

A Satisfying Approach to Marriage

Ideally, a marriage is composed of two individuals who are both satisfied with themselves and confident of who they are. These two individuals freely choose to share their lives with one another, not because they have to, but because they want to. This difference is profound, for it defines the foundation of the relationship, expectations each person has of the other, and the freedom each person has to continue being an individual, as well as a spouse.

Marriages where one or both partners feel as though they *must* have the other person in order to feel valuable or important are destined for difficulties. Expectations of the spouse who “needs” the relationship can never be consistently met and often place an unrealistic burden on the other partner.

So much of the strife that occurs within marriage is the result of searching for the kind of validation from a spouse that he or she can never give. When we lack confidence in our own worth, we become hypersensitive to sharp words, forgotten promises, or perceived criticisms. When we feel as though we need the positive affirmation of our spouse in order to feel good about ourselves, we present him or her with a bottomless pit of need that cannot be filled.

As a result of not feeling acceptance of ourselves for who we are, we also have very little to give to our spouse or to others. We fear losing the relationship and feel threatened by the spouse’s friends or activities away from home. Ironically, the very efforts we make in such cases to control our spouse’s behavior only hasten his or her desire to be free of that control.

If this describes your attitude toward your marriage, begin by finding your own sense of satisfaction in yourself and in your relationship with God. Find your truest sense of value, confidence, and peace from Him and everything else will fall into place. Make your marriage a complement to what you already have in God, not a replacement for it. Resist the urge to seek validation of your worth from your spouse. It is a fruitless and endless search. Marriage is not intended to replace what only God can give.

Think for just a moment, do you take personal offense whenever your spouse makes a mistake? Do you search for hidden meaning in his or her comments? Do you find personal slights in his or her behavior and ways of speaking that are not intended? People tend to find what they are looking for. If you look for instances of unspoken slights, you will find them. If, however, you look for traits that demonstrate your spouse’s love and appreciation for you, you are much more inclined to see those as well.

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