

## MARRIAGE IS MINISTRY

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Thank you Lord for my Spouse! Yet God says I gave them to you and I charge you with the task of ministering to their deepest needs for love and self worth, to minister to your mate for Me. I know you think I gave them to you for you to get your needs met. But in fact, I have given them to you so you can care for them, so you can minister to their *needs*.

Christ says in Luke 9:23, "*If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself* [ignore what you want], *and take up his cross daily* [suffer loss and rejection, if necessary, to do what I want], *and follow Me* [be obedient to God]" NASB. In John 13:34, Christ says, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another*" NASB. The way Jesus lived and gave up His life is an example for us. He never sought to satisfy himself, only the Father. In marriage, Jesus expects us to be as giving to our mates as He is to us (Ephesians 5:22-33).

As a result of what God expects from us, how should we respond in our interaction with our mates? Every time we interact with our mate, our goal should be to minister to their deepest needs for security and significance.

Your mate has a deep need to know they are totally and unconditionally loved without having to change who they are, without having to *win* your love. This love is freely given, does not have to be earned. And this love cannot be lost by their failures in the relationship. This is the security your spouse seeks.

Your mate also has a deep need to know they are truly important, that they are significant to someone. They need to know they are having an eternal, meaningful impact on the lives of others. And they need to know that they are totally adequate to produce that impact.

Unfortunately, none of us are able to fully meet the needs of our spouse on a regular and consistent basis. No matter how well we do or how determined we are, we must admit to our selves that we humans are incapable of fully meeting the needs of our spouse all the time, every day. Yet these needs scream for fulfillment. They refuse to be denied.

Should we take a close look at our own lives, we would certainly see that each and everyone of us suffers with these needs, striving to have them fulfilled by trying all sorts of things: alcohol, sex, drugs, clothes, cars, houses, job titles, financial success, fame, recognition, romantic affairs, even arguments, and the list goes on and on.

Most of us enter marriage looking to have our needs for security and significance met by our spouse. And when they fail to meet our expectations, causing us pain, we tend to change our behavior to avoid further hurt and pain. When we are disappointed or our feelings are hurt. We stop sharing deep feelings. We react with anger and hostility. Or, we clam up to avoid rejection and criticism. Many men, especially, don't talk to their wives to avoid criticism. And some of us take extreme measures like separation and even divorce.

What most of us don't realize is that our deep, deep need to feel secure in love and significant as a person of value, can be met only in a close relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ. He can see everything ugly in us yet love us fully and unconditionally anyway. He has work for us to do in our marriages for which we are totally qualified and adequate – helping our spouse feel secure and significant. Because it is His work we are doing, and knowing the sacrifice He made for us, we can encourage our spouse, never complaining about our disappointments, even suffering hurt and rejection from them – Denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Jesus, in obedience to His Word.

Marriage is ministry! Ministry is serving! We are performing ministry for God, as His agent, carrying out His orders and His designs in obedience to His desire for us. It is not what we want, but what He wants. Through our submission and our commitment to the will of God (John 14:15), we will be doing the most we can do to touch the deepest needs of our mate.

Then you will surely come to know the marvelous blessings of God! *If you love Me, you will keep My commandments* (NASB).

Note: For an in-depth discussion, refer to the book *The Marriage Builder* by Dr. Larry Crabb