

**MARRIAGE IS  
NOT FOR WIMPS**

**COMMUNICATION  
CLASS**

**SESSION TWO**

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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   T W O   O U T L I N E

- Opening Thoughts & Recap
- Table Talk Time – Week 1 Recap
- Filters & Miscommunication
- Table Talk Time - Filters
- Expectations
- Speaker / Listener Technique
- Table Talk Time – Expectations & Speaker / Listener

## Week 2 - Opening Thoughts

“God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.”

- C.S. Lewis

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

- John 15:5

“We all want progress, but if you're on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive.”

- C. S. Lewis

## Reminder - 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.

## \*\*\*Table Talk Time - Week 1 Recap\*\*\*

1. Did you do the homework questions? What insights did you gain from the questions?
2. Did you have an opportunity to practice the Speaker/Listener Technique? How did it go? What was the most difficult part of this technique? Where did you get tripped up?
3. Were you a “weni” this week? What was the scenario? What was your spouse's response? Did it get resolved?

## **Filters & Miscommunication**

We tend to think that whenever we speak we are clear, obvious and easily understood. However, the fact is that others don't always see things as we do, and therefore we need to make allowances for these miscommunications. We receive information from all our senses, but before we can process and act on this, it passes through perception filters. Everyone uses these and they are an essential part of the way we understand and process information. However, they can also cause confusion and misunderstanding. Working out where your misunderstandings generally arise can help you determine which filter is your own biggest stumbling block. Once you recognize which filter is your Achilles heel, you can work to overcome it.

### **1. Types of Filters**

- a. **Inattention** – When people are distracted or uninterested they simply do not get the message. They either don't hear the speaker or they simply ignore them.
- b. **Emotional States** – When someone is in heightened emotional state it is easy to misconstrue what is being said.
- c. **Beliefs & Expectations**
  - i. Confirmation Bias - People often expect us to respond a certain way based on prior experiences. Confirmation Bias is a tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions – we have an incredible tendency to see in others what we expect to see.
  - ii. Error of Attribution - People tend to have a default assumption that what a person does is based more on what "kind" of person he or she is, rather than the social and environmental forces at work on that person. This default assumption leads to people sometimes making erroneous explanations for behavior. This general bias to over-emphasizing dispositional explanations for behavior at the expense of situational explanations is much less likely to occur when people evaluate their own behavior.
- d. **Differences in Style** – Some of us are loud, outspoken and aggressive. Others are introverted, introspective and timid. Some of us are wordy & can't get to the

point....others of us are cut & dry and lack tact. We need to develop a tolerance for our spouse's communication style.

- i. Gender Differences
  - ii. Personality Differences
- e. **Self-protection** – When someone covers up their real concerns and feelings out of fear of rejection. They will communicate in such a way to protect us from getting hurt or rejected.
- i. What is it about me that makes you want to self-protect?
  - ii. What is it about you that makes you want to self-protect?

## 2. **Dealing with Filters**

- a. **Assume filters are there.** Come to terms with the fact that you are not a totally rational person and that you are affected by your mood, your past and your style.
- b. **Accept the fact that your memory is not perfect.** Simply agree that you each may have differing perceptions of the same incident. Countless psychological studies show how fragile human memory is – how susceptible it is to motivation and beliefs. Recognize that it is almost never going to be profitable to pursue an argument about what was said in the past. Don't get stuck in the past, even if it was five minutes ago. Shift the topic to what you think and feel in the present.
- c. **Announce filters when you know they are there.** Get them in the open where they can do less damage.
  - i. If you've had a tough day at work then inform your spouse of this fact (i.e. "I'm edgy because I had an argument with my boss, etc...").
  - ii. If you are experiencing fear of abandonment during a difficult conversation then bring this out into the light (i.e. "Growing up in my house my dad would often leave for days when my parents got into a fight.").
  - iii. If you are attempting to interact with your spouse but missed part of the conversation because you got distracted then bring it up right away rather than try to stumble through the conversation. (i.e. "Sorry honey...I wasn't listening

and I totally missed what you just said because I was watching this really funny Man Law commercial. Let me turn the TV off and give you my full attention.”)

### **\*\*\*Table Talk Time - Filters\*\*\***

1. How have filters caused problems in your marriage?
2. Do you have a “default” filter that you most often find yourself using?
3. Talk about your communication style & how it can help or hinder good communication?

### **Expectations**

“Expectations are profoundly powerful, as they reflect what we long for and how we wish things would be. When they are fulfilled, they are a tree of life. But when what we expect does not happen, the hope deferred makes our hearts sick. To a large degree, we are disappointed or satisfied in life based on how well what is happening matches what we expect... Therefore, expectations play a crucial role in determining our level of satisfaction in marriage...Expectations affect everything. “

- Scott Stanley, Daniel Trathen, Savanna McCain & Milt Bryan,  
*A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for your Marriage*

Expectation is the root of all heartache.

- William Shakespeare

Blessed is he who expects nothing for he shall never be disappointed.

- Alexander Pope, *In a letter to Gay, October 6, 1727*

Expectations are beliefs about the way things will be or should be - including about behaviors, roles, life and death, relationships, and so forth. Expectations that are not met lead to feelings of sadness, disappointment, frustration, and anger.

We have expectations about everything and whether or not these expectations are met can affect our overall sense of satisfaction. Perhaps the single biggest cause of conflicts & disappointment can be attributed to unmet expectations.

### 1. **Everyday Expectation Examples**

- a. How you want to be greeted when you walk in the door after work?
- b. Who drives the car when you go out?
- c. Who changes diapers?
- d. What time your spouse should be home each night?
- e. How will you spend Christmas?
- f. Who is responsible for filling up the gas tank?
- g. Who's the primary lawn care person?
- h. What is the right way to squeeze the toothpaste?
- i. How do you want your clothes folded?
- j. Who manages the checkbook?
- k. What is the maximum amount you can spend without checking with your spouse?
- l. On and on and on.....

### 2. **Origins of Expectations**

- a. **Family of Origin** – We have picked up many expectations unconsciously as we grew up. Our family experiences laid down many patterns – good and bad – that became the models for how we think things should or will be. Expectations were transmitted directly by what our parents said and indirectly by what you observed. No one comes to marriage as a blank slate.
- b. **Previous Relationships** – We have also developed expectations from the other important relationships in our life such as previous dating relationships or marriages. We have expectations about how to kiss, what is romantic, how to communicate about problems, how recreational time should be spent, what church to go to and how often to attend, who should take responsibility for the first move to make up after a fight, and so on.

- c. **Cultural Influences & Backgrounds** – A variety of powerful cultural factors can influence our expectations: books, television, movies and so forth. What expectations would we have about marriage, for example, based upon watching thousands of hours of TV in America? What about our cultural background? Did we grow up in the same country and in the same culture, or do we have very different backgrounds?
- d. **Core Beliefs (Religious, Spiritual & Otherwise)** – We all have key beliefs about life, God, and how it all fits together. These beliefs make up your core belief system. Everyone has a core belief system. Even if you do not see yourself as being religious or spiritual, you have a core belief system. Don't be misled into thinking that just because you both have a Christian background that you automatically see spiritual issues similarly.

### 3. **Three Kinds of Expectations**

- a. **Unaware** – Even when you are not fully aware of them, unmet expectations can lead to great disappointment and frustration. And when they continue to be unmet, they can shift from disappointed expectations to angry demands.
- b. **Unspoken** – We may have reasonable expectations, but they aren't reasonable if they have not been clearly expressed. Your spouse cannot do anything about something he or she doesn't know about. It's critical to express your expectations to your spouse. Do not assume that your partner knows what you are looking for?
- c. **Unreasonable** – The truth is many expectations we have just aren't realistic. For example, is it reasonable to expect that your partner will never seriously disagree with you? Of course not! Many newly married couples feel that because their love is so strong they will not experience any serious conflict. One of the most destructive and unreasonable expectations we can have is that our spouse will meet all our unmet needs and heal all the wounds we experienced from prior relationships. Those who think this way set themselves up for serious disappointment as only a growing relationship with Jesus Christ can meet that expectation.

### 4. **Three Solutions**

- a. **Be aware** – If you find yourself upset ask this question, “what was I expecting to happen?” This may help reveal an expectation that you were unaware you had. It is

your responsibility to be self-aware, not your spouses. Healthy couples are made up of two individuals who are self aware.

- b. **Be clear** – Talk to your spouse about your expectations.
  - i. Are you taking a trip to see the in-laws? Then ask about what your spouse expects of you?
  - ii. Are you gearing up for a big event? Then sit down with your spouse and talk about what each of you expects.
  - iii. Have you ever had a discussion about the various roles in marriage? Then sit down and talk through what your expectations are for a husband and what they are for a wife?
  - iv. Etc.....
- c. **Be reasonable**
  - i. Recognize that we all have unrealistic expectations.
  - ii. Recognize that what we want may not be what's going to occur.
  - iii. We have to learn what it means to “flex” in marriage.

**\*\*\*Table Talk Time – Expectations & Speaker / Listener Technique \*\*\***

1. What were / are some of the unrealistic expectations you brought into marriage?
2. What expectations about marriage (unrealistic or realistic) did you get from your family of origin?
3. “Perhaps the single biggest cause of conflicts & disappointment can be attributed to unmet expectations.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?

## Homework

### Expectation Exercise

Use the exercise below to explore your expectations for how you think this relationship should be & what you desire of it. Spend some time carefully thinking through and writing down your feelings about each question. There may be numerous other areas where you have expectations. Please consider everything you can think of that seems significant to you. This is one exercise that you will get little out of unless you are able and willing to really put some time into it. Many couples have found such an exercise extremely beneficial for their relationship. This exercise will also provide a lot of good material with which you can practice good communication skills.

**Remember, the point is to consider beliefs and expectations for how you think the relationship should be, not how it is and not how you guess it will be.**

**Write down what you expect, whether or not you think the expectation is realistic. It is essential that you write down what you really think, not what sounds like the “correct” or least embarrassing answer. This is not an exercise to hammer your spouse – it’s designed to reveal your expectations.**

**It can be valuable to consider what you observed and learned in each of these areas in your family growing up.** This is probably where many of your beliefs about what you want or do not want come from. Also, consider previous relationships, and what you came to believe about relationships in them?

**“What do you want regarding...(or how do you think things should be) regarding:**

1. The longevity of this relationship?
2. Sexual fidelity?
3. Love? Do you expect to love each other always? Do you expect this to change over time?

4. Your sexual relationship? Frequency? Practices? Taboos?
5. Romance? What is romantic for you?
6. Children? How many? What do you expect to do if you are unable to conceive?
7. Work, careers, and provision of income? Who will work in the future? Whose career/job is more important? If there are children, will either partner reduce work time out of the home to take care of the children?
8. The degree of emotional dependency on the other? Do you want to be taken care of and how? How much time do you expect to be able to rely on each other to get through the tough times?
9. Basic approach to life? As a team? As two independent individuals?
10. Loyalty? What does it mean to you?
11. Communication about problems? Do you want to talk these out? If so, how?
12. Power? Who do you expect will have more power in what kinds of decisions? For example, who will control money or who will discipline the kids? What happens if you disagree in a key area? Who has the power now, and how do you feel about that?
13. Household tasks? Who do you expect to do what? How much household work will each of you do in the future? Does the current breakdown here match up with what you ideally expect?
14. Time together? How much time do you want to spend together (versus with friends, at work, with family, etc...)

15. Sharing feelings? How much of what you are feeling do you expect should be shared?
16. Friendship with your partner?
17. Friendship with someone who is not your spouse? What would it mean to maintain a friendship with someone other than your partner? What if that person is of the opposite gender?
18. The little things in life? How do you squeeze the toothpaste? Is the toilet seat left up or down? Who sends greeting cards, if either? Who does laundry? Who takes care of the vehicles?
19. List all the other expectations for how you want things to be that are important, that you are aware of and are not listed above.

**Now go back to each area above and rate each expectation on a scale of 1 to 10 for how reasonable you think the expectation really is using the scale below:**

**10** – “Completely reasonable” – I really think it’s okay to expect this in this type of relationship?

**1** – “Completely unreasonable” – I can honestly say that while I expect or want this, it is just not a reasonable expectation in this type of relationship.

Now schedule some time to sit down with your spouse and go over these expectations. Place a big check mark by each expectation you wrote about that you feel is especially important to you. This will take some time but will be worth it!