

# Our Two Great Needs:

# Significance and Security

■ by Kathy Krentkowski, MA, LCPC, LMHC

What do we *really* want out of life?

Some say happiness. Others point to success, love, or freedom. But beneath the surface of our striving, late psychologist, author, and spiritual director Dr. Larry Crabb suggested that we are driven by two deeper, primary needs: security and significance.

**Security is the deep assurance that we are unconditionally loved, accepted, and safe.** It's the foundation of a stable inner world—a sense that we are not alone or abandoned, no matter what happens. On the other hand, **significance is the belief that our lives matter, that we have purpose, and that we can make a meaningful impact.** Without it, we may feel invisible, overlooked, or unimportant, even in the midst of worldly success.

When these two longings go unmet, they anxiously drive us to try harder to fill these deep needs. We may focus our efforts on gaining approval, money, fame, or health. We create strategies to make money so we can get the house that will keep us safe and the car that will reliably take us where we want to go. We look for approval by being nice, “perfect”, and visibly appealing so we can develop and maintain friendships, find a partner, and gain the respect of those we work with.

We are also motivated to avoid **the hurt of insecurity and insignificance.** In response to our unfulfilled longings, we may turn our efforts outward, criticizing those who fail us, heaping guilt on others, and lashing out in anger. We hope this will bring about changes that will fulfill our longing to matter and be safe. On the other hand, we may turn our attention inward with self-criticism and greater strides to excel and be better—all so we can be “good enough” and “worthy enough” to matter to someone.

The problem with these strategies is that no matter what we say or do, we cannot control the outcome or guarantee a response that leaves us feeling fulfilled. When some inevitable pothole gets in the way—when people let us down, fail, or disappoint us—we anxiously try harder, resulting in a cycle of problems and heartache.

## Unmet Needs

**(The following story is shared with permission.)** A woman I was working with was adjusting to the challenges of being married later in life. One day, she woke up to a snowstorm and found that her car and driveway were covered with several inches of snow. Her husband had left early for work, without clearing her car or shoveling the driveway. She was devastated, angry, afraid, hurt, and overwhelmed. The hurt felt extreme. Alone, she began to cry, “How could he leave without taking care of me?! Why didn't he think of me? I can't rely on him!”

Her needs for significance and security were threatened. What was she going to do? She was already feeling herself shutting down, preparing to give her unsuspecting husband the silent treatment. Entertaining thoughts of punishing him, her feelings of hurt would

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quickly turn into resentment. If she continued to believe her security and significance came from her husband, she'd direct her feelings at him without acknowledging the hurt associated with woundedness from unmet needs. And her unfulfilled longings would remain empty.

If she responded to her husband as her wounded feelings dictated, there was no way to control the outcome or guarantee a response from him that would meet her needs. She needed a way to cope that included fulfillment of her deep longings.

Because we had been talking about Christ meeting her deepest needs for significance and security, she was able to take a deep breath and re-center herself. **"I know I matter to you, God, and that you ultimately hold my life in your hands. You care for me, you see me, and you said you will meet all of my needs. I'm choosing to trust you."** Feeling more at peace, she did the next right thing and started shoveling. As she pushed through the feelings and efforts, a snow plow came down her street and slowed at her house, offering to plow a path out. As she watched the truck push away loads of snow in a single sweep, she stood in awe at how God showed up for her in the most practical and meaningful way.

It's okay to look to others to help us feel significant and secure. God allows these needs to be met in the context of relationship. It's not unreasonable to want others to show up for us in ways that make us feel worthy and safe. But when others let us down—and they inevitably will let us down—we need a deeper well to draw from, one filled with the truths that we are loved by God and we are safe in Him. The next time you find yourself feeling especially wounded by someone you love, ask yourself if your need for security and significance is threatened. If they were, allow the Lord to sink the truth deep within you as you remind yourself that you are seen by an Almighty God who knows you, loves you, and has your life in His hands.

Explore these verses and allow your well to be filled with the one who satisfies all of your deepest needs.

**Isaiah 46:4 – "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you."**

**Matthew 10:31 – "So, don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."**

**Psalms 139:13 – "For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made."**

**Isaiah 43:4 – "Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life."**

**Psalms 37:39 – "The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord; he is their stronghold in the time of trouble."**

**Matthew 6:25-26; 30-33 – "Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ... But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." ■**

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