“Recapturing Romance & Intimacy In Your Marriage”
The word romance conjures up different images for each of us, and our expectations of what constitutes a romantic relationship also vary. Women are inclined to describe romance as the things their mate does to make them feel loved, protected, and respected. Wives, especially those married to busy husbands, crave the excitement of romantic encounters. They long for “some enchanted evening, across a crowded room.” Flowers, compliments, nonsexual touching, and love notes are all steps in this direction. So is helping out at home. A man who shares in the
duties of cooking, cleaning, and picking up the kids after basketball practice is much more likely to win the affection of his wife.

Men, on the other hand, rely more on their senses in the area of romance. They appreciate a wife who makes herself as attractive to him as possible. A man wants to be respected—and even better, admired—by his wife. He likes to hear his wife express genuine interest in his opinions, hobbies, and work.

Perhaps the most evocative descriptions of romantic love come from Solomon’s Song of Songs, where we see that it includes both intimacy and emotional excitement: “My lover is mine and I am his” (2:16) and “My heart began to pound for him” (5:4). We see how deep affection inspires desire and complete appreciation for another: “How beautiful you are, my darling!” (4:1). We learn that to be romantic means to pursue the object of our affection—and to pine when he or she eludes us: “All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him” (3:1). And we see how powerfully a public display of affection communicates romantic love: “He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love” (2:4).

When a husband and wife achieve true intimacy, of course, they will naturally desire to share their romantic feelings at the deepest level. By God’s design, one of the most pleasurable ways for couples to express their profound love and appreciation is through His gift of sexual intimacy.
Some would say that “having sex” and “making love” are one and the same, but there’s an important distinction between the two. The physical act of intercourse can be accomplished by any appropriately matched members of the animal kingdom. But the art of making love, as intended by God, is a much more meaningful and complex experience. It is physical, emotional, and spiritual. In marriage we should settle for nothing less than a sexual relationship that is expressed not only body to body, but also heart to heart and soul to soul. This intimate union, two becoming “one flesh,” is both the symbol and fruit of genuine, heartfelt romantic love between a husband and wife.

The epitome of deeply felt romantic love—including sexual intimacy—can only be expressed within the unbreakable bond of marriage. We have already read some of Solomon’s depictions of romance. His Song of Songs concludes with this eloquent description of the connection between two married lovers: “Love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty flame” (8:6).

This fiery, romantic, sexually intimate love is not achieved overnight. It develops between a man and woman through a process called marital bonding. Such bonding refers to the emotional covenant that links a man and woman together for life and makes them intensely valuable to one another. It is the specialness that sets those two lovers apart from every
other couple on the face of the earth. It is God's gift of intimate companionship.

How does this marital bonding occur? According to the research of Dr. Desmond Morris, bonding is most likely to develop among those who have moved systematically and slowly through twelve steps during their courtship and early marriage. These steps begin with the visual connection, then progress to conversation, then to several stages of nonsexual touching, and finally to the last four stages, which are distinctly sexual and private—and reserved for marriage—culminating in intercourse.

What research shows is that intimacy must proceed slowly if a male-female relationship is to achieve its full potential. When two people love each other deeply and are committed for life, they have usually developed a great volume of understanding between them that would be considered insignificant to anyone else. They share countless private memories unknown to the rest of the world. This is in large measure where their sense of specialness to one another originates. When sexual intercourse occurs without the stages that should have preceded it, the woman, especially, is likely to feel used and abused.

If you are married and now regret that you progressed too quickly toward physical intimacy, it is not too late to go back to the very beginning and rediscover each other anew. I know of no better way to draw close to the person you love. Touching and talking and holding hands and gazing into one another's eyes and building memories are often the best ways to invigorate a tired sex life and renew intimacy.

In fact, men in particular would be wise to recognize that because of the critical physiological and emotional differences between men and women, a woman's sexual desire is aroused by means of these relational types of activities. Unless a woman feels a certain closeness to her husband—unless she believes he respects her as a person—she may be unable to enjoy a sexual encounter with him. A man can contribute immeasurably to his wife's sexual enjoyment—while enhancing his own—by giving time and attention to her emotional needs. He should make plenty of time for romance outside the bedroom. He should understand that fatigue is a sexual “inhibitor” and help his wife find opportunities for emotional and physical restoration. And he will be richly rewarded by doing all he can to build her self-esteem. The strong connection between self-worth and the ability to respond to sexual stimuli means that anything a man does to reduce his wife's self-esteem will probably be translated into
bedroom problems. But respect and affirmation will increase her self-confidence and lead to a more fulfilling sex life. The Lord established the institution of marriage and gave us the gift of physical intimacy as a means of expressing love between husband and wife. As designed by Him, the sexual relationship in marriage is much more than an afterthought or a method to guarantee procreation. When characterized by mutual respect, tenderness, and affection, it is the ultimate demonstration of profound, romantic love between a man and woman. It is also a glue that holds marriages together.

No matter how you define and express romance—through flowers, love notes, an evening in the bedroom, or all of the above—it is a vital ingredient for achieving genuine and lasting intimacy in your marriage. If you are careful to nurture and protect the flame of romance in your relationship, you'll enjoy its warmth for a lifetime.

Action Steps for Your Romance

• Write down what romance means to you and ask your partner to do the same. Now compare notes. You may be surprised at what your spouse comes up with!

• What are your favorite memories of romance with your mate? How could you recapture those? What new memories would you like to make? Schedule at least two of these for sometime in the next two months.
Here is some additional encouragement for couples from Dr. James Dobson’s Family Talk:

CLICK TO READ | *Difference Between Male and Female Sex Drives*

CLICK TO LISTEN | *Women and Intimacy*

For over three decades, Dr. James Dobson has been America’s leading authority and advocate for the family. This material is excerpted from Dr. Dobson’s book *5 Essentials for Lifelong Intimacy* (Copyright © 2014 by Siggie, LLC Published FaithWords and is used with permission).