

**MARRIAGE IS
NOT FOR WIMPS**

**COMMUNICATION
CLASS**

SESSION ONE

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

Throughout this course I refer to the book, *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage* by Scott M. Stanley, Daniel Trathen, Savanna McCain & Milt Bryan. Much of the material in this class is a synthesis of their groundbreaking research. I highly recommend this book for you and your spouse.

Key concepts discussed from their book include:

- Four Deadly Habits
- Speaker/Listener Technique
- Filters & Miscommunication
- Expectations
- Expressing Criticism Constructively
- Ground Rules for Protecting Your Marriage from Bad Conflict
- Events, Issues & Hidden Issues
- Problem Solving

Additionally, in lesson five we discuss concepts from a book titled *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman. I have not included The Five Love Languages assessment which helps you identify your love language. I encourage you to purchase Dr. Chapman's book so that you can cover the content in more detail and be able to take the assessment.

S E S S I O N O N E O U T L I N E

- Intro & Opening Thoughts
- Oneness
- Four Deadly Habits
- Table Talk Time: What is your default “WENI” mode? How has that been destructive in your marriage?
- Introduce the Speaker Listener/Technique
- Table Talk Time: Practice Speaker/Listener Technique

Purpose

This study will offer practical skills for better communication and conflict resolution, as well as protecting intimacy, friendship, and fun. It is offered for any married couple that would like to seek some godly advice on how to strengthen and enhance their marriage.

Three Groups of Couples in This Study

1. Couples who don't know what they don't know (newly married) – This study will be a fantastic way to lay a good communication foundation for your marriage.
2. Couples who are struggling well – This study will help enhance your ability to communicate effectively with your spouse.
3. Couples in crisis – This study will provide techniques and encouragement to help stop the cycle that has caused heartache in your marriage. There is hope because God wants your marriage to thrive.

Week 1 - Opening Thoughts

1. We can talk & we can listen but let's not assume that we have communicated.
2. Even those who do communicate well, do not do it perfectly, our goal is to get better.
3. Most importantly - God is 100% committed to your marriage. He is on your side.

Oneness

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

- Matthew 19:4-6

"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

- Malachi 2:16

Oneness is the freedom to speak one's mind to the other about absolutely anything. Oneness is being as comfortable with silence as with speech. Oneness is perfect trust. It's acting the same way apart from one's spouse as with him or her. It's anticipating the other's needs, and feeling the other's hurts as one's own. Oneness is habitually setting aside all differences for the simple joy of living in peace.

- Mike Mason, *The Mystery of Marriage: 20th Anniversary Edition*

Oneness

What it Looks & Feels like

Mutual Understanding

Emotional Intimacy

Connectedness

The Opposite of Oneness

Misunderstanding

Emotional Distance

Disconnectedness

We are either moving toward oneness or moving away from oneness. Which way are you moving?

Barriers to Oneness

1. **Fear of rejection & self-protection** – one of the great lies of all time is, “if (s)he knew what I was really like (s)he wouldn’t love me.”
2. **Sin & selfishness** – We need to be honest about our bent toward self. We don’t default to servitude...we default to self-glorification, self-protection and self-gratification. The sanctification process involves our daily dying to self & resurrection to servitude. Christ came not to be served but to serve – if that was His goal, it needs to be ours.
3. **Lack of knowledge** – we are products of our training (or lack thereof). People rarely set out to wreck their marriage – they often just don’t know how to love the other person well.

Core Convictions About marriage

1. God’s Design for Marriage is **Oneness**
2. God’s Purpose in Marriage is two-fold:
 - a. To reveal His **glory**
 - b. To make us **holy** more than happy

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3. Good **communication** is critical to success in marriage.

Two key concepts

1. **Team** – Continue to remind each other that you are a team. When one of you wins, the other wins. When one of you loses you BOTH lose. It's you AND your spouse, not you VERSUS your spouse. The goal is to attack problems & issues together, not to attack each other about issues & problems.
2. **Safety** – Anything can be said in the context of a safe environment. If there is an environment of acceptance then every hurt, unmet expectation and frustration will have a place to be voiced. No one will reveal their deepest thoughts if there is a fear of not being heard.

Four Deadly Habits

1. **Withdrawal & Avoidance** – These are different manifestations of a pattern in which one partner shows an unwillingness to get into or stay with important discussions.
2. **Escalation** – What goes around comes around. This occurs when partners respond back and forth negatively to each other, continually upping the ante so conditions get worse and worse. This typically spirals downward quickly with anger & frustration growing with each lob of an insult.
 - a. Proverbs 20:3 - It is to a man's honor to avoid strife, but every fool is quick to quarrel.
 - b. Proverbs 29:11 - A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.
3. **Negative interpretations** – When perception is worse than reality. This occurs when one partner consistently believes the motives of the other are more negative than is really the case. It's amazing how rarely we will give our spouse the benefit of the doubt.
4. **Invalidation** – This is a pattern in which one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other. Another subtle form of invalidation occurs when you are expecting praise for some positive action that is ignored by your partner, while some minor problem is highlighted.
 - a. Proverbs 15:1 - A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

- b. Ephesians 4:29 - Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.
- c. 1 Peter 2:17 - Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.
- d. Subtle Forms of Invalidation
 - i. Rolling the eyes at something a spouse says
 - ii. Ignoring the spouse when they're talking
 - iii. A dismissing or contemptuous tone of voice in saying things like "I don't think so" or "You're wrong" or "Like you would know anything about that!" (Note: those very words can be used in affectionate banter when said with a smile and in the context of a spouse's strengths.)
 - iv. Any form of sarcasm
 - v. Making plans without consulting the spouse (which would affect the spouse)
 - vi. Ridiculing a spouse's dreams and hopes, even in jest
 - vii. Continually rejecting a spouse's romantic or sexual overtures
 - viii. Choosing to spend time chatting with internet friends (especially of the opposite sex) over being with one's spouse
 - ix. Not acknowledging the heart issues behind the words that a spouse shares
 - x. Not looking at a spouse when they're talking
 - xi. Being critical of or ridiculing a spouse in public, even in jest
 - xii. In a dispute or disagreement that involves the children, ganging up with them against the spouse
 - xiii. Saying things like "Oh, your mother is just being weird (stupid, illogical, emotional, etc.) again" or "Don't listen to your father, he doesn't know what he's talking about" to one's kids

What would have to happen for you to consider this class a personal success for you?

What is your default "WENI" mode? How has that been destructive in your marriage?

Speaker/Listener technique

1. Preliminary Statements about the Speaker/Listener Technique

- a. The goal here is to **understand** the other person's perspective.
- b. It is critical to separate problem discussion from problem solving.
- c. Premature problem solving leads to poor solutions and poor follow through. You cannot solve a problem when you don't really understand the issues.
- d. Only move to problem solving when both agree you have a good discussion of the issues. This allows for a solution to proceed from a secure base of understanding and respect.

2. The "Time Out"

- a. There is no benefit to hashing through a disagreement when one or both of you cannot engage. Be wary of times when you are **hungry, angry, late** or **tired** (HALT)
- b. A time out can be called at any time in the conflict resolution process.
- c. If someone calls a "time out" you need to set a specific time (preferably within 24 hours) to circle back up. A "time out" is not meant to "get out" of a difficult conversation.

3. XYZ Statements

- a. What is an XYZ statement? - XYZ statements are a great way to communicate hurts & frustrations that need to be shared as well as a way to provide positive feedback. Using these types of statements when processing conflict can be very helpful because it forces us to deal in specifics and not vague generalities.
 - i. When you do X (a specific behavior)
 - ii. In situation Y (a specific setting)
 - iii. It makes me feel Z (a specific feeling)
 1. Examples for hurts & frustrations:
 - a. "When you threw your clothes on the floor after you came home from work last night, I felt angry."
 - b. "When you showed up 15 minutes late for my appointment with the doctor I felt hurt."
 2. Examples for positive feedback:

- a. “When you brought me that grande, non-fat, three-pump, extra-hot, white chocolate mocha from Starbucks before the study, I felt really cared for.”
- b. “Yesterday, when you cleaned the house before I got home from work, I felt really loved.”

4. **Rules For Both**

- a. The speaker is the one with the floor.
- b. You share the floor over the course of the conversation.
- c. No problem solving
- d. Stay on one subject at a time
- e. You can stop the flow for a moment if something is unclear or not going right.

5. **Rules for the Speaker**

- a. Don't go on and on
- b. After saying a bit, stop and allow the listener to paraphrase what has been said
- c. Speak for yourself
- d. You can pass the floor at any time to the listener to hear their side of the issue.

6. **Rules for the Listener**

- a. Your job is to listen well.
- b. Paraphrase what the speaker is saying
- c. You can ask for examples or explanations of something the Speaker said
- d. Do not offer your opinion or thoughts until you get the floor.
- e. Concentrate on what the speaker is saying and attempt to edit out your internal response.

7. **Speaker/Listener Benefits**

- a. **Safe Haven** – When done properly, the speaker/listener technique provides a safe place for both people to communicate what they are feeling. This is especially important for a person who tends to withdraw. Also, when speaker/listener is done properly it is very difficult (though not impossible) to escalate the conversation.

- b. **Content Validation** – Because the listener has to paraphrase what the speaker says there is instant content validation that ensures the message communicated was heard as the speaker intended it. Many of our arguments come from a miscommunication that can be avoided with the speaker/listener technique.
- c. **Personal Validation** – The goal of speaker/listener is understanding. Since this does not mean that you have to agree with each other you are free to validate the other person and show that you respect them and their ideas. This reinforces the “team” concept and leads to greater personal validation.

Homework Assignment

1. How are you doing at viewing your marriage from a “team” perspective?
2. What is your default negative communication pattern?
3. What subject or setting usually leads to “fighting” or hurt feelings?
4. Continue to Practice the Speaker/Listener technique - do not use a hot topic – use topics that will not elicit strong emotional responses (e.g. where should we take our next vacation, what’s your idea of a great date, what does your dream house look like, etc....).