

How to Develop Spiritual Intimacy in Marriage **By Drs. Bev and Tom Rodgers**

The clock goes off at 6:30 am, and our team effort starts. Together we pack children's lunches, make sure book bags are loaded and papers are signed and of course, iron just the right blouse at the last minute. At 7:30 we push the kids out the door and mumble a weak prayer for their safety. Then it's off to a full day's work for us. As marriage counselors the roster for the day often includes a great deal of hurt, pain, frustration and tears.

The day rolls into evening and dinner is slung on the table. Then the nightly activities of church, cheerleading and sports practice begins. By 10:30 we frequently sink into bed exhausted. A peck on each other's lips and it's off to dreamland.

Now I ask you when is there time for a normal busy couple to develop spiritual intimacy? After 22 years of marriage, Tom and I discovered a powerful secret about spiritual oneness. We discovered that you *make* time for it.

Early in our marriage we realized that our busy schedules, the demands of parenting, and the heaviness of hearing other people's pain caused us to somewhat dry up spiritually. It was hard enough for us to maintain our spiritual center individually, much less, as a couple. This drought created distance and a sense of disconnection between Tom and I, which eventually led to a power struggle. We had disputes over seemingly insignificant things, which were blown out of proportion. This caused a breach of trust between us. Little did we know that our problem was rooted in our spiritual dryness.

Don't get the wrong idea here, just because we are marriage counselors doesn't mean that we are immune to marital discord. In fact, it can be quite embarrassing to slide into unhealthy relationship patterns when we spend all day instructing couples not to do so. Luckily we learned from our own spiritual plight, and we can now pass these lessons on to the next generation of spiritual lovers.

So how did we find our way out of our spiritual desert? The story goes like this. One anniversary Tom was looking for a gift that was unique, personal and, because he was in graduate school, very cheap! He decided to make me a Spiritual Journal. He took a simple notebook, filled it with paper and made tabs for various sections. He included a section for prayer requests, one for answers to prayer, one for spiritual insights, and one for inspirational readings, sayings and scriptures that I read during the day.

I was so delighted about my new gift that it generated much conversation between us. I wanted to share my spiritual insights with him, and tell him how I saw God in everyday things like the family of Cardinals that were feeding outside my window. I wanted to tell him about my prayer requests and answers to prayer. This led to us praying

more together and sharing much more of our spiritual selves with each other. Some days we couldn't wait to see each other to discuss what we had written in our journals. To our surprise, our spiritual lives began to flourish. We started feeling more connected to God and especially each other.

Trust bloomed where there was once fear and negativity. Our power struggle faded. We felt a sacred closeness that was deep and rich. It was then that we realized what was happening. We were developing spiritual intimacy.

We learned from this experience that spiritual oneness is less mystical and more practical than many people think. It involves getting excited about the simple things of God and making the time to share them. Spiritual intimacy can occur while you are sitting on the deck watching your kids frolic in a wading pool, or sliding down the slide with your two-year old in your arms. It can be in sacred prayer and meditation before you fall off to sleep at night while holding one another.

For those of you who are having trouble getting started, here are some practical steps.

- See sacredness in everyday things, and remember to share them with each other.
- Discuss blessings that occur throughout the day.
- Share prayer requests and answers to prayer on a regular basis.
- Tell your spouse about something inspirational that you read at least once a week.
- Surprise him or her with a saying or two under his or her pillow at night.
- Start a spiritual journal, just for the fun of it.

The spiritual oneness that we have developed is almost intoxicating. We now believe that we understand the Genesis passage in the Bible more clearly, where it says that the two shall become one flesh. Tom and I feel that we have grown into becoming one flesh, and so can you.