

Ministry Marriages

Learn to appreciate each other's gifts for a healthy ministry and marriage.

Marriages in the body of Christ are burning to the ground—and that includes the marriages of Christian leaders. Is it hopeless? Does God have a plan for our marriages, or will the devil continue to make so many of our ministry marriages look like reality TV? Ministry marriages can survive under siege, in distress, in crisis, and under pressure when we learn to love like Jesus and appreciate the gift we are to each other. My husband and I learned through trial, pain, and suffering how to appreciate the gifts, talents, and abilities God has embedded in each of us, miraculously avoiding the death of our marriage.

Our Differences Are Glorious

Paul compares our roles and responsibilities as husband and wife to a great mystery. Ministering and doing life with a ministry mate, is very much like a good mystery—only God knows the plot, the problems to be faced, and the solution that we will arrive at together. Our differences can be beautiful when we learn to appreciate them. Believe it or not, our God is intentional. He is glorified when we, despite our differences, yield our hearts to him, love each other like Jesus, and truly appreciate the value of each other. I am amazed at how oil and water repel each other, but together they make delicious chocolate cake. Oil and water serve different purposes and have different attributes, but together they can become beautiful masterpieces. If ministry mates will learn that our differences are really part of God's masterpiece, we can learn to come together and we'll be dangerous to the kingdom of darkness. It is the enemy, after all, who whispers that our differences are a detriment to our ministries and marriages, suggesting that if we just found a different partner, things would be better. This is a lie.

When we fail to recognize all the wonderful attributes, gifts, and talents that God treasures in our spouse, our marriage will take a hit. Paul eloquently explained how we should view the gifts in our spouses in Romans 12:6: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us." Having different gifts is self-explanatory, but when was the last time you took notice of and appreciated the differences your spouse brings to your marriage? My husband and I are as different as night and day. He likes to roll the window down in the winter time, and I like to have the heat on "hell." My husband is diplomatic, me not so much. He is a global thinker, and I think about now. These distinct differences caused many arguments and quarrels until we learned the art of compromise. After years of dancing in life and ministry, we make this complicated dance look easy.

I am type-A, and my husband is the direct opposite. If we did life and ministry completely according to how I am wired, our ministry would be rigid, and everyone would operate like the Energizer bunny. My husband helps me "chill out" and not take everything so seriously. I have learned from him, for example, how to take a nap after church on Sunday. My husband is great at casting vision, but sometimes needs help figuring out a plan to get us there. This is where my strengths come in—I help him lay it out in sequential steps. Learning to align our gifts, talents, and abilities together is an effort for anyone in marriage, but adding ministry to this makes it

even more difficult. You might be thinking, *Is it worth it?* It absolutely is. If God says we're meant to be together, working together for his kingdom, then it's true—and it's absolutely worth working on.

For many years, the way God designed my husband drove me insane, until God began to show me that there are certain things that I do better, and there are certain things my husband does better. I have the grace to handle financial and administrative matters—him not so much. He has the grace to handle chaos in crisis and the incredible stress of being a bi-vocational pastor without complaining—me not so much. I have learned to appreciate and love his quiet strength, while he has learned to appreciate and love my passionate charisma. When we work together, God is glorified.

It's inevitable that we'll experience conflict in our marriage; how we handle it is indicative of our maturity in Christ. In our marriage, we often agree on what should be done, but how to get there is a horse of another color. When my husband and I pray through our conflict rather than give each other the silent treatment, we are demonstrating forgiveness and maturity and presenting a glorious church without spot or wrinkle. When we operate in unity and oneness in our marriage rather than allowing a spirit of division to operate, our family and ministry are blessed. [Psalm 133:1–3](#) declares that unity releases blessing and life forevermore. So, when we work as a unit, it releases life and blessing.

Sometimes our conflict has actually led to incredible lessons. When I first started leading, I led according to what I learned in previous leadership roles without considering that I was now leading in the kingdom of God. I used to get straight to the point, but I learned through some conflicts that this method can hurt rather than heal. Drawing from my husband's diplomacy, I have altered the way I lead. I am typically no nonsense and a straight shooter, but now I take more care and ask God to make me sensitive and attentive to the needs of people who are very different from me. Now I think through who and what my decisions may affect and consider the potential risks before I make and implement my decision. Amazingly, God knew that we would balance each other out; together we are both better in ministry.

Three Steps You Can Take

To help you begin to appreciate the differences in your spouse, I suggest these three practical steps that have helped me:

1. Talk to each other.

Communication is the key to helping ministry marriages thrive. The Bible declares in Proverbs 4:7: “The beginning of wisdom in this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.” In our marriage, we are intentional about communication. For example, we designate one night a week that is just about us. On Friday nights, we unplug from technology and talk to each other. We turn our phones on silent and only answer if it's a call from our children. We have ensured that our church and ministries respect Friday night—they know to contact other leaders who can address their concerns. Protecting your communication is vital to a healthy ministry marriage.

2. Stay in your lane.

One of the most important rules of the road is staying in your lane. Failure to do so ensures someone will get hurt. Staying in my lane in a ministry marriage means focusing on what I've been given to do rather than trying to do what God has given my husband to do. For example, I recognize that my husband is the senior leader in our local congregation, and I have trained myself to respect his decision-making even when I don't agree. I am the administrative pastor, gifted in teaching and training, and I need to focus on these tasks. This allows us to work together more easily and cuts down on arguments. This does not happen overnight, but through prayer, humility, and extending grace, we are getting better every day.

3. Celebrate each other's success.

When your spouse wins, throw a party, because it's your win, too. Often in ministry marriages, spouses can become envious and jealous of the gifting or success of their ministry mate. It takes understanding who and how God made you and trusting God with your marriage to truly celebrate each other. Adhering to oneness in your ministry marriage helps keep the enemy from whispering division in your ear. I know that if my husband excels in ministry, it's a win for me because I was in the background praying for him, encouraging him, and supporting him along the way. When I excel in ministry, my husband gladly celebrates my win as our win, respecting and supporting the anointing on my life and ministry.

Appreciating the gifts that God has given you and your spouse ends unnecessary confusion, jealousy, and envy that threaten the unity in our marriages. As my husband and I have learned to appreciate each other's gifts, our family is better and our marriage is preaching in ways we never imagined.



Dr. Domeniek L. Harris is an author, speaker, educator, women's ministry leader, Bible teacher, and founder of By His Side Ministries, a multicultural, inter-denominational, and international ministry for ministry wives. She is the new CEO of The National Coalition of Pastor's Spouses. She and her husband have helped establish When Pastors Pray, a ministry to address the mental health and spiritual needs of those called to the pastorate. She is a co-laborer in pastoral and outreach ministry with her husband, Apostle Brian D. Harris, at Dominion Living Ministries in Memphis, Tennessee.

© 2020 Christianity Today - a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.