

# MINISTERIAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

## SEMINAR VI

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**Theme: “The Pentecostal Minister as a  
Counselor/Caregiver”**

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### *Deciding Your Place as a Minister’s Wife*

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Being a minister's wife is a great opportunity and a tremendous challenge. There are, of course, many pressures and difficulties associated with the ministry. Sometimes it seems that more is expected of a minister's wife than any human being could achieve.

Some people's concept of the place of the minister's wife is very narrow and inflexible. It would almost seem that only the husband's ministry and role is important. Some people believe that the wife's duty is simply to support the husband and make him look good and successful. I am convinced that God has a lot more in mind for a woman who is married to a minister than some people think.

It is vitally important that you see yourself as a full partner with your husband in life, ministry, love, and throughout the passages of your married life.

Each minister's wife needs to identify her place and role in life and ministry. Keep in mind that you will continue to grow and develop your

interest and skills in ministry as the years pass. You will experience many changes and new opportunities for expression and fulfillment.

Your husband needs you far more as a partner in life and ministry than he probably realizes. No matter how you look at it or who you focus on, the truth remains that a committed, loving, anointed wife is a minister's greatest asset. Let's talk about this partnership.

## **I. PARTNERS IN LIFE AND MINISTRY**

How often do you find a successful pastor without a supportive wife? The minister's wife is of far greater value to the overall effectiveness of her husband's ministry than people talk about or write about. God calls **both** and unites them together as a team, as partners in ministry.

In order for a husband and wife to be effective partners in ministry, they must first and always be partners in life; partners in planning and dreaming. They are spiritual partners who pray together, worship together, and study God's Word together.

As partners, each has a special role to fill in their home and ministry. As the husband loves his wife, she is going to find it easy to submit to his leadership. His maturity and spirituality will inspire trust in her and cause her to feel loved and cared for each day. The husband is to bring to the partnership a strong, stable

attitude, always seeking the highest good for the one he loves. As this love is expressed in word and action, the wife is motivated to give herself in faithful support to her husband.

A marriage must be a giving relationship. The husband is giving love, giving every bit of energy and knowledge he possesses to do that which is best for his wife and family. The wife responds to that love, adoration and provision with an eagerness to please and share in the dream God has given to her husband.

Every man should give his wife a place of honor, special privilege, and preciousness. The wife is in many ways a reflection of her husband and how he treats her. God intends for the wife to be elevated to a queenly position by a wise and loving husband. The most important thing a pastor can do for his church or a father can do for his children is to love his wife. The home should be the most attractive place in the world to the children, and the mother should be the greatest attraction.

The Christian home is a laboratory in which the love of God is demonstrated. Without this kind of love in the home, children are likely to grow up with a feeling of inferiority, emptiness, and a lack of self-esteem (worth).

In most cases, the key factor in whether or not the minister's wife becomes a full partner in ministry with her spouse is

determined by her husband's behavior. Of course, there are some wives who are uninterested, unwilling, or resistant to being fully involved in the ministry. They see their role limited to the home and/or they may be committed to a secular career that is very consuming.

I am of the opinion that most women who are married to a minister sincerely want to be a spiritual partner in ministry. Some men are intimidated too much to elevate their wife in ministry. Sometimes this partnership is hindered because of guilt and shame resulting from marital conflict. Whenever there is a lack of unity and harmony in the home, there cannot be a real partnership in ministry.

Some men probably want to be in partnership with their spouse but simply do not know how to build this partnership. They should be encouraged to seek guidance and wisdom in order to understand how to build a strong partnership. The message must be shouted loud that men must accept responsibility to do all they can to open the doors for full spiritual partnership in the work of God with their spouse.

If you want to strengthen your spiritual partnership in ministry with your spouse, following are some suggestions that might help.

- Acknowledge the call of God on your life.
- Write down specifically what you know that call to be. List other specific areas of ministry which could also be areas of calling and opportunity for you.
- Discuss the above-mentioned areas with your husband for his feedback.
- Make these areas a serious matter of prayer and commitment.
- Discuss with your husband your personal life goals and dreams.
- Identify and list on paper (with your spouse) any areas of your interest which could conflict with his interest or goals.
- Identify differences in your personality and your spouse's personality. What is problematic about these differences? From your evaluation of personality differences, identify any present areas of differences of opinion on how the church should operate. Identify any present conflicts in lifestyle and/or ambitions.
- Set specific times for you and your husband to share and work on your understanding of each other and your ideal roles in life and ministry.
- If exploring the above areas creates problems, or if it exposes serious conflicts, seek professional Christian help in working through these areas.
- Together with your spouse, and even the children, identify your agreed on priorities in life.

- Make prayer and worship a regular part of your marriage.
- Answer the question, "Does my husband really want me to be a part of his ministry?" If not, why not? If you find that your husband has a problem in this area, confront it, discuss it, and give him an opportunity to find a new paradigm.
- Do everything possible to build spirituality and unity in your marriage.
- Repent of your own lack of vision or spiritual commitment, if needed.

## **II. PARTNERS IN UNCONDITIONAL LOVE**

When you got married you probably thought that you found the love of your life. Sometimes things happen to couples that cause them to think that they married the wrong person. Each year in the United States, more than 200,000 marriages end prior to the couple's second anniversary.

A strong marriage based on love and commitment must withstand the pressures of ministry and the passing of time. The minister's wife and her husband move through predictable passages/stages on their journey toward a lifetime goal of growth as individuals and as a couple.

Your love for each other must be pure, unselfish, and kept alive if you and your husband successfully make it through the passages/stages of marriage.

In order to be partners in unconditional love, a couple must manifest a high level of spiritual and emotional maturity. There will always be some conflicts and differences of opinion. We need to be partners who turn conflicts into love fights. Love fights are exchanges that not only resolve the conflict, but actually increases love for each other.

In conflicts, a husband and wife need to follow certain principles. Let's look at some of these principles.

- Stop being defensive and allow yourself to learn from the experience.
- Listen with your heart; don't argue.
- Be willing to be easily understood by answering questions honestly and thoughtfully.
- Keep your emotions under control.
- Think before you speak.
- Focus on your own part of the blame.
- Be quick to forgive.
- Remember, it is impossible for you and your spouse to effectively minister to the people you serve when either or both of you are torn up internally through marital conflict.

### **III. PARTNERS THROUGH THE PASSAGES OF MARRIAGE**

(Book reference --"Passages of Marriage" by Minirth, Newman, & Hemfelt)

The lifetime of a married couple can be divided into five distinct units. Although some people hasten ahead of time into the next passage, or linger a little longer in one passage or another, in general, most marriages follow pretty close to the following pattern.

#### **A. The First Passage -- New Love: The First Two Years**

Whether young or old, couples pass through this dewy-eyed stage of idealized love. This happens because we exercise selective perception. We see what we want or wish to see in the other person. In time our perception might clear up and then another barrier to reality emerges--the "deferred resolution of differences." Simply put this means, "I'll change my spouse after we're married." Another failure in this passage is the "pursuit of the ideal person." Couples pursue an ideal in their mind's eye and not the actual person. This is a real illusion problem. They can't seem to see through the illusions until they have been married for awhile.

#### **B. The Second Passage -- Realistic Love: 3 - 10 Years**

During this season of marriage a heavy dose of reality sets in. The kids and careers bring on enormous pressures. As you look at your husband (or wife), this perfect partner is

not so perfect after all. If this is the Garden of Eden, why are there so many thorns? Who's sorry now? Or what happens when reality sinks in?

At this point in the life of a couple in ministry, some inevitable changes are going to take place. Deep problems can arise; however, what is looking hopeless can turn back to a bright promise. A good union can be made even better. The key is to find and manage the sources of trouble and change.

Following are some hints of trouble to watch out for as a minister and spouse enter and live through this second passage.

1. chronic financial distress
2. in-law problems and unresolved childhood conflicts and yearnings
3. family imbalances (chronic fighting, sexual dysfunction, problems with and about children
4. emotional distress, anxiety, depression, addictions, or driving compulsions

Many of the problems a couple faces in later years do not show up at all in premarital dating. During early marriage a couple is literally blinded by love. Then the pressures of life and ministry responsibilities shake their marriage and they both seem to change before each other's eyes.

The husband (minister) is usually under intense pressure, sapping his energy, to keep up with his multiple responsibilities and to provide for his family.

The wife is also deeply enmeshed in the church responsibilities and possibly her own career also. Both spouses feel these pressures and stresses. The wife is strung-out, exhausted, trying to meet all the needs of husband, home, church, and career (and maybe children). She works "second shift" also by holding down a job and coming home to the family chores and various church activities.

The wife gets a massive dose of disillusionment as she views the never-ending loads of laundry, dirty dishes, phone calls, hospital visits, committee meetings, church crises, and screaming kids.

Complacency is the big disease of this passage. What was once new is commonplace, and there is nothing new and exciting to take its place. Sex becomes a mechanical thing with a specific purpose. All of this results in considerable potential for an affair.

Strengthening the bond of marriage for a couple in ministry, during the second passage (3-10 years) of marriage, requires attention to the following tasks:

### **1. Hang on to love after reality strikes.**

Research shows that the highest divorce rate hovers somewhere around that seventh-year period. All too often, people do not see it coming.

People become disillusioned with aspects of life, marriage, and ministry. The struggles for success cause great doubt and anxiety. Spouses get so busy fulfilling their roles in life that they seem to start going their separate ways. They lose the sense of partnership in ministry!

Complacency, a form of boredom, can literally destroy a relationship and partnership. This is why the unconditional love, talked about earlier, is so important. Unless we can accept our mate unconditionally, we will expect them to make us happy.

We must, first of all, take responsibility for our own happiness. Learn to like yourself and feel good about your accomplishments. Follow your God-given dreams. Be a spiritual and visionary leader as you obey God's call.

Allow for changes in life and change in your spouse and learn to adapt. Avoid falling into ruts in life. Remember the need for variety, romance, and humor! Build beautiful memories as you and your partner journey through life.

### **2. Child proof your marriage.**

Having children adds enormous stress to a marriage. Children multiply the opportunities for friction. Disagreements, power struggles, and differences in opinions intensify in child rearing.

Having children creates for a couple heavy financial pressures. For a young couple in ministry on very low salaries, most pastors may really feel the financial pressures of providing for children.

As parents, prepare yourselves in every way possible to work through and manage the stresses of parenting. Remember that parenting is another area in which you and your spouse are role models to those you serve in ministry.

### **3. Continually renew and maintain your marital contract/commitment.**

The second passage of marriage requires a great deal of adjustment and it requires true commitment.

Broken promises, weak commitments, and conflicts create anger in couples. Unresolved anger leads to bitterness. Bitterness destroys intimacy and leads to a betrayal of the marriage contract and partnership.

A couple who are partners in ministry must quickly resolve anger and give forgiveness. As partners, both the wife and the husband must:

- admit their feelings
- commit to forgive
- give a little
- avoid retaliation
- work on restoration
- determine to be honest
- affirm each other in a positive way
- always seek to grow together spiritually

- always be uncompromisingly faithful
- watch out for any temptations to have an affair, even to have a mental fantasy affair
- develop intimacy
- show love in every way possible

### **C. The Third Passage -- Steadfast Love: 11 - 25 Years**

The minister and his wife can get so wrapped up in church work and careers, kids, and a host of extraneous, time-consuming activities that they find themselves fallen into a rut. A minister's wife often feels her place during this passage is as her husband's old shoe ... comfortable, but wearing out. A wife can begin to feel not only bored but bitter about the relationship.

During this time many minister's wives begin to resent their husband's obsessive-compulsive work habits. The ministry seems to be taking more and more of his time and he has become less and less attentive to his wife and family.

Minister's wives are very vulnerable during this third passage. Their healthy relationship can drift in one of two ways. (1) They become codependent and enmeshed or (2) they become alienated/estranged and hostile. Sometimes

they even drift from periods of enmeshment (possessive dependent control of each other) to agitated hostility.

During this passage the minister's wife must work hard at maintaining her own individual identity, along with her identity as a minister's wife. As we feel we are losing real intimacy in our marriage, we become afraid of various things.

A minister's wife might honestly say:

- "I am afraid of being a failure as a wife/mother."
- "I am afraid I am not worthy of my spouse's love."
- "I am afraid of failing in my career."
- "I am afraid to let my true self be known to my spouse because he wouldn't like me very much if I did."
- "I am afraid to let myself be vulnerable, so I won't open up. I have been hurt too many times."
- "I am afraid I am not worthy of God's love."
- "I am afraid of abandonment. I don't feel my spouse loves me."
- "I am afraid that it is only his ministry that keeps us married."
- "I am afraid to be assertive. I feel that any effort to stand up to my spouse will trigger more rejection."

You may find it difficult to identify your fears and list them, but you must before you can overcome them. What can you do to help yourself?

- Rebuild your personal identity.
- Don't neglect yourself.
- Take responsibility for your life.
- Some important final good-byes must be said.
  - Say good-bye to parents.
  - Say good-bye to earthly security.
  - Say good-bye to illusions/fantasies.
- Say hello to intimacy by identifying the things that have pulled you apart.
- Identify those things that draw you together and build on them.
- Say hello to conflict. Resolving conflict is a crucial tool for building intimacy in your relationship and minimizing issues that wedge between you and your spouse.
- Break some old patterns of communication and build new ones.
- Overcome the now-or-never syndrome -- change comes slowly and things may not be as bad as they seem.
- Accept your spouse as he is. Remember that few people, if any, married the person of their dreams! The reason is that the person of our dreams and the person we can attract are often very different. It doesn't do any good to dwell on the thought that you probably could have done a lot better eleven years (or so) ago.
- Build up your spouse and forgive him.

We talked about having to say good-bye to some things during this passage. The older you are in this passage, the more you will find it necessary to accept certain losses and let go. It may become necessary to ...

- Say goodbye to lost youth.
- Say goodbye to lost health.
- Say goodbye to past dreams.
- Say goodbye to the wonder years.
- Say hello to adolescent struggles.
- Say hello to power struggles.
- Say hello to financial struggles.
- Say hello to new opportunities for intimacy and closeness.

We have spent a lot of time on this third passage but it is so very important and fits with many married interns. This passage is the best of times and the worst of times. It involves mid-life crisis, rebellious teenagers, job changes, economic swings, and a hundred other storms that can batter your marriage relationship.

Deciding your place involves much more than whether you will be involved in children's ministry or ladies ministry or

choir, etc. I firmly believe that if you have a strong steadfast loving relationship with your minister spouse, you will discover your gifts and through exploration find where you fit in a career and ministry. Your role in his ministry will change, grow, shift as you move, get older, have children, etc. Most of all, discover your own identity and keep intimacy alive with your spouse.

In this lecture we will not explore the other passages of marriage, but let's list them for your awareness and future exploration.

**D. The Fourth Passage -- Renewing Love: 26 - 35 years of marriage**

During this stage the kids leave, careers peak out, and the meaning and purpose of life alter somewhat. What now?

**E. The Fifth Passage -- Transcendent Love: beyond 35 years**

What a history this couple has with more than thirty-five years of marriage. Love and satisfaction with each other can reach its highest point ever during this passage. Goals and motivations greatly change as a couple moves toward the retirement years and see their youth fade forever.

## **CONCLUSION**

Deciding your place as a minister's wife is not easy and the task varies depending on your stage in life as you and your husband enter the ministry.

God wants the two of you to be real partners in the spiritual journey of ministry. The wise husband will draw his wife close to him and make her his most trusted and appreciated friend and helper. As you labor together, the bond of love, unity, loyalty, and partnership will grow throughout your life and ministry.

Carefully work your way through the passages of marriage and never allow anything in this world to come between you!