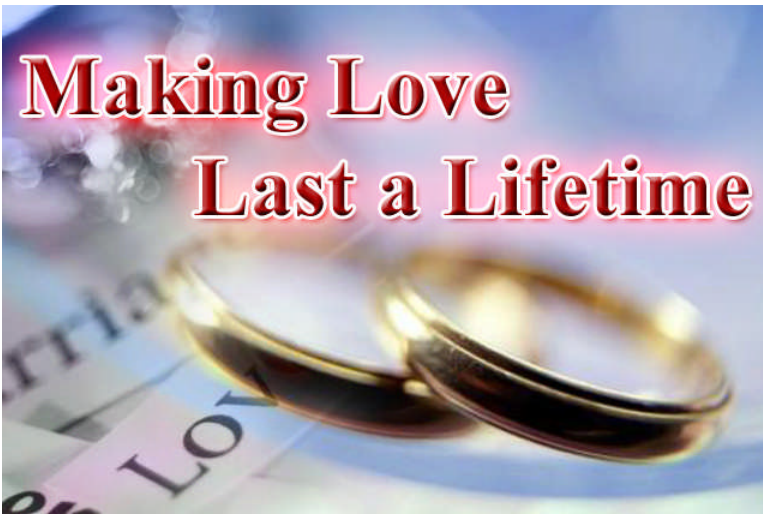


March 26, 2006

The Ministry and Meaning of Faithfulness

1 Timothy 4:4-5
Hebrews 13:4a

The key to building a healthy intimate relationship is found in the Christian concept of *agape*, or sacrificial love. This type of love is primarily focused on meeting the needs of another rather than meeting our own needs. It is about serving, loving, blessing, and giving away one's self.



For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer. 1 Timothy 4:4-5

Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. Hebrews 13:4a

For Personal Study

Even if you are not married or in a relationship, it's important to know some things about being faithful and protecting relationships.

Everyone can be tempted. We're human. The Devil even tempted Jesus. But how we prepare and protect ourselves *before* we are tempted, and what we do *once* we are tempted... those are the big issues.

What Is Temptation?

Have you ever been tempted to take something that wasn't yours? To enjoy something that wasn't good for you? If the temptation was small and seemed fairly harmless, you might give in. But it's the small temptations that can be the most deceiving, and if, in a moment of weakness, one does give in, larger sins can follow.

The temptation to be unfaithful in a relationship can be just like that. Instead of starting with a full-force urge to be unfaithful, a person may simply realize how much he or she enjoys the company of someone of the opposite gender, how appreciated this person

makes them feel. Maybe they offered a kind word or smile. In certain circumstances, this can lead to attraction, feelings for someone outside of the marriage.

Guarding Your Relationship

Hopefully you won't need to deal with this, but we are human. So how do you prepare and protect your relationship from attacks of temptation? Adam Hamilton in *Making Love Last a Lifetime* reminds us to keep ourselves out of vulnerable situations to begin with. He also shares that "when people's needs are not being met... they are most susceptible to participating in an affair.... When your mate feels loved by you and when your mate's emotional and sexual needs are being met, the likelihood of your mate becoming involved in an affair is greatly diminished." This is where *agape* love comes in — serve, love, and bless your mate. Strive to make them feel loved and appreciated by you.

Next, if feelings do arise, recognize them honestly so you can deal with them, change the situation, and ask for God's help.

Resources for further study:

- Hamilton, Adam. *Making Love Last a Lifetime*, Chapter 7.
- Carder, Dave. *Torn Asunder: Recovering from Extramarital Affairs*.
- Leman, Kevin. *Sheet Music: Uncovering the secrets of sexual intimacy in marriage*.

For Group Discussion

1. Read through the "For Personal Study" section here as a group.
2. What would you consider to be a *vulnerable situation*? What about a *vulnerable conversation*? How can you guard against this?
3. How can you help your *mate* feel *loved* and *appreciated*? What really makes you feel appreciated by your spouse? (Have each person anonymously write down 5 ideas. Shuffle the lists and share them aloud. Put these ideas into practice!)
4. If *you* don't feel loved or appreciated, what can you do to share that with your mate or draw out those feelings from him or her?
5. If you feel tempted, if you feel attraction for someone outside of your relationship, what should you do?

Making Love Last a Lifetime

March 26, 2006

St. John Evangelical Lutheran Church • 6004 Waterloo Road, Columbia, MD 21045 • 410-799-8888 • www.StJohnMD.org

Daily Reflections

This week's Daily Reflections will take us deeper into the themes of marriage, adultery, and God's intention for marital sexuality.

Monday, March 27

Let's begin with a look at adultery. Adultery is typically defined as sexual intimacy with someone other than one's spouse (thus adultery is a sin that a married person commits). Tomorrow we will examine God's grace in the light of adultery - but today we will simply focus on establishing the biblical prohibition against adultery. Read Exodus 20:14 - this is the 7th Commandment and its inclusion in the Ten Commandments reminds us of how seriously this offense was taken by God. Why do you think this sin was so serious as to be included among the foundational commands that God gave to Israel? What effect does adultery have on all parties involved? Read Proverbs 6:23-35. Why is adultery warned against in this passage?

Tuesday, March 28

Today we begin by reading Jesus' words regarding adultery. Read Matthew 5:27-30. Jesus here uses hyperbole -exaggeration to make a point. He is not commanding us to literally cut off our hands, nor would Jesus have literally confused actual intercourse with thoughts about it. But he is making a very serious point - what is his point? What is your secret *thought life* like? Are you ever tempted in this way? No

one is immune to an affair if they are in the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong person. Do you agree? Could email conversations be a temptation toward adultery - opening the door to a relationship that might not be appropriate? Have you known anyone who struggled in this area?

Wednesday, March 29

Today we turn to a word of grace and hope - not only for those who have committed adultery, but for all of us. Read John 8:1-11. What do we learn about the heart of Jesus from this passage of scripture? If you or someone you know has faced adultery, consider purchasing the book, *Torn Asunder: Recovering From Extra-Marital Affairs*. God is able to make us new, to forgive us and restore us. But that does not necessarily mean our marriages can survive adultery - it is such a painful experience that Jesus himself permits divorce in cases of adultery. He permits it, but he doesn't command it. It is possible for a marriage to survive adultery, but it will take hard work and God's grace.

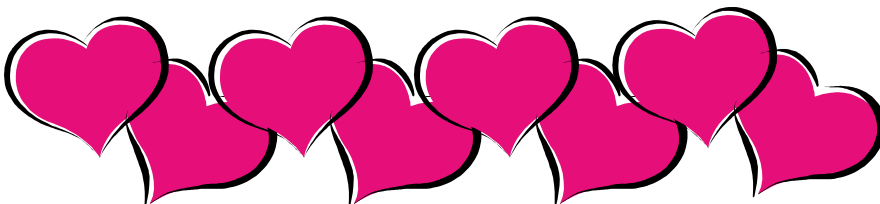
Thursday, March 30

Today we turn to the issue of sexual intimacy in marriage. Genesis 2:24-25 teaches us that intimacy was intended by God as a blessing and means of emotional and physical union. Let's also consider "his needs" and "her needs" with regard to intimacy. Surveys done by Adam

Hamilton's church, and reported in *Making Love Last a Lifetime* showed that a large number of women needed affection, romance, and caring words and touch. Men on the other hand had a strong need for sexual intimacy. We learned that these two different expressions of intimacy can either leave us frustrated and dancing in misstep - or we can learn how to intentionally meet one another's needs while creating an intimate relationship that regularly involves both. What might this look like? Read I Corinthians 7:1-7. What does this passage say about the sexual intimacy? Paul spoke of this as a "duty" - but is it possible this is more than a duty - but an opportunity - to live out our faith by ministering to our spouse in the way they receive intimacy?

Friday, March 31

Let's look today at some scriptures about the Christian life that may have a direct bearing on marital intimacy. Our sexuality is something not to be divorced from the rest of our life - but fully integrated - and the same principles that apply to how we relate to one another should be applied to this area of our lives. How might the following scriptures shape our approach to our sexual life? Read Galatians 5:22-23, I John 3:16-18. Ephesians 5:25-33. Pray for God to help you to be a blessing to your mate, to minister to them in the area of emotional and physical intimacy.



Pray for your spouse each day—for their integrity, faithfulness and protection from temptation. Pray also that you will grow in faithfulness and demonstrate your love in more meaningful ways for your spouse.