

Intentional Spiritual Intimacy in Marriage

Guest Speaker Sam Ingrassia

Good morning, gentlemen. This is very cool. It is a privilege to see this many guys out so early. I am on Central Time still so I am not sure if I am awake. It is a privilege to be with you guys. I came out from Dallas, Texas. I thought it was going to be warm here. A few years ago I used to live in Kissimmee. I hate to tell you how long ago, but we were living there the week EPCOT opened. Anyone been here that long?

How many of you have been coming to the MIMBS for over five years? Awesome. This is wonderful. This is a wonderful ministry Patrick Morley has. *Man in the Mirror* had influence on my life. A number of years ago I led a small group of guys through a study of that book. It had a great impact on my life and the lives of the men. There were practical and challenging issues. As I looked through the website to freshen up, I saw the twelve challenges that he talks about in the scope of ministry and the major aspects of men's lives. As I look it over I realize the focus for today is all about relationships at point number four, building godly relationships and marriages.

We are going to be talking this morning about marital prayer. I am aware of Patrick's book, *The Marriage Prayer Challenge*. I've taken that with an angle on sharing my story with you this morning. We will be talking about the same vital issue.

I am approaching my 38th wedding anniversary this May with my wife Vicki. We have three adult daughters living in Dallas. I have the joy of entering grandfatherhood February 2nd. Lila Michelle is 6 weeks old and we are having a great time with our first little granddaughter.

I pastored in New Jersey for nine years before the Lord called us into missions ministry. I am on staff with E3 Ministries – Equip, Evangelize, Establish. What we are about is establishing the church in the world. We are in about 35 countries. One of our main models is mobilizing North American churches and Christians for the purpose of short-term mission trips. We are doing evangelism in such a way to establish a church. We are planting new ones and strengthening existing ones.

Basically, the model is planting churches and establishing churches within reasonable walking distance of people. In so many places people are not able to access the church. How many walked here today? We don't walk to church either. We are working in places if we don't mobilize the church and take them there, people don't go.

My main ministry is in Colombia, South America. I will leave a week from tomorrow to Cali with a team. I have a team in Barranquilla this week and also the city of Armenia. We are mobilizing the church for the purpose of establishing the church.

What I want to share with you is something God has done in my life. It is just a side thing that has emerged but frankly has been a major game-changer in my life. The reason I am here is to talk to you about that.

I have here with me Baby Ben wind up Westclock alarm. Anyone remember this? This crowd will remember this. This belonged to my father. This ticking reminds me of hunting and fishing trips and sits on a shelf in my home office. When this thing had its power, when the bell would really ring – it would waken the dead. It is time to get up and hunt the rabbits or get in the deer blind. That alarm does not have something that this little cheapo made in China half broken, my travel alarm has on it.

The feature that this has, that this clock does not have is the snooze button. What I want to talk to you about today is I believe God has an alarm clock in our lives. That alarm rings in different areas of our life

from time to time. But we are pretty good at hitting the snooze button. Somehow in God's providence He allows us to hit that snooze button. It is like saying you know what God, I'll get to that later. I want to talk to you about a snooze button issue this morning.

Across any marriage, whether you are married four months, four years, or almost forty years like me, you could probably put an under construction banner across any marriage. It is always under construction. Life is like a moving target. Trying to hit those targets is difficult let alone hit the bull's eye, especially when the target is moving around. Try sighting in a rifle at 200 yards if the target is moving. You can't do it that way. You need a steady target.

In the spring of 2011 my wife Vicki and I hit what I would describe as a rough patch. It was not a crisis in our marriage. We have always had a good marriage but it was a weird season. Tension was touching on different aspects of our life. We got to a place where we had to sit down, and I remember this day very vividly, we were sitting in our living room and saying what is going on? What is the deal? We need to figure this thing out and work through it. We are in full time ministry and people in full time ministry do not have problems.

As we talked that afternoon a realization arose in Vicki's heart. As we talked, she said something that was like an incoming rocket. She said, "You know what? As I am thinking about it, part of what is going on is I started realizing you have failed me." Does that sound like an incoming rocket to you? You have failed me. Four words that blew my heart like a rocket. I have loved Vicki since I was 17 years old. How did I drop this ball, failed the woman I have loved virtually my whole life. Let me give you some back story.

There were some spiritual and emotional battles going on with two of our three adult daughters at the time. My wife knew we needed to be praying about those things and we really were not. We did not have a consistent prayer time together and she knew we needed to be praying. She felt the weight of the spiritual battles were falling more on her than on me and she was getting worn out from it. She basically said as incoming rocket number two, "I really can't do this alone anymore." She was feeling alone. She said I am tired and worn out. Part of that was because our oldest daughter had done a thirteen year journey into the broad way that leads to destruction.

We had done all I knew to do to raise my kids for Jesus Christ. I was a pastor at that time. When we got into the teen years for Tina she had to go blood, sweat and tears. Some of you had done that in your life as well. I have to some measure as well. But during that time when Tina was out there I had failed to lead Vicki and I in a consistent spiritual prayerful fight for her soul. It is not that we never prayed together, but I really fumbled the ball in leading us in the spiritual fight in that kid's soul. Vicki felt that fell more on her than on me. It was happening again and she was saying I can't do this alone anymore and that is what she was crying out to me. Then she said rocket number three, and it was not any bitterness, it was sharing revelation. She said, "Furthermore, I feel like I need to connect more with you spiritually." You know what? I would say I already knew that.

I was nursing a burden of that very issue. It was not that we never prayed together. I don't want to give you that impression. Here is what I would say. We are doing life like this. I am moving along and Vicki was moving along, and our spiritual connectivity was here and there. Our spiritual condition was haphazard, not regular and lacking intentionality. Whatever happened, just happened. That is pretty much the way we were doing spiritual life together.

We are spiritual people, servants of Christ in full time ministry. But the regular spiritual connectivity was lacking. I don't want you to get nervous because I am not a guilt dealer. I don't want to send you out feeling worse than you do in this touchy area I am addressing this morning. I am not going to tell you try harder. I want to share with you something that changed my marriage and life.

GIFT OF REPENTANCE AND REVELATION

I want to talk to you about a game-changer this morning. But interestingly enough, it is so simple it will blow your mind. It has mine. I am going to talk to you about a realistic path today that every man in this room can do. In that living room that day I got two gifts from the Lord. The first was a gift of repentance. I was broken before my wife. I literally put my hands up before my wife and said, "Vicki, guilty."

I had tears and I apologized the best I knew how to say that I was sorry. But saying sorry is not enough. You have to do something. The Lord gave me a gift of revelation. What I mean by that is this. He showed me exactly what He wanted me to do. I said, "Vicki we are going to pray together, honey. What we are going to do is we are going to pray the Bible. We are going to pray through the Word of God together. We are going to let the Bible become the tracks that we run on. We are going to let the Bible show us what to pray about and let it become the guide and the template and give us the content for the things we could pray about. "

We will look for topics, key words, ideas from the Bible and use those ideas as the focus of our prayer. If it was grace, peace, love, trials, our speech, whatever topic God would show us, that would become our prayer focus and that is what we will pray over the girls. We started in one of my favorite books, Hebrews. It was awesome. We were connecting together more intentionally on a path. This burden I was nursing was being lifted. My wife's heart was being nurtured in a fresh new way and it was going very well. We decided we are going to not just read the Bible, not even study the Bible, we are going to pray through the Bible – just simple Scripture prayers.

We started doing this and I got about three months into this. We are not praying every day and I will explain that in a minute. But in intentionality now we are praying more regularly than we were. I got about three months into this thing, and God clearly said to me, *Sam I want you to use your failure in this area in life in marriage as a platform to call men out on it.*

I started on that path and I started sharing with other colleagues, my brother, my nephew, family members, pastors, elders, deacons and Sunday school teachers. I knew a lot of Christian leaders and godly business men through the course of life and ministry. We went to lunch and I'd share with them what I am sharing with you today. I would say here is what happened in my life. Here is what God showed me and what Vicki and I are doing.

I would say that a suspicion I had has been proven true and that is most of us are living with a level of guilt. That is showing us that we have a burden that we are not cutting it in spiritual influence and leadership at home particularly in marriage and particularly evidenced in the area of praying with my wife, or shall I say lack of praying with my wife. It is something I know I ought to be doing but I know I am not getting it done. As I share with all these guys, we are going to church, attending small groups, we take kids to the events – we are doing the stuff. But on the personal connectivity we were lacking. I am doing all this work in ministry in the kingdom but at my house I am dropping the ball, in this particular area especially.

As I am talking with my friends, I say here it comes, you can lie to me if you want to, but that is between you and the Lord. The big question is, apart from praying over meals, praying at bedtime to put your children and grandchildren to bed, praying at a church meeting or some activity, how often do you and your wife pray together – just the two of you? Tell me how often that happens. Here are the answers. Try not to shout out your answer today. I know you want to shout it out for everyone to hear, but try to refrain yourselves. Never, rarely, occasionally, hardly ever, not enough? When needed? The last one was mine – when she asks me. By the time Vicki has asked me to pray about this, I already feel like a jerk. Why didn't I think about that?

If your answers are in any of those ballparks, you are not alone. I am telling you, you are not alone. We desire to be spiritual leaders but it is like we kind of don't know what to do. A motivated guy might go to a Christian bookstore, get a devotional, go through questions with his wife, and it feels stilted and forced, not relevant, and it might work for a while but not for long. So that is a little frustrating.

Then there is an intimidation factor that guys tell me about and I had this a little bit. My wife is an intercessor in her own right. It goes like this: Sam, my wife loves God more than me. She reads the Bible more than me. She has a prayer partner. What should I do? Should I teach her Romans? I don't even know Romans.

It is not like you would say, "Okay, dear, the time has now arrived for you to come into the living room. You will now sit at your feet and I will string spiritual pearls of wisdom upon you, from on high where I dwell." If you said that, what would your wife say? I know where you dwell buddy. That is not going to work, and that is not what she wants.

The awakening was when I realized Vicki does not need me to disciple me. She has been walking with the Lord with over 40 years. If I have to come up with a new thing to share with her from the Bible, I am out of luck. She does not need me to disciple her in the way of giving her information. What she needs is for me to walk with her more intentionally in life. I found that praying through the Bible with her is a simple guide to walk with her in life. It is led by the Spirit of God. That is what we have been doing. I have been walking with her in yoke more intentionally simply using the Bible as a guide for our prayers. We are following the path of the Word of God which is bringing me to a connection of spiritual intimacy with my wife.

I call my friends out for an honest confession and assessment of where they are. They'd give me a fist bump and say, "That's what I'm going to do." I'd say let's go on a journey together. We know where we need to go. We know we need to walk closer with our wife in spiritual intimacy so let's go together. Men need a plan. We need tracks to run on. Just say the Word contains the tracks we can run on.

READ, STUDY, PRAY

Take the black bookmark on the table in front of you. I want to just look at it with you quickly and show you something that is so silly simple you are not going to believe it. On one side it describes the issue but flip to the side that says quick start guide.

Read out loud a small selection of verses with your wife, no more than a paragraph. Proceed slowly. Take turns to participate in reading. That is just it. Read a few verses, not a lot of verses, just what seems like a reasonable section. Sometimes it is just one or two verses. Choose what seems to be a good length of read that is appropriate and number two is observe the passage together and share your thoughts. This is not a teaching time, but a time of prayer.

This is important. We read the verses, we sit quietly, listen for the Spirit of God, and ask what do You want us to pray about from this text? What is here for a prayer focus? I like to listen to her first. It is not me jumping out there telling her what I see. I sit quietly and ask, "What jumps out at you?" Isn't that a profound Bible question? What jumps out at you? Listen to her heart. What does God show her? Do you know how important that is? What is the Lord speaking to her about? Then I might share what I see, and then pray in the one flesh spiritual intimacy in your marriage. You both can participate. Find what is comfortable in your marriage in terms of praying out loud. The idea is to pray about those things. The observations you make becomes the focus.

The bottom of the bookmark says when you miss, don't be discouraged, continue where you left off. I put this bookmark in my Bible where we are. Right now Vicki and I are praying in the book of James, so that

bookmark sits in my Bible. That is my gift to you today. Put that bookmark in your Bible, and that is your reminder to pray with your wife. Keep it there as a reminder. You have tracks and paths to run on. Find a book that fits for you. Pray through Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Psalms, whatever works for you. You can find a book of the Bible easy enough to pray through. Read, observe, pray through the Bible together. What we are talking about here is what I call expository praying. It is not expository teaching, it is expository praying.

Let me share an example. Just a week or two ago this jumped out at us in the Scripture. "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you" (James 1:19-20). We read the verses. We stay quiet. Honey, what jumps out at you? She said, "Quick to listen." I said the phrase that jumps out at me is humbly accept the Word planted in you. God planted His Word in us and we need to accept it and it can save us or deliver our lives.

Let's pray, I say. "Father, we thank you today that from the book of James we are reminded we need to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. Lord, I feel like sometimes I get this completely backwards. I am quick to speak, slow to listen and quick to anger. That anger does not work your righteousness. Lord, help us to receive the Word that you planted in us.

"Lord, today we pray for Christina, Nicole and Stephanie, our three girls. We pray for Brian, who is with Stephanie and their daughter Lila. In their lives help them to be quick to hear You and one another. Help them to be slow to speak out. Help them to be slow to anger. Lord, the Word we planted in them, that You planted in them, help them receive that Word today. Speak to their heart. Help them to be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. In Jesus' Name. Amen."

I am just trying to give you a quick example. Gentlemen, it can be that quick. This does not have to be a 30 minute or hour Bible Study. You have to go to work. Life is busy. Find a time to go to the Word, come together, listen to the Spirit and pray those things rather than praying off the top of your head all the time. I am either bored or boring praying the same thing in the same way, lacking creativity, where do I go with this thing? Your prayers can be as fresh as the flow Word of God itself. How awesome is that? You want to hit the targets of life? Let the Spirit of God lead you.

I can't tell you how many times what we have read is exactly what God wanted us to pray, because the Spirit of God is leading us in this way.

I know you have heard marriage illustrated as a triangle. God is at the top, husband and wife are in the corners. One plus one plus one equals one in Christian marriage. God is at the core of it. It is like a marital trinity if you will. The Bible says in Genesis Chapter 2:24, "For this cause a man shall leave His father and his mother, and cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh; and the man and his wife were both naked and not ashamed."

INTENTIONAL SPIRITUAL INTIMACY

One flesh. Physical intimacy conceives and births physical life. Likewise, spiritual intimacy conceives and births spiritual life. It is procreation. It is multiplication. You cannot have children if you do not come together to conceive them. You cannot birth spiritual life in your marriage if you don't come together to have that intimacy. Use the Word of God as the guide for the Spiritual intimacy in marriage. God will show up. I promise you. I say this declaring in faith, this is the Word of God and you have the Holy Spirit and you have your marriage.

I look across this crowd. It is an older crowd. You are like me. I felt like I lost so much time. God can restore the years the locusts have eaten. He did that in my daughter's life in a miraculous powerful work

to break her and bring her back to himself. She is a warrior for Christ today. I can't say it is because I fought for her in prayer. I have apologized to her, by the way. It has been an amazing thing God has done.

Spiritual intimacy and spiritual life is conceived and birthed. Do you want to have love and peace and unity and answered prayer and insight and spiritual growth in marriage no matter how long you have been married? You can step into this following the Word of God. It is one flesh; it is a spiritual umbrella covering your life, marriage, ministry, kids, grandkids; one flesh taking the Word of God in spiritual intimacy to call the Word over your family. It is an amazing and powerful thing.

Physical intimacy conceives and births physical life. Spiritual intimacy conceives and births spiritual lives. "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ Loved the church and gave Himself up for her . . . To make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word . . ." (Ephesians 5:25-26). Jesus loved His bride and we are called to love ours. He set her apart, cleansing her by the washing of water through the Word. We can do the very same thing. We are talking about intentional, spiritual intimacy this morning. There is an alarm ringing in your life in this area, and you can answer it. This is a message of hope. I am so excited to be here to tell this message to you. It has been a game changer for me.

If you are a young guy here I am begging you, don't miss this. Don't miss it. Your wife will likely welcome you. The thief is at hand to steal, kill and destroy. This is the way to stop him. The movement is at hand right here. This is the movement I believe that we need. There are many movements. We need today, when marriage is under attack, we need a movement of Christian men who will pray in their homes. You see what God will do if we could alter the DNA of Christian marriage.

This bookmark is a tool for you. I have a book here today called, *Just Say the Word*. This book is \$8. We self-publish it. We want to see what God will do with it. I encourage you to get the book to read more about this. We wrote a short thin book so any guy could read it. This book can be read in one evening. I promise.

Thirdly, justsaytheword.net– the website is at the bottom of the bookmark. There are also business cards. You can see the sketch video on the website and there is a newsflash email. There is a card you can sign up with and we send out an encouragement newsflash periodically on marital prayer. Just Say the Word. Gentlemen it is marriage, prayer and the Word of God woven together. These are three provisions from God woven together into a powerful union of spiritual intimacy.

I don't know where you are at with Christ or how long you have known the Lord, but I declare to you in the Name of Jesus you can do this. You have the Word; you have your marriage; you pray to God together with your wife and God will show up. Let's pray.

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, I pray in Jesus' Name, that You would put the seed in our hearts fresh again, and the men who see the webcast in the future. Put on our hearts to answer the alarm for intentional spiritual intimacy in our marriage. I pray this in Jesus' Name. Amen.