., El Shaddai, Rock, Shepherd, Light, Father, King, and Hen, etc. Because of the beauty and complexity of our relationship with God many metaphors are needed. Each metaphor shows one aspect of the relationship, never the whole relationship. Each has limitations; they cannot be applied in every aspect of the item. For example, the Rock is solid, protects, and is secure, but God is not hard and cold like a rock. The Shepherd is our provider, protector, and leader, but God is not illiterate or uninformed like some shepherds. One metaphor that has been largely overlooked, possibly because of the desire to avoid any misunderstanding of the relationship, is the metaphor of God as Husband/Lover. He loves us intimately and the intimacy produces fruit, but this relationship is not sensual, sexual, or physical.

The word *Intercourse* is usually linked with sex, but its broader meaning is: The voluntary mutual exchange of words, goods, or ideas which produce new benefits, e.g., social intercourse producing friendships, academic intercourse producing richer understandings, commercial intercourse producing exchanges of goods, and sexual intercourse producing physical pleasure and children. Spiritual intercourse, or prayer, with God produces creativity, fruit of the Spirit, fruitfulness, spiritual offspring, and great on-going satisfaction.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). The word for *knowledge* in this verse comes from the root word in Hebrew-*yada*-the same word in the Hebrew language that is used to indicate physical intimacy between a man and wife. God already knows us, but He wants us to know Him intimately. To appreciate the metaphor of God as our Husband, we must avoid the sensual thoughts often associated today with sexual intimacy. Titus 1:15 "To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted." Sex correctly understood and experienced was originally and can today be pure.

II The Metaphor - the Satisfying and Fruitful Intimacy of the Human Marriage

In Genesis 2:18 it says, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'" God initiated marriage. Marriage is good.

The Song of Solomon is a love story between God and humankind. In it the Bible uses sexual and sensual expressions to communicate a message about God's love for us and our loving responses to Him. Song of Solomon 2:6: "His left arm is under my head and his right arm embraces me." 4:11: "Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue." 7:7-9: "Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. I said, 'I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit. May your breasts be like clusters of grapes on the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine.' (She responds by saying:) 'May the wine go straight to my beloved, flowing gently over lips and teeth.'"

Sex is pleasurable and beneficial for far more than just procreative purposes; it includes intense and satisfying mutual pleasure between two married persons. The sensual expressions used in the Song of Solomon demonstrate the legitimacy of enjoying love-making, sexual intercourse, in marriage. God would not have used sexual love-

making to illustrate intense mutual love between God and humans if physical love-making itself were bad or evil. He uses something good to illustrate something else that is good. The Song of Solomon is written to show us God's intense and intimate love for us.

Husbands and wives should considerately and lovingly meet their spouse's sexual needs. I Corinthians 7:2-5: "But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps 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."

If the human marriage relationship is a metaphorical illustration of intimacy with God, the relationship should not be one of use, abuse, or conquest. Rather it will unselfishly focus on the happiness and contentment of the other party. For example, the husband who is only concerned about his own physical gratification is selfish. He should proceed at a slow gentle pace so that his wife enjoys the experience and is satisfied as well he is. When husbands lovingly, gently, fondle and caress their wives and their wives are fully satisfied with the experience, the husband enjoys fulfillment of his manhood and the wife enjoys the experience so much she wants it again and again.

We are to be happy with our mate and celebrate the attraction of our spouse's physical body. Proverbs 5:18 & 19 says: "May your fountain be blessed and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer - may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love." These are the easiest verse in the Bible to obey. This enjoyment is real and it also symbolizes a rich spiritual truth about intimacy with God.

Whoever has a wife is blessed. Proverbs 18:22 says, "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord." Marriage is a noble institution and physical intimacy in it is sheer joy without any stain or impurity. Hebrews 13:4: "Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."

God wants the human race to produce children to populate the earth. Genesis 1:28 says "Be fruitful and increase in number." The aspects of the satisfaction and fruitfulness of physical human intimacy are both a part of the metaphor symbolizing the satisfaction and fruitfulness of our intimate union with our Lover/Husband/God.

III God is Our Jealous Lover/Husband.

Isaiah 62, 5 says, "As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you." Jeremiah 2:2 adds, "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me . . ." Then notice the change apparent in Jeremiah 2:23b & 24. "You are a swift she-camel running here and there, a wild donkey accustomed to the desert, sniffing the wind in her craving - in her heat who can restrain her? Any males that pursue her need not tire themselves; at mating time they will find her. Do not run until your feet are bare and your throat is dry. But you said, 'It's no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them'"

Jerusalem, the adulterous wife in Ezekiel's imagery, illustrates that idolatry is spiritual adultery, being unfaithful to our divine Lover/Husband. Ezekiel 16, especially in vs. 25 & 26: "At every street corner you built your lofty shrines and degraded your beauty, spreading your legs with increasing promiscuity to anyone who passed by. You engaged in prostitution with the Egyptians, your neighbors with large genitals, and aroused my anger with your increasing promiscuity."

An attitude of prostitution takes us away from God. Hosea 4:12: "A spirit of prostitution leads them away; they are unfaithful to their God." Hosea 5:4: "A spirit of prostitution is in their heart; they do not acknowledge the Lord." If idolatry is spiritual prostitution, it follows that the proper way to relate to our true Lover/Husband would be to enjoy spiritual intimacy with God, not other ideologies or attractions.

Israel's Husband is God to whom she will return. Hosea 2:7: "She will chase after her lovers but not catch them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now'"

The message of the book of Hosea, illustrated by Hosea's own patient behavior with his wayward wife welcoming her back to himself, is that God is the loving, patient, waiting, and forgiving husband to whom we should return. If you can imagine the pain of the broken-hearted Hosea pleading for his wayward wife to return to the security, provision, and faithful love he offered her, you then have a picture of God as He pleads for us to return to Him and the security, provision, and faithful love He offers.

IV God, our Husband, Wants Intimacy with Us, the Bride.

The metaphor of "Master" will be replaced by the metaphor of "Husband." Hosea 2:16: "In that day,' declares the Lord, 'you will call me "my husband"; you will no longer call me "my master."'"

God intends to marry His people. Hosea 2:19, 20: "I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord." Hosea 2:23: "I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people': and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

"When you pray, go into your room . . ." Matthew 6:6. The word *room* could be translated *bedchamber*. 2 Corinthians 11:2 "I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him."

Notice the choice of vocabulary John uses to express that God's life is in His own. I John 3:9 says, "Those who are born of God will not continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God." God's seed (life-producing creativity energy) in us acts as a preventative to sin. When we are pregnant with God's life we don't want or need any other. Intimacy with God produces resistance to sin; we do not want to offend the Lover with whom we spend intimate time. Being pregnant with God's ideas in our spirits can help us resist the attraction of any other would-be suitor. God satisfies; other lovers do not. Just as the "satisfaction" in adultery is short-lived, shallow, and guilt-ridden, so is the "satisfaction" of idolatry. It is only the relationship with our Divine Husband that is genuinely satisfying. No other lover offers this.

God, our strong soldier Husband, saves us, loves us, and sings joyfully over us. Zephaniah 3:17: "The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing." Just as a husband sings of his love to his wife, so God will sing over us.

When Jesus came to earth and died for us he came to find His bride. Can you envision His life on earth as a proposal for marriage? "Will you marry me" I will die for you. Will you be my bride? Then, at the marriage supper of the Lamb the Father and Son will shout with joy. Jude 24: "To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy -" To the Father He says, "I have bought her with my blood. Isn't she beautiful!"

The saints of God in the New Jerusalem are the bride/wife of the Lamb. Revelation 21:9: "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, 'Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.'"

V Intimacy with God and Joy in Marriage each Illustrate and Teach each Other.

Lessons about Christ and the Church and husband and wife are used together to explain each other. Ephesians 5:21-33.

Jesus gave Himself for the church and the church responds by submitting, obeying, and cooperating with Jesus as Savior, Lord, and leader. Likewise the husband is to give himself for his wife, nourishing, encouraging, caring for her, and bearing burdens for her. To follow Jesus' example, instead of blaming her he takes responsibility to help solve her problems.

Christ and the church are united and the husband and his wife are united. Ephesians 5:31 & 32: "'For this reason will a man leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church, However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." Husbands are to love their wives as they love themselves and as Christ loved the church. And all of the redeemed beloved of God are so seek to be intimate with their divine Husband.

The metaphor of marriage is a legitimate expression of a satisfying and fruitful relationship between God and us.

VI Practical Conclusions and Applications

God, not any human, initiates the offer of intimacy; let us not spurn His offer.

God loves us intensely and jealously like a husband loves his wife.

We don't now fully know the nature of the intimacy that is possible with God, but we can and should seek to be intimate with God.

God uses the most intense, exciting, stimulating, and satisfying human experience possible, physical intimacy between married partners, to demonstrate, illustrate, and teach us of His lofty, noble, intense, and great desire for a close relationship with us.

Sexual fulfillment in marriage is a wonderful gift from God. In sexual intercourse each married partner has the opportunity to give the most intense and exciting physical human experience possible to the mate they love. Married partners can be drawn closer together through this experience while at the same time appreciating the spiritual lessons that can be learned about God. Welcome to the world of innocence, purity, holiness, and discovery in sex.

The misuse of sex as a conquest or seduction outside of marriage is a violation of the marriage vow and a sad illustration of idolatry; God hates both idolatry and adultery. Escape from the world of shame, embarrassment, guilt, and regrets in sex. Be not conformed to the outside world, but renewed by the Holy Spirit from within.

Believers have God's spiritual life-giving creative seed in them. God's seed may symbolize new life, energy, creative ideas, visions, hopes, and understanding. It is right for us to want God to make us pregnant with His ideas. Intimacy with God is worth seeking and is productive.

Loving the world or any idol or anything other than God more than we love God, is both foolish and counterproductive; it is spiritual adultery. God is our very loving and very jealous Husband. Different cultures have different symbols to symbolize loyalty in marriage: long hair (I Corinthians 11:2-16), wedding rings, and leather skirts, etc. Spiritually speaking, to honor our marriage to God we should keep our leather skirts on, our hair long, or our wedding rings on. We will be faithful to our divine Lover/Husband. We will keep our leather skirt on and keep it down. "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If you love the world, love for the Father is not in you" (I John 2:15). We will not love the world or the things in the world; we will be loyal and faithful to our divine Husband. Every culture understands a jilted husband's jealousy.

Casting idolatry in the frame-work of spiritual adultery enables us to see how offensive, inappropriate, and hurtful idolatry is and how it breaks God's heart.

Psychological satisfaction and security in loving and being loved endures all the time between the singular incidents of physical intimacy. This is true in human marriages and also in our marriage with God.

If, on one hand, we neglect the metaphor of God as Husband, we miss the biblical emphasis on creativity as a result of intimacy.

If, on the other hand, we confuse sex and worship, we risk a horrible misunderstanding of worship such as some

non-Christian religions express in temple prostitution.

The fruit produced by union with God will resemble the Father, yet also take on the appearance and personality of the human partner. This is why sermons, prophecies, and truth presented by the human partner take on the vocabulary, personality, and expression of the speaker.

Intimacy produces pregnancy. Sexual intimacy produces children. If we want to have spiritual fruit, we must be intimate with God. If you want to be pregnant with new life, creative ideas, and fresh visions from God be intimate with Him. Spend more time alone with God and you will be more fruitful. If you want more spiritual sons and daughters, spend more intimate time alone with God.

If you are looking for romance with God, consider the picture of Jesus returning in the clouds to catch His bride away to celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb after which we will live with Him forever in the house He is preparing for us.