



# Cultivating Intimacy in Marriage

**Principles, Practices, and Tools for  
Deepening Spiritual, Emotional, and Physical  
Bonds with Your Spouse**

# Recorded Sessions from Marriage Saturday



## **DAVE & LAURA STRUNK**

### *Spiritual Intimacy in Marriage*

<https://vimeo.com/1170081383/883bac6d8a>

Dave and Laura Strunk live in East Tennessee with their three children and share a deep love for the Church and for helping others grow in intimacy with Christ. Dave is the lead pastor of Church of the Redeemer in Alcoa, which he helped plant in 2017. After years of pastoral ministry in Colorado, Laura is a spiritual director and serves as associate director and supervision faculty for Selah, a training program for spiritual directors. Together, Dave and Laura care deeply about the slow work of intimacy—with God and with one another—and are learning (sometimes the hard way) how prayer, listening, and grace make room for love to deepen in the midst of ordinary married life.



## **TORREY & SUMMERS MCMURRAY**

### *Emotional Intimacy in Marriage*

<https://vimeo.com/1170086258/e49f798ab9>

Torrey and Summers have been happily married for nearly 24 years and are the proud parents of three almost-grown children: Shepard, 20; Landry, 18; and Graeme, 16. For the past 12 years, they both enjoyed their time at CSPC. Torrey is now serving as the CFO/COO of One Knox Soccer, while Summers currently works as a psychologist in private practice at Restoration Counseling. Summers specializes in marriage and family counseling and Torrey gets to vicariously read all the books and listen to all the podcasts.



## **RICK & TERESA DUNN**

### *Physical Intimacy in Marriage*

<https://vimeo.com/1170082201/8946ffa6fe>

Rick and Teresa Dunn have been married for 43 years and are the grateful parents of three grown children, two children-in-law, and three beloved grandchildren. Rick and Teresa Dunn have been married for 43 years and are the grateful parents of three grown children, two children-in-law, and three beloved grandchildren. Rick and Teresa reside in Knoxville, Tennessee, and Castle Rock, Colorado.

Teresa is the founder of Restoration Counseling Associates in Knoxville and has served as a Licensed Professional Counselor for more than four decades. She specializes in marriage therapy, trauma recovery, and sex therapy, helping individuals and couples pursue healing with honesty, courage, and hope.

Rick holds a Ph.D. in Education and has spent over 40 years as a teacher, author, and pastor. He served as Lead Pastor of Fellowship Church in Knoxville for 22 years. Rick is the Founder and President of White Horse Leadership Initiative, a ministry dedicated to holistic leadership formation and coaching for pastors and nonprofit leaders.

In the spring of 2026, Rick and Teresa will launch their podcast, *Marriage: A Journey of Grace, Truth, and Time*, where they share wisdom drawn from decades of marriage, ministry, counseling, and walking with others through the complexities of real life and lasting love.

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# Spiritual Intimacy in Marriage

Dave & Laura Strunk



## Watch Session 01

<https://vimeo.com/1170081383/883bac6d8a>



## What is Spiritual Intimacy?

Spiritual intimacy in marriage is sharing your life with God together while also helping one another grow in relationship with Him. Spiritual intimacy happens when each spouse pursues God personally and then shares that journey with the other.

God already knows us deeply (Psalm 139), so marriage becomes a place where we invite our spouse into our life with God.

**Knowing your spouse can help you know God more deeply, and knowing God can help you love your spouse more deeply.**



## The Trinity as the Model of Spiritual Intimacy



The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit “dance” in loving relationship with one another.

God created relationships for loving communion, not isolation. Marriage is an invitation to join the relational life of God together. True intimacy flows from first belonging to God, not expecting your spouse to meet every need.

**When a spouse knows they are secure in God’s love, they are freer to love their spouse without unrealistic expectations.**



## Understanding Spiritual Differences in Marriage

Couples often experience God in very different ways. These differences can cause conflict if misunderstood but they can also become a gift when couples learn to appreciate them.

## Examples

### One Spouse

Experiences God through images, prayer, journaling

Loves theology and study

Feels spiritually expressive

### Other Spouse

Experiences God through circumstances or reflection

Loves service and practical acts

Feels spiritually quiet

# Combating Barriers to Spiritual Intimacy



## **Distraction** *(especially screens)*

Constant phone use reduces:

- attention
- conversation
- presence

Spiritual intimacy requires focused attention.



## **Busyness**

Modern families often live in constant activity:

- kids' sports
- work schedules
- endless commitments

Over time couples can spend years shuttling between events without nurturing their marriage.



## **Lack of Attention**

The opposite of intimacy is inattention. True intimacy requires:

- presence
- curiosity
- listening
- remembering what matters to your spouse

Attention is one of the deepest ways to love.

### **Key Question to Ask**

Are we investing our time in distractions when we could be connecting?

### **Key Question to Ask**

Are we living according to God's priorities or our culture's priorities?

### **Key Question to Ask**

Are we intentionally providing opportunities for focused attention?



## **Invest Time in Fostering Connection**

Example activities:

- cooking together
- listening to music
- completing creative activities
- having meaningful conversations



## **Slow Down**

Spiritual intimacy grows when couples have margin and presence in their lives.



## **Create Shared Rhythms**

- Schedule a weekly date night
- Intentionally share reflections on the week
- Consistently pray together

## Five Practices that Build Spiritual Intimacy

## Examples



### Practice 1 Foster Self- Disclosure

Spiritual intimacy deepens as couples share their inner thoughts and feelings, fostering connection and mutual understanding.

- Open up about your fears, desires, challenges, and joys with your spouse.
- Discuss the moments when you feel God's presence in your life.
- Create a safe space for vulnerability.



### Practice 2 Listen Rather Than Fixing

A common issue for couples is problem-solving over active listening. Spiritual intimacy grows when spouses feel seen and heard.

- Healthy Listening Involves:
- Listen attentively without rushing to offer advice
  - Ask insightful questions
  - Foster a safe environment for emotional processing



### Practice 3 Plan a Weekly "In-House" Date Night

An impactful routine is establishing a weekly date night at home, which can improve the entire week as you focus on what to share during these evenings.

- On the same night each week, sit down together without distraction to discuss:
- Where did you see God this week?
  - What were your highs and lows?
  - What were your fears, desires, or struggles?
  - What felt life-giving or draining?



### Practice 4 Engage in the Prayer of Examen

The Examen is a historic spiritual discipline that aids in recognizing God's presence in daily life and encourages couples to discuss their inner spiritual experiences together.

- Ask this version daily or weekly:
- Where did I experience joy or consolation this week?
  - Where did I experience loss, frustration, or disconnection?
  - Where did I sense God's presence?
  - Where did I struggle to trust Him?



### Practice 5 Allow One Another the Freedom to Grow Spiritually

Couples can strengthen spiritual intimacy by supporting each other's individual spiritual growth, often by helping their spouse deepen their personal relationship with God.

- Encourage attendance of a retreat or study.
- Support time for spiritual disciplines.
- Create space for mentorship or spiritual direction.

# Key Takeaways for Couples on Spiritual Intimacy

**Spiritual intimacy begins with personal intimacy with God.**



**Share your inner spiritual life with your spouse.**



**Listen rather than fixing.**



**Create shared intentional rhythms.**



**Engage in a shared reflective practice, like the Examen.**



**Honor spiritual differences in your marriage.**



**Slow down and invest time in fostering connections.**



**Allow one another the freedom to grow spiritually.**

**Giving someone our attention is one of the deepest ways to love.**

## How can we start building spiritual intimacy?



**This week, set aside 45 minutes to an hour.**



**Remove any distractions, especially phones.**



**Ask each other:**  
What was your high?  
What was your low?  
Where did you sense God?  
How can I pray for you?

# Emotional Intimacy in Marriage

Torrey & Summers  
McMurray



## Watch Session 02

<https://vimeo.com/1170086258/e49f798ab9>



## What is Emotional Intimacy?

Emotional intimacy refers to the feeling of being secure, recognized, and understood by your partner. It involves the freedom to express your true feelings and thoughts, the assurance that your emotions will be met with compassion rather than dismissal, and the ability to share your inner world with your spouse.

**A feeling of safety with your spouse.**



Emotional intimacy grows when both spouses hold these beliefs:  
“I can be myself here.”  
“My heart will be handled gently.”  
“My spouse is on my side.”

But emotional intimacy is also fragile. When one spouse shares something vulnerable, the other spouse has a choice:

- A. Receive it gently
- B. Dismiss it or crush it

**How we respond in those moments shapes the emotional climate of the marriage.**

## The Foundation of Emotional Safety

### Respect and Kindness

One of the strongest builders of emotional safety is **choosing respect when you could attack.**

Every spouse knows the “nuclear button”—the exact thing that would hurt the other person most. Emotionally safe couples choose not to push it.

Instead they practice **kindness, gentleness, restraint, and respectful communication.**

This builds long-term trust.

### Curiosity About Your Spouse's Inner World

Emotionally connected marriages are marked by curiosity.

Instead of assuming, couples ask: “Help me understand what you're feeling.”

“What's going on inside you right now?”

“Tell me more about that.”

**Healthy marriages move toward each other, not away.**

### Attention and Attunement

Attunement means:

- Being emotionally present
- Paying attention
- Not multitasking during important conversations

**Sometimes small actions make a big difference.**

*Example:*

A husband learned that making eye contact while listening made his wife feel significantly more valued and safe.

# Combating Barriers to Emotional Intimacy



## Emotional Avoidance

Emotional avoidance looks like:

- staying busy
- focusing only on kids
- using screens
- drinking to decompress
- distracting themselves

**Avoidance of emotional conversations prevents deeper connection.**



## Ask Brave Questions

Examples: "How could I make our marriage feel safer for you?"  
"Are there ways I make you feel unsafe emotionally?"

**Ask the question and listen without becoming defensive.**

Sometimes the answer may be something simple:

- Changing your tone of voice
- Refraining from interrupting
- Being aware of facial expressions
- Removing distractions

**These seemingly small details can matter deeply.**



## Emotional Reactivity

When emotions run high and couples respond without thinking, it can lead to arguments, defensiveness, and escalation.



## Learn to Pause

Emotions are more than mere thoughts—they happen in our bodies. When feelings of anger, shame, frustration, or hurt surface, our natural instinct is to react immediately, but emotionally mature couples can pause before reacting. The pause provides an opportunity for you to recognize your feelings, identify the emotion, and choose your response.

### Instead of reacting with

anger →  
sarcasm →  
defensiveness →

### You can respond with

curiosity  
honesty  
gentleness



## Emotional Immaturity \*

Emotional immaturity looks like:

- Demanding immediate fulfillment of needs
- Refusing to engage emotionally
- Avoiding difficult conversations
- Escalating conflicts

**Marriage requires emotional adulthood.**



## Recognize the Personal Story

Every spouse brings a story and emotional history into marriage.

Examples: Feeling ignored as a child → interpreting distraction as rejection  
Past failure → assuming you've disappointed your spouse

Understanding your story helps you recognize:

- emotional triggers
- defensive reactions
- recurring fears

Without this awareness, we can unknowingly react to our past rather than our spouse.



## Resentment \*\*

Resentment is one of the greatest threats to emotional intimacy.

Resentment forms when:

- emotions are not expressed
- misunderstandings are never addressed
- hurt accumulates over time

**Resentment grows slowly.**



## Check the Personal Story

Instead of assuming your interpretation is true, check it.

Example: Instead of believing: "My spouse is disappointed in me."  
Ask: "Hey, I'm feeling like I let you down. Is that what's happening?"

Often the answer is completely different than the story we created.



### Selfishness

**Selfishness destroys emotional intimacy.**

Selfishness focuses only on:

- my feelings
- my frustrations
- my justice

**Emotional intimacy means caring about your partner's heart and considering their emotional experience.**



### Repair Quickly

Couples in healthy marriages repair quickly.

Repair means:

- apologizing
- taking responsibility
- clarifying misunderstandings
- reconnecting emotionally

Examples of repair language:

"I'm sorry for how I said that."  
 "I snapped earlier and that wasn't fair."  
 "What I meant to say was..."

Small repairs prevent small wounds from becoming deep resentment.

### \* A Note on Emotional Maturity

Emotional maturity encompasses the ability to manage your own emotions, a genuine concern for your partner's emotional experiences, and the capacity to endure challenging emotions without suppressing them.

### \*\* A Note on Resentment

Over time, resentment can become detrimental to a marriage. It often results in assuming the worst, creating emotional distance, fostering bitterness, and hardening hearts. Typically, struggling marriages are not shattered by a single incident but rather by years of unresolved resentment.

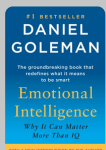
## Three Practices that Build Emotional Intimacy



### Practice 1 Learn Emotional Awareness

**Couples grow emotionally by learning to:**

- recognize emotions
- identify triggers
- understand deeper feelings  
*(like shame beneath anger)*



**Emotional Intelligence**  
Daniel Goleman



### Practice 2 Practice Honest Emotional Language

**Examples of emotionally healthy statements:**

"I'm feeling really hurt right now."  
 "I'm trying to understand why I'm so angry."  
 "Help me process what's going on."

**Talking about emotions becomes easier with practice.**



### Practice 3 Time Difficult Conversations Wisely

**Sometimes emotional wisdom means waiting.**

Emotional maturity considers:

- timing
- context
- emotional readiness

# Key Takeaways for Couples on Emotional Intimacy

Emotional intimacy begins with feeling safe with your spouse.

When one spouse shares something vulnerable, the other spouse must receive it gently.



Resentment grows when emotions are left unspoken.



Couples in healthy marriages repair quickly.



Learning to pause before reacting changes everything.

Emotional maturity is a skill that must be learned and practiced.

Emotional intimacy requires curiosity about your spouse's inner world.

Selfishness destroys connection; attentive love builds it.

## How can we start building emotional intimacy?



This week, set aside 45 minutes to an hour.



Remove any distractions, especially phones.



### Ask each other:

What emotions did you experience most this week?

Was there a moment you felt misunderstood?

When did you feel closest to me?

Is there anything we need to repair?

### A Common Misconception

Some partners often mistakenly equate: **Emotional Intimacy** with **Physical Intimacy**. When physical intimacy is lacking, emotional connections may falter, but couples in healthy marriages develop the ability to foster emotional connections independently of physical connection.

# Physical Intimacy in Marriage

Rick & Teresa Dunn



## Watch Session 03

<https://vimeo.com/1170082201/8946ffa6fe>



### The Ease and Unease of Physical Intimacy

Physical intimacy is both a place of wonder and a place of potential wounding. Because of this, conversations about sex often bring both comfort and discomfort.

#### Physical intimacy touches:

- **identity**
- **vulnerability**
- **past wounds**
- **desires**
- **rejection**
- **belonging**

This is the reason many couples steer clear of discussing it. However, evading the conversation frequently results in feelings of shame, secrecy, and increased disconnection.

In healthy marriages, partners learn to communicate honestly and graciously about physical intimacy.



### Sex as the Fruit of Intimacy

Sex is not primarily about sex — it is about intimacy.

Healthy physical intimacy is often the fruit of deeper connection in other areas of marriage.

Those areas include:

- spiritual intimacy
- emotional intimacy
- trust
- vulnerability
- communication

When those foundations are strong, physical intimacy often becomes a natural overflow of connection. When they are weak, sex often becomes a battleground.



### The Bigger Story of Sex

#### 1. Sex is God's Idea

In modern culture, sex is often reduced to pleasure, physical experience, and consumption.

Scripture presents a much bigger vision.

Sex was created by God as part of covenant marriage, designed to reflect:

- deep union
- vulnerability
- relational knowing
- the nature of God's relational love

Sex is not merely about two bodies. It is about two whole persons coming together in covenant. When we reduce sex to pleasure alone, we shrink the story God intended.

#### 2. Physical Intimacy Reflects God's Relational Nature

God designed marriage and sex to reflect something deeper about Himself.

In marriage:

- two people become one flesh
- they are known physically, emotionally, and spiritually

This mirrors how God invites us into deep relational union with Him. Physical intimacy a picture of covenant love, vulnerability, and relational oneness.



### The Order God Intended

1. **Spiritual Intimacy**
2. **Emotional Intimacy** (relational trust)
3. **Physical Intimacy**

### Culture's Reverse Order

1. **Physical Intimacy** (*immediately*)
2. **Emotional Intimacy** (*later - maybe*)
3. **Spiritual Intimacy** (*much later - rarely*)

### At Cartoon Version of Intimacy:

When physical intimacy comes first, couples may experience the feeling of connection without the emotional and spiritual foundation for it.



### A Key Challenge for Many Men

For many men, physical intimacy often becomes the primary way they experience connection.

Sex can feel like:

- belonging
- attachment
- closeness
- reassurance

There is nothing inherently wrong with this. However, when sex becomes the sole means of experiencing connection, issues can arise.

Healthy marriages develop multiple ways of connecting, including:

- emotional conversations
- affection
- shared experiences
- spiritual connections

Sex then becomes one expression of connection, not the only one.

## Physical Intimacy as a "Dashboard"



Physical intimacy in a marriage can act as a car's dashboard for your relationship, offering valuable insights into what may be happening beneath the surface.

When there is tension or conflict surrounding sex, it can indicate deeper issues such as:

- Emotional disconnection
- Resentment
- Stress
- Lack of communication
- Unresolved conflicts

Instead of simply asking: "Why aren't we having sex?"

A better question might be: "What factors in our relationship are creating distance?"

**Physical intimacy often brings to light deeper relational dynamics.**



### Navigating Sensitive Topics in Marriage

**Sex** and **money** are two subjects that often spark intense discussions in marriage.

Both of these issues are closely linked to:

- Vulnerability
- Security
- Power
- Identity

As a result, couples can sometimes find themselves as adversaries rather than allies during these conversations. However, healthy couples recognize these topics as opportunities for deeper understanding, rather than conflicts to be won.

# Combatting Barriers to Physical Intimacy



## Fear

Fear often drives:

- withdrawal
- blame
- defensiveness
- shame

Fear causes couples to hide rather than move toward each other.

**“Perfect love casts out fear.”**

1 John 4:18



## Engage with One Another Humbly

Physical intimacy requires humility because marriage reveals our deepest weaknesses, exposing:

- selfishness
- emotional immaturity
- insecurity
- fear

Instead of viewing this exposure as a failure, it can transform into a chance for growth and healing. Marriage frequently serves as one of God’s essential instruments for shaping our character.



## Shame and Secrecy

Because sex is rarely discussed openly, couples may carry:

- confusion
- embarrassment
- past wounds
- unrealistic expectations



## Move Toward Each Other

Shame thrives in silence, but healing begins when couples discuss their struggles. Acknowledging feelings of disconnection is a powerful first step for partners.

Example: “I miss you. I feel disconnected.”

- Defensive Response: “That’s not true.” / “I did four things this week to connect.”
- Healthy Response: “Tell me more.” / “Help me understand.”

Curiosity encourages reconnection, while defensiveness hinders it.



## Using Sex as a Weapon

Sex can sometimes become a tool for:

- control
- punishment
- validation
- leverage

This damages trust and deepens relational wounds.



## Take Time to Identify the Deeper Need

Healthy intimacy is built on a foundation of mutual care and respect. Issues related to physical intimacy often reflect symptoms rather than the underlying problems.

### Potential Symptom

- tracking how often sex happens
- using sex to prove a point
- withholding sex to punish
- pursuing sex to avoid emotional connection

### Deeper Need

- longing for closeness
- fear of rejection
- emotional disconnection
- unresolved resentment

The real work of intimacy often happens beneath the surface.



## Stress and Busyness

Life pressures can easily disrupt physical connection:

- work stress
- parenting
- exhaustion
- competing priorities



## Remember that Intimacy is a Long Journey

Intentional time and emotional connections are often essential for safeguarding intimacy.

Healthy physical intimacy typically develops over time through:

- Years of development
- Healing from past wounds
- Transparent conversations
- Deeply understanding one another

Many couples experience challenging seasons where intimacy becomes difficult. However, growth is always within reach.

# Key Takeaways for Couples on Physical Intimacy

Physical intimacy is both wonderful and vulnerable.

Physical intimacy is part of a much bigger story God designed.

Healthy physical intimacy flows from spiritual and emotional intimacy.



Physical intimacy uncovers deeper relationship needs.



Curiosity and humility create space for healing.



Talking about struggles begins the healing process.

Marriage exposes our weaknesses but also creates opportunity for growth.



Healthy physical intimacy is built over time.

## How can we start building physical intimacy?



This week, set aside 45 minutes to an hour.



Remove any distractions, especially phones.



Begin discussing physical intimacy with simple phrases/questions:

“I miss feeling close to you.”

“How have you been feeling about this part of our marriage?”

“What would help you feel safer or more connected?”

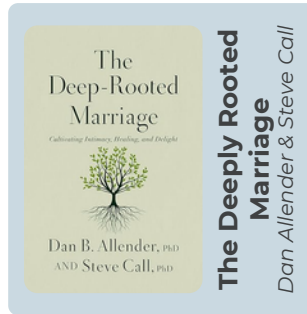
**The aim is not to resolve everything at once, but to foster closeness.**

When couples find themselves in need of more support, it is completely normal to seek outside assistance. This may involve options such as **counseling, marriage intensives, retreats, or couples mentoring**. Reaching out for help is not an indication of failure; rather, it often serves as a vital step towards healing and personal growth.

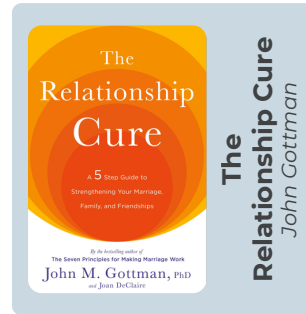
# Recommended Reading on Intimacy in Marriage



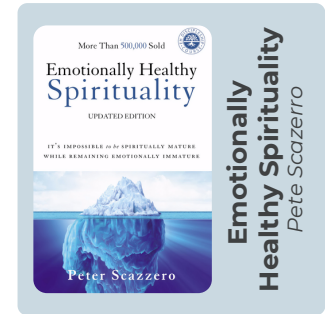
**Reimagining the Ignatian Examen**  
Mark Thibodeaux



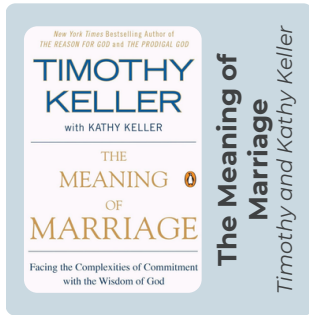
**The Deeply Rooted Marriage**  
Dan Allender & Steve Call



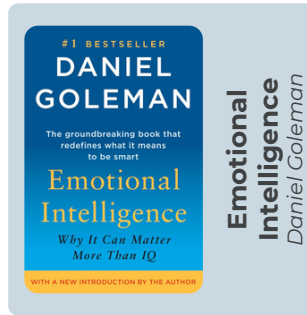
**The Relationship Cure**  
John Gottman



**Emotionally Healthy Spirituality**  
Pete Scanzero



**The Meaning of Marriage**  
Timothy and Kathy Keller



**Emotional Intelligence**  
Daniel Goleman



**A Celebration of Sex**  
Dr. Douglas E. Rosenau



**The Great Sex Rescue**  
Sheila Wray Gregoire

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## Building An Intimate Marriage That Will Last

*An intensive marriage retreat led by Rick & Teresa Dunn*



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