

COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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Are You Too Needy?

Emotional neediness has the potential to be a significant struggle in a marriage relationship. It makes no difference if you are male or female, because both husbands and wives can fall into this trap. But, how can you tell if you are too needy?

There are many ways to determine if you are too needy. Ask yourself these questions. Does your mate tell you that you are smothering him or her by your constant domination of their time? Do you threaten and emotionally blackmail your mate by saying, "If you don't do what I want, I will _____. Do you control, pressure, or manipulate your mate to be with you and to make you the center of their every thought? Do you expect your mate to do things for you that you know you could do for yourself? If your mate refuses your requests do you get angry or use tears to get your way? Do you regularly go through melt-down and make-up cycles because you don't get what you want? Do you demand to be emotionally or physically fulfilled by your mate? Are you the one who needs to be constantly reaffirmed, touched, consoled, and held? Have you clamped an emotional electronic monitoring device on your mate and check it 24/7 to see if he or she is still "really" interested in you? Do you justify your mate's verbal or physical abuse because you think you can't live without them? Any of these behaviors reveal a high degree of neediness in your relationship. As these behaviors continue day after day and year after year, they result in an emotional draining of your spouse and the marriage slowly deteriorates.

Unhealthy and destructive neediness in a marriage is one of the great silent killers of love in a relationship. The biggest reason neediness is missed as a problem by your spouse, or your counselor, is that neediness is usually disguised as a cry for love. An overly needy spouse will express the need for verbal reassurance and physical demonstrations of his or her mate's love, but when it does not come in the manner requested, the pressure upon the other spouse increases. This pressure only drives the other spouse further away creating the opposite of the desired response. Why? The needy spouse's unrealistic expectations can never be sustained. There is a *real* need that you have, but this need cannot be met by anything emotional or physical. Your real need can only be met by God Himself. Let me explain what I mean.

What causes neediness?

1. Needs or desires? One of the great misunderstandings today is the confusion between the words *need* and *desire*. We often hear people say today, *You are not meeting my needs*. This is the justification many use to look outside of their marriage for someone else to meet these *supposed* needs.

But, think about this issue. We have very few real needs, but we have many desires. Confusing the two will get you off track quickly. We need air, water, clothing, and food to survive. Paul said with these "*be content*" (1 Tim. 6:8). But, notice in the words that he used in the very next verse in this text. "*But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men*

in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (1 Tim. 6:9-10). You must identify and control your desires or you will fall into many sorrows. Why would there be heartache from pursuing your own desires whatever they may be? Your lustful desires will never give you the satisfaction you look for.



Don't let neediness separate you!

However, Jesus said there was really only *one thing* that was needed in life. He revealed what that one thing was when He spoke to Mary and Martha. He commended Mary for sitting before Him in fellowship. She wanted to be with Him and experience His love and to hear His truth (Luke 10:42). Truly, this is the most important need of all Mankind. Jesus said, "*This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent*" (John 17:3). To know the Lord experientially, and to know His truth, will satisfy you and keep you from pursuing every sinful or empty desire.

Therefore, when men and women confuse their needs with their de-

"She is your companion and your wife by covenant" Mal. 2:14

sires, they become snared by a powerful lie that will destroy their marriage with constant conflict. I believe this conflict results primarily from individuals not finding their satisfaction and contentment in the Lord. The contentment Paul speaks of is exactly what can transform a person or a marriage into one that is happy. People who are fulfilled and happy are more willing to give to others instead of take.

2. Selfishness. The Scripture is absolutely clear that selfishness is at the root of every destructive behavior (James 3:16). Selfishness is at the root of the overly needy spouse's thinking. The needy mate thinks, *You should meet my needs. What about me? Why don't you tell me or show me that you care?* All of these thoughts are self-focused and only create conflict between people.

We have very few real needs, but we have many desires.

When Paul addressed the conflicts in the church of Philippi, he commanded them to deal with their selfishness. He taught, *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others"* (Phil. 2:3-4). Dealing with a person's self-focus is also why Jesus made *denying self* the basis of entering or maintaining a relationship with Him. Jesus said, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me"* (Matt. 16:24).

Therefore, if you want to resolve your problem with neediness, you must deny yourself. Ask God to open your eyes to your own selfish desires. Humbly acknowledge how your selfishness is affecting your marriage. Turn in true repentance from these attitudes and behaviors. Start considering your mate's interest above your own.

3. Insecurity. One of the fundamental reasons why a person becomes self-focused is insecurity. An insecure person usually battles with comparing themselves to others resulting in self-doubt. An insecure person is filled with anxiety over what other people think of them. Thinking in this manner is very unwise. Paul said comparison was one of the causes of the conflicts in the Corinthian church. He warned them, *"For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise"* (2 Cor 10:12). Comparison is what causes both crushing insecurity and prideful self-righteousness. Both are forms of pride! Comparing yourself with others either causes you to think more highly, or more lowly of yourself than is right. When you add insecurity to selfishness, you will constantly seek security and reassurance from your mate.

4. Lack of real spiritual life. Whenever a person thinks that another person can satisfy the emptiness within his or her soul, they are not seeking fulfillment from God. This issue is one of the most important in the struggle of a needy person. Who gives you life? Is it found in a person, a possession, or some position? Never! The Lord is the only One who can fill the emptiness within and give you the happiness and the joy of life. Jesus said, *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst"* (John 6:35). This is one of the strongest statements Jesus ever made in His attempt to reveal to men that He was the answer they were looking for in life. You will either believe this claim and will come to Him, or you will look some other place. The words *come* and *believe* are both in the present tense, which mean you must continuously pursue Him if you never want to hunger or thirst. Both times the word *never* is used in this passage; it is a very strong double negative. This is

one of God's absolute promises, and is a challenge to you to come and see if He is true to His Word. When you experience His fulfillment, then you will never seek your happiness in a person. God will satisfy the true source of your neediness.

5. Idolatry. When anyone sets up another person or thing as the one they believe can fulfill and satisfy them, they are committing idolatry. You have replaced God as the first person in your life. Idolatry is coveting something or someone more than the Lord. God spoke through Jeremiah the Prophet and gave the Jews an illustration of what they had done by forsaking God for idols. He declared, *"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns--broken cisterns that can hold no water"* (Jer. 2:13). In other words, idolatry is like trading a drink of refreshing water for a stagnate liquid that you can't really swallow and which will definitely not satisfy your thirst.

Now, you may be thinking, *Can God's people actually fall into idolatry?* Yes! God also said later in Jeremiah: *"My people have forgotten Me, they have burned incense to worthless idols. And they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways, from the ancient paths"* (Jer. 18:15).

In addition, The Prophet Ezekiel said that idolatry doesn't have to be something where you burn incense to a physical idol you have in your living room. You can set up an idol in your heart (Eze 14:3).

Paul also commanded, *"My beloved, flee from idolatry"* (1 Cor. 10:14). Therefore, turn from seeking life, satisfaction, or love from any other source than God Himself. When you are satisfied in Him alone your neediness will be met.

6. Personal identity in Christ. The more personally needy an individual is, revealed by seeking meaning and life from another, the less that indi-

vidual truly understands who he or she is in Christ. This is an equation you cannot get around. No one seeks from a human what they know they already possess in God. If you see yourself in Christ, a sinner saved by His grace, valued and loved by God, and accepted in the beloved, then you have a confidence and security that no person can give you.

The personal identity that Paul had in Christ gave him the confidence and boldness he had in life. Paul knew he was the chief of sinners and was nothing in himself (1 Tim. 1:15; 2 Cor. 12:11). However, at the same time he saw himself as not inferior to the most eminent apostles, yet not worthy to even be called an apostle (2 Cor. 12:11; 1 Cor. 15:9). How could Paul have this view of himself? He reveals where his personal identity came from: *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”* (1 Cor. 15:10). Is it God’s grace, which is found in Christ Jesus, where you find your identity? Or, are you seeking your identity in what you possess, what you do, who you know, or to whom you are married? This is a fundamental question only you can answer. If you want to become less needy, then ask God to turn you from seeking your identity in your mate, and find your meaning for life in Christ alone.

The solution to neediness.

I believe you can overcome any personal struggle in your life, including your neediness. However, to do so requires a sincere personal acknowledgment of your fault and a complete surrender to Christ. This acknowledgement of fault and surrender to Him must be accompanied by real repentance from every sinful behavior that has caused the neediness in the first place (i.e. the selfishness, insecurity, and idolatry).

Without a complete transformation of your life, the neediness will ultimately kill the love relationship be-

tween you and your spouse. Why? Neediness is what makes you clingy, controlling, possessive, jealous, argumentative, and demanding. Obviously, these behaviors will create conflict after conflict that will slowly destroy your relationship. The offended spouse will eventually consider the marriage as “too difficult” and you “too high-maintenance” and will give up hope that anything will change. This is why there is no time to waste. The time to deal with these issues is now! Here are some steps to take.

For the needy spouse.

1. Get yourself right. Before God and your spouse, acknowledge, confess, and repent of your selfishness, anger, jealousy, lack of identity in Christ, controlling, and insecure behavior (James 5:16). This is the only place to begin.

2. Find a biblical counselor. One of the best ways to begin getting yourself right is to find a good biblical counselor that can help you sort through your issues. Solomon said, *“Without counsel, plans go awry, but in the multitude of counselors they are established”* (Prov. 15:22). If you have plans to restore your marriage, then you want a good counselor to help establish the specific steps you need to take.

3. Stop blaming your spouse. When you blame your spouse for all the problems in your marriage, you are not taking responsibility for your own behavior. As long as you are focused on your mate’s faults you will never deal with your own. Jesus said, *“First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”* (Matt. 7:5).

4. Control your thoughts. Ask God to help you control your selfish thoughts. Behaviors always begin in your thoughts. When you begin to think insecurely, angrily, jealously, or selfishly, recognize these thoughts as sin and turn from them before you begin acting on them. Choose to pray

first and then think about what is good, virtuous, and encouraging (Phil. 4:6-8).

5. Control your tongue. Ask God to help you control your abusive tongue. David said people can use their tongue, *“like a sword.”* He said they would... *“bend their bows to shoot their arrows--bitter words”* (Ps. 64:3). If you want to reconcile your relationship, then you must stop the bitter words, because they are like swords and arrows in the heart of your mate. When you stop the harsh words you stop the bleeding.

6. Become a giver. One of the key ingredients for any loving relationship is two people equally serving one another. Paul taught, *“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another”* (Rom. 12:10). However, if one person is always giving and the other is always taking; that marriage will ultimately break down. True love requires two mutually committed givers.

7. Find your identity in Christ. Determine why you seek your identity in people or things. Jesus constantly asked people to determine why they acted in a certain way (Mark 2:8; Mark 4:40). If you want to find your identity in Christ, then you must determine why you are seeking it in another place.

For the needed spouse.

This part of the solution must be accomplished by the partner receiving pressure from the needy spouse. You must recognize that you have a part in the problem and the solution.

1. Bear the correct burden. Do you realize you cannot carry every burden your spouse wants you to carry? There is a difference between bearing someone’s burden and each of us bearing our own load. What do I mean? Paul taught, *“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”* (Gal. 6:2). Then three sentences further on in this chapter Paul added, *“For each one shall bear his*

own load" (Gal. 6:5). The word *burden*, in verse two, means a crushing burden, a heavy weight that is a great hardship, one that would overcome the person attempting to carry it. The word *load*, in verse five, means a small or light load that is easily carried by one person. This word *load* is the same word that is used in Matthew 11:30 when Jesus said, "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." This *load* was also used in Roman military literature for the backpack of the Roman soldier. In other words, each soldier had to carry his own backpack. No other soldier was going to do this for him. Each had to carry his own load. Therefore, when you are asked to help someone, you must determine one thing: is this a crushing load that you should help with, or a light burden easily carried? This concept is very similar to the difference between needs and desires. In child-rearing, you should never do for your children what they can do for themselves. If you do things for your children that they should be doing for themselves, you will make them dependent upon you. Wouldn't you think it strange if your teenager came and asked you to tie his shoes for him? Why? This person can obviously handle this task himself. Therefore, encourage an overly needy spouse to take personal responsibility when it is necessary.

2. Don't give in to demands. Appeasing the demands of a jealous and controlling spouse will give you temporary harmony, but it will do nothing to bring about lasting change. In fact, giving in to a needy spouse only encourages this behavior. Therefore, stop giving in to his or her demands and angry attempts to manipulate you into meeting his or her desires. Jesus didn't meet every request made of Him (Luke 12:13-14). Your spouse must find ways to meet his or her own desires without asking for help or support from you. When your mate learns to do without your constant help, he or she will begin to experience the reward and

personal satisfaction of overcoming a problem.

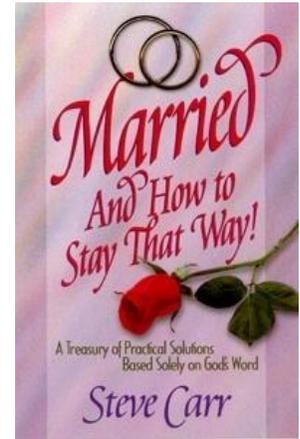
3. Don't stir up jealousy. If your mate struggles with jealousy you must make sure not to stir up jealous thoughts by your actions. Choosing to live above your own standards is what someone does who is choosing to love. John said, "He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him" (1 John 2:10). If you know that your mate struggles with jealousy take a good look at your words, associations, and behaviors, so that there is no cause of stumbling in you.

4. Where to find happiness. You need to constantly remind your mate that you cannot give him or her personal happiness or satisfaction. Obviously, this is a real need that only God can meet. Encourage your spouse to seek his or her life in Christ. He alone can give the living water that satisfies the depths of every soul. He alone can meet the needs of every living creature (Ps. 145:15-16).

5. Seek your own counseling. Just as your spouse needs to sort out his or her own issues concerning neediness, you also need to examine what your issues are and find solutions. You will need help to keep your heart right during this time of change as well. Remember, it takes two people to make a marriage work. Jesus said, "Love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

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For more information concerning the ministry of Pastor Steve Carr or for additional marriage resources for couples and counselors, please contact us at our web site www.covenantkeepers.org or by email at ccag@calvaryag.org or at 805-481-2320.



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