“The Love of Many Will Wax (Grow) Cold” Matthew 24:12

Satan’s Attack on the Human Capacity to Love
Ezekiel 36:26
A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.
God is a God of Love

• God is a God of relationships.
• John 15:12: This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.
• Yet it is prophesied in Matthew 24:12 that “the love of many shall wax cold”.
• It stands to reason that anything that dulls the love in our hearts and the joy in our relationships is not of God.
Galatians 5:22-23

• But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

• The fruit of the Spirit are feelings:
  ❖ Love is a feeling
  ❖ Joy is a feeling
  ❖ Peacefulness is a feeling
  ❖ Longsuffering is action based on feelings
  ❖ Gentleness is action based on feelings
  ❖ Faith is a feeling

Could it be that dullness of our emotions/feelings has the potential to restrict the flow of the Holy Spirit in our lives?
Intimacy

• Dictionary.com: A close, familiar, and usually affectionate or loving personal relationship with another person or group.

• Typically, children learn about and develop intimate relationships through interacting with parents and close family members. How we learn as children will follow our relationships for the rest of our lives.
Many types of intimacy

- **Emotional** – the ability to share a wide range of feelings without fear of judgment or rejection
- **Physical** – being sensual, playful, and sensitive in physical intimacy that is joyful and fulfilling for both partners
- **Intellectual** – sharing ideas or talking about issues and still respecting each other’s beliefs and views
- **Spiritual** – discussing how spirituality works in our lives, respecting each other’s spiritual needs and beliefs
- **Conflict** – the ability to work through our differences in a fair and balanced way, and reach solutions that are mutually satisfactory
- **Play** – Having fun together, through recreation, relaxation or humor
When Intimacy Gets Hijacked

• *Intimacy Anorexia* (IA) is the active withholding of emotional, spiritual, and physical intimacy from the spouse or primary partner. This active withholding impacts the spouse significantly, but regardless of pain to self or their spouse, they continue.

• It is a deep-seated intimacy detachment disorder, referred to as “the silent cancer in marriage”.

• Nearly everyone who meets the criteria for IA is unaware that they have the problem, as they view their levels of intimacy as normal.
What is IA?

• Intimacy Anorexia (IA) is a defense mechanism for coping with emotional pain. People with IA have learned to withdraw emotionally to reduce their levels of pain.

• Having IA wasn’t a conscious choice to develop. It was a self-defense strategy to cope with pain. It is all they know, so they don’t even realize they have an issue.
What is IA?

• What psychologists say is a conscious choice is to engage in the anorexic behavior, as a way to maintain the wall of protection from hurt.

• When someone gets too close, the IA will engage in intentional behavior to increase the distance back to a “safe” level. That behavior then causes pain to the encroacher, causing them to retreat. The IA intentionally hurts others to avoid being hurt himself.
Is it Really Intentional?

- IAs want to believe it is not, even when they have withheld love and pushed the spouse away hundreds of times.
- Each choice of withholding intimacy is an act for which the IA must be held responsible.
- Each choice of withholding intimacy is a decision that, with practice, can be changed.
Does This Man Look Comfortable?

Photo credit: Usage rights purchased from www.shutterstock.com
Actually, He Is.

• In fact, he would be uncomfortable out of his box. He feels safe and secure in his box. Coming out is scary. It represents the possibility of hurt.

• Once people become aware that they have IA, they have a choice: live this way (emotionally inhibited and hurting those around them) the rest of their life, or work to attain a level of love and joy they can barely imagine.

• It takes courage to reopen themselves to a full range of feelings. It will seem risky and frightening at first, but the rewards are immeasurable.

• IA can be overcome, but it will take conscious effort. Daily.
The first cause of Intimacy Anorexia is sexual abuse. The individual who experiences this trauma may conclude that intimacy (not just sexual) is not safe or is actually painful. IA is a defensive response to the abuse.
Second Way People Develop IA

The second cause is the inability to attach to the cross-gender parent during childhood. The parent could have been unavailable, unstable, hostile, demanding, overly protective, or emotionally unpredictable. They could have been an addict or had mental health issues. They could simply have been in a bad marriage themselves and not able to role-model an intimate relationship.
Parent/Child Dynamics

• When a child expresses some form of need, or displays a negative emotion (e.g., crying or expressing anger toward the parent), the parent responds with intolerance, rejection, or punishment. The child learns to avoid asking their parent for attention, comfort, and support.

• The parent does not supervise or provide guidance about handling life’s difficulties. The unhappy child begins to assume that everything is his/her fault.
Parent/Child Dynamics

• Because the child’s distress is not eased by the parent, and it can’t be tolerated by the child, the only way for the child to cope with negative emotions is to stifle them. They learn to not talk about it and to pretend that everything is just fine.

• Parents: You MUST examine yourself to see if this is happening in your home now, and find a way to overcome it, or you are potentially dooming your child to a life of quiet despair.
Exodus 34:6-7

• And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,

• Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.
A third cause is being in a long-term relationship with someone who has IA. The continually rejected spouse learns to numb their emotions to dull the pain of being alone in the marriage.

This is similar to the parent/child dynamic. The spouse’s needs or feelings are met with rejection or punishment, so their defense mechanism is to stifle their feelings.
Fourth Way People Develop IA

A fourth cause of Intimacy Anorexia is sexual addiction. This person connects to fantasy and/or pornography on a regular basis. They emotionally stay underdeveloped and have little ability to connect intimately to another person. This phenomenon has become rampant. The “hook-up” app, Tinder, recently became the top grossing app in the Apple App Store, ahead of Netflix, Pandora, and popular games.
Who Is Most Likely to Develop IA?

• While there is no simple measurement, a *Psychology Today* article estimated it is present in about **17% of adults** in Western cultures. Counting their spouses and children, IA potentially reaches half of the population.

• Two psychologists who treat IA patients have reported that most of their IA patients are men, while one said that his are nearly evenly divided, but slightly higher among women.
Who Is Most Likely to Develop IA?

• Most of their IA patients have a susceptibility to addiction. One counselor specializing in addiction reported that 68% of his clients had IA. In fact, he said the IA was the primary addiction that led to the secondary addiction (drugs, alcohol, sexual, etc) for which they sought treatment. (In other words, the drug use arose due to the IA.)

• A marriage counselor reported that nearly 40% of his couples had at least one partner with IA.
• Because the IA person has learned to ignore and deny his own negative emotions, he is likely to be unaware that he is not perceiving or adequately attending to others’ emotions.

• By extension, if you confront the IA with revelations that he is emotionally unavailable and distant, you are likely to be met with denial and strong resistance/defensiveness, because he really doesn’t see it. Many find it too painful to acknowledge any fault in themselves.

• Obviously, this pattern will wreak havoc in close relationships.
How to Diagnose Intimacy Anorexia

The spouse or romantic partner (or counselor) should do the rating, as the person with IA is not likely to see it himself.
Ten Indicators

• Five or more is a positive diagnosis.
• As we go through the list, try to examine yourself to see if some of these characteristics apply to you or your spouse. Ask yourself how your spouse would answer about you.

(List is taken from the book *Intimacy Anorexia*, by Dr. Doug Weiss)
What are the ten indicators for IA?

1. **Busy**: Intimacy anorexics stay so busy that they have little time for their spouse. This is their way of avoiding emotions, by keeping their mind occupied on tasks. The spouse may accuse them of putting them last, only giving them the “leftovers” of their time.

2. **Blame**: The intimacy anorexic will blame their spouse for the emotional problems in the marriage. Examples: “She’s too needy.” “She pressures me too much.”
What are the ten indicators for IA?

3. **Withholding Love**: The intimacy anorexic actively withholds love the way the spouse likes to be loved. Example: They refuse to say “I love you” even when the spouse clearly longs to hear it. They refuse, or give minimal, touch or comfort when the spouse clearly needs it.

• This is a direct violation of Ephesians 5:25 and Colossians 3:19: “Husbands, love your wives…”

4. **Withholding Praise**: Intimacy anorexics do not regularly praise their spouse privately.
5. **Withholding Sex**: Not all intimacy anorexics withhold sex from their spouse, but they do withhold *intimacy* during sex. They will be selfish and perfunctory, getting their needs met without seeing that their partner is also fulfilled.

- This is a direct violation of 1 Corinthians 7:3-4: “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time...”
What are the ten indicators for IA?

6. **Withholding Spiritually**: Intimacy anorexics can be very religious by attending church and can even be the pastor or spiritual leader at the church. But at home they rarely pray with their spouse, or worship or read the Bible together.

- This is a direct violation of Ephesians 5:24: “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.” The husband is to be the head of the home in everything, including spirituality.
What are the ten indicators for IA?

7. **Feelings:** The IA is someone who is unwilling or unable to share their emotions with their spouse. They tend to be very stoic, holding in their feelings.

They avoid deep conversations if it will force them to address emotions.
What are the ten indicators for IA?

8. **Criticism**: Ongoing or ungrounded criticism toward their spouse. They seem to look for the bad in the relationship. They will ignore the positive and focus on the negative, even if the relationship has far more positive than negative in it. Since no one is perfect, they will find something they can criticize, and then will use that as an excuse to withhold affection.

- This is a violation of 1 Corinthians 13: 4-5, “love...is kind...thinks no evil...”
What are the ten indicators for IA?

9. **Anger/Silence**: An IA can use anger or silence to control their spouse. If a discussion brings out any emotions, they will simply refuse to speak further.

10. **Money**: This is the least common feature of IA but when it’s present it is really strong. The IA will use money to control the spouse.
IA Patterns of Behavior

• Many IA’s engage in what psychologists call “Starve the dog.”

• They starve their spouse of intimacy which, long term, eventually causes the spouse to act out in some way (for example, anger). Then they blame their spouse for the problem in the marriage.

• They are experts at playing the victim when in fact they were the true troubler.
Another IA Pattern of Behavior

• A second pattern is, “I can read your mind.” In this scenario, the IA declares, in their mind, what you are thinking or feeling and guesses your motives (they are always negative interpretations).
• They don’t discuss it with you, they just treat you as if that’s what you’re thinking.
• They use this as an excuse to treat you poorly, create distance, and blame you.
“I Can Read Your Mind”

Her: he's probably thinking about other girls...

Him:
Why do we put round pizza in a square box, then eat it in triangles
Characteristics of IA

• Intimacy anorexia is a form of addiction. The person who has it can use denial, anger, blaming, or rationalization for their behavior.

• The intimacy anorexic is very friendly to others, yet has almost no truly close friends with whom they confide feelings.

• They tend to be very social and outgoing, because it fulfills their needs on a safe, surface level. Most of these acquaintances will have no idea the person is stunted emotionally because they never get close enough to see it.
Contributors to Staying Stuck in IA

• Continually seeing yourself as the victim.
• Having a real or fantasy other person, who will give you attention without asking for sex or intimacy. It may be an “emotional affair” but you don’t see it as cheating because you “haven’t done anything.” IAs are good at long-distance relationships.
• Hanging on to your fear, stay inside yourself where it is safe.
• Staying busy, too busy to feel.
Contributors to Staying Stuck in IA

• Adopting an entitlement attitude. Telling yourself that you are more important than your spouse.
• Being in control, so you can maintain an aura of safety.
• Staying fiercely independent, because having to depend on someone takes trust, which is just too scary.
• Being selfish. Your needs must come first.
• Building a wall to keep others out.
• Continually looking for, and reminding yourself of, your spouse’s flaws.
Effect on the Spouse

• The spouse of an intimacy anorexic senses they are unimportant and unwanted. He or she is starving for connection and begging for love, to no avail.

• The more the spouse shows need, the more the IA withdraws. The more the IA withdraws, the worse the spouse feels. It becomes a vicious cycle.

• The marriage relationship is more like roommates than romance.
How does it feel to live with an intimacy anorexic?

• Loneliness is the most common feeling.
• The spouse senses that their soul is drying up, or that they have not been touched on the inside for so long. These are very common feelings for a partner of an intimacy anorexic.
• Partner: It is not your fault!!!
“It’s Not My Fault”

• Take these words in. **You are not in any way responsible for the fact that your spouse is an intimacy anorexic.**

• For as long as you can remember, you have been desperately trying to please your spouse. **You have been trying to do the impossible: evoke love from someone who does not choose to give love.**

• It is time to stop your efforts and realize that you are amazing as you are. Your spouse’s choice to withhold love is not a reflection of your worthiness; it is actually not about you at all, not about your height, your weight, your income, your housekeeping skills, etc.
Getting Help

• Persons suffering from intimacy anorexia can be helped if they really want to learn to love fully. Just like any change, the person must be motivated and work on it to achieve success.

• First, they have to admit that they have a problem. This is difficult because they may not even recognize that they have an intimacy dysfunction. They have to be willing to trust their partner’s assessment.
Getting Help, Part 2

• They have to be willing to examine themselves, and to deal with the issues that caused them to retreat in the first place.
• They have to commit to a daily regimen of intimacy exercises with their spouses.
• They have to be held accountable by their partner, and face consequences for withholding intimacy.
The Three Daily Steps

- **Step #1 – Prayer**
  Prayer is an absolute necessity in marriage. You’ve heard: “The family that prays together, stays together.” In additional to your usual prayers, you should spend a minimum of five minutes per day praying together, out loud, specifically for the challenges IA brings to your marriage, praying for God to open the heart of the avoidant partner.
The Three Daily Steps

• **Step #2 – Feelings Exercise**
  Emotional intimacy is a second very important aspect that a couple needs to develop and maintain throughout their relationship.

• The lack of sharing emotions is one of the largest hindrances for a couple trying to maintain intimacy. That is why the feelings exercise is *critical*. 
Feelings Exercise

Pick any feeling from the feelings wheel. Then, while looking into your partner’s eyes, place the feeling in the following sentences. “I feel (feeling) when ______. I first remember feeling (feeling) when __________.”

There are no right or wrong answers. The spouse is to listen without comment. Do NOT use this time to bring up issues in your relationship. You can of course do that, just not during the feelings exercise time.
Feelings Exercise

The purposes of the exercise are:

1) to learn to reconnect to a wide variety of feelings,

2) to remember back to these feelings prior to the IA taking control of your emotions, and

3) to learn to express your feelings in a safe environment.
The Three Daily Steps

• Step #3 – Praise

You are the primary voice in your spouse’s life. A silent voice is the cruelest thing you can do to your spouse. Praise and nurturing one another is an essential ingredient for a vibrant, ongoing, intimate relationship. Praise, both giving and receiving, is a skill. Skills can be learned by anyone.
Praise Exercise

• First you both individually think of two things that you love, appreciate, or value about the other person.
• Then, while looking into each others’ eyes, tell each other what it is that you value in them. Say, “(Name), I love ____ about you. (Elaborate as appropriate.)”
• Practice giving the praise with sincerity, really taking time to value this characteristic in your spouse. Spouse, practice receiving the praise, not doubt that you are deserving. When you have taken it in and believe it, say “Thank you.”
The IA can regain true intimacy, but only if they are willing to work to overcome established patterns.

- For information, go to [www.intimacyanorexia.com](http://www.intimacyanorexia.com)
- Read the book *Intimacy Anorexia*, by Douglas Weiss. He also has a book for the spouse titled *Married and Alone*.
- Commit to daily practicing the three exercises to reconnect to true feelings. Additional exercises are available in Dr. Weiss’s other resources.
- The rewards are immense: a depth of emotions you haven't felt in years, fully experiencing the fruit of the Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace.