

What Is True Intimacy?

If you were to ask this question of people on the street, you would undoubtedly get many different answers. Men would probably emphasize sex, or a good sexual relationship. Women would probably emphasize a deep connection through the sharing of thoughts and feelings. Women would say less about sex. Both men and women would probably relate romantic notions of intimacy, such as “two people who have fallen in love”, or are in a state of being “in love”.

The differing perspectives of men and women suggest part of the problem in achieving true intimacy. That is, we are working from different, if not conflicting definitions. How can we achieve something called “true intimacy”, if we don’t even agree on a definition?

Before you launch into this book, let’s see if we can agree on a definition of the central concept. Hopefully, you will agree with this definition because it takes into account the differing needs of both men and women. We cannot have anything like “true intimacy” unless both men and women agree that the needs of both are met. Otherwise, we have one-sided expectations that leave one person dissatisfied. When this occurs, we have fake intimacy. It is intimacy in name only, but really does not represent the joining of two lives in a harmonious, satisfying, and lasting way.

One of the most accurate and beautiful definitions of true intimacy can be found in the New Testament of The Bible, I Corinthians: Chapter 13. Whether or not you ascribe to the Christian faith, you will find this definition quite thorough and striking in its description of true love.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man/woman, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even

as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Let's draw some conclusions from this passage. First, the experience of true love has greater value than anything else in life. Whether we admit it, or even realize it, most of us are seekers of true love. We live in an extremely materialistic culture, where money and power are synonymous. Everywhere we look people are sacrificing themselves for money and power. Unfortunately, we never get enough of either to be truly satisfied. Moreover, money and power can easily be lost. Whether we have money or power, or have had it and lost it, we eventually end up empty, still searching for something in life that lasts and is truly satisfying. True intimacy and true love are interchangeable concepts. To be truly intimate, we must come from a place of true love. What is that place?

Here the scripture offers a definition. First, "love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude." "Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Second, in order to love we have to give up childish ways. That is, love requires two people who have reached a level of maturity that rises above childishness. More specifically, love requires us to rise above our prejudices and narrow, incomplete points of view. In order to have true love we must rise above our own egos, needs, desires, and points of view. We must be able to truly listen to, understand, and care for another person who feels and thinks differently, and who sees the world through different lenses.

Finally, and most optimistically, the scripture asserts that love never ends. True love, or true intimacy is so satisfying, so compelling, so fulfilling that it tends to last for a lifetime. In fact, true love leaves a legacy that lasts past our lifetimes, enduring with our children and loved ones long after we are gone.

The state of true love suggested, albeit beautiful, wonderful, and promising is very hard to achieve. Alas, we are human beings, mere mortals. We come to our intimate relationships with all of the hang-ups, hurt feelings, fears, and bad habits left over from the imperfect families in which we originated, and left over from previous failed attempts at adult love relationships. Without awareness, we bring all of this baggage to our adult relationships, where they are played out on the stages of our lives in seemingly never ending tragic and futile dramas.

Simply knowing a good definition of love, and wishing our experience could be similar, doesn't get us far enough down the road to true intimacy. We need guidelines and recipes, both for recognizing and disarming dysfunctional patterns, as well as for establishing patterns that actually take us farther and farther down the road to true love.

This book seeks to provide you with the necessary guidelines and recipes for achieving true intimacy. However, you will not make must progress unless you practice.

In fact, you have to practice these guidelines and recipes so much that they actually come alive in your relationship, replace your old, dysfunctional habits, and become a regular part of your intimate experience. While this may seem like a very daunting task, it is more than worth the result. As we embark, let's go forward with this concise definition.

True Intimacy: *True intimacy is a process between two adults characterized by a) an unfolding awareness and accommodation of each other's deepest thoughts, feelings and needs; resulting in b) a lasting and satisfying sexual and emotional connection.*

This definition implies that, while sexual satisfaction is clearly important, it results from an unfolding awareness of each other's deepest thought, feelings, and needs. Inevitably, then, high quality communication becomes the pathway to true intimacy. There is no substitute for high quality interpersonal communication. It is the sine qua non of intimacy.

Unfortunately, most of us have not been taught in school or at home how to communicate effectively in intimate relationships. That's why there is a vital need, everywhere, for the information contained in this book. Here's hoping you will digest it, modify, and use it in a thousand ways in your own experience, and that it will result in the achievement and maintenance of true intimacy in your life and relationships. If so, this book may become one of your most valued possessions.