

**MARRIAGE IS
NOT FOR WIMPS**

**COMMUNICATION
CLASS**

SESSION THREE

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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 H R E E O U T L I N E

- Week 2 Recap & Week 3 Opening Thoughts
- Table Talk Time – Homework & Week 2 Recap
- Expressing Criticism Constructively
- Ground Rules for Protecting Your Marriage from Bad Conflict
- Table Talk Time
- Events, Issues & Hidden Issues
- Speaker / Listener Technique
- Table Talk Time – Practice Speaker / Listener Technique

Reminders from Week 2

#1 - Filters

1. Types of Filters

- a. Inattention
- b. Emotional States
- c. Beliefs & Expectations
- d. Differences in Style
- e. Self-protection

2. Dealing with Filters

- a. Assume filters are there.
- b. Accept the fact that your memory is not perfect
- c. Announce filters when you know they are there

#2 - Expectations

1. Origins of Expectations

- a. Family of Origin
- b. Previous Relationships
- c. Cultural Influences & Backgrounds
- d. Core Beliefs

2. Three Kinds of Expectations & Their Solutions

Type of Expectation	Solution
Unaware	Be aware
Unspoken	Be clear
Unreasonable	Be reasonable

#3 - 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.

Week 3 - Opening Thoughts

"Marriage is a noose."

- Miguel de Cervantes, Spanish author

"Marriage is like a cage; one sees the birds outside desperate to get in, and those inside equally desperate to get out."

- Michel de Montaigne, French Renaissance author

"If you want to sacrifice the admiration of many men for the criticism of one, go ahead, get married."

- Katharine Hepburn

Only two things are necessary to keep one's wife happy. One is to let her think she is having her own way, the other, to let her have it.

- Lyndon B. Johnson

Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. ***But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.***

- 1 Corinthians 7:27-28 (*emphasis mine*)

Table Talk Time

1. What insights did you gain from the Expectation Assignment?
2. Did you have any unmet, unspoken or unrealistic expectations this week? Were you able to talk through them with your spouse?

Expressing Criticism Constructively

During the course of your marriage you will have to provide constructive criticism to your spouse (& you will be provided with constructive criticism!). We should not avoid these conversations because, when they are done in love, they can be vital in the growth process. As Proverbs 25:11-12 says, "***The***

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right word at the right time is like a custom-made piece of jewelry, and a wise friend's timely reprimand is like a gold ring slipped on your finger (The Message)." It's not just what you say, but when you say it and how you say it.

1. **Destructive Griping:**

"And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison." (James 3:6-8)

- a. **Mind Reading** – Talk about what you think and feel, not what you think your partner thinks and feels. You are not a mind reader and you really don't know what your spouse is thinking.
- b. **Character Assassination** – "You're lazy" "You have no integrity" "You're stupid." These types of statements imply that things can't change. The Lord can heal even the most broken marriages.
- c. **Catastrophic Interpretations** – "You always" or "You Never" Be aware when your perception is worse than reality. No one is consistent enough to merit a "you always" or a "you never."
- d. **Blaming** – "It's all your fault!" A marriage is made up of two individuals and very, very rarely is only one person to blame. In most circumstances there is plenty of blame to go around.

2. **Constructive Gripping**

- a. **XYZ Statements** – A good way to communicate constructive criticism.
 - i. **Example:** "You are so inconsiderate" versus "When you said that what I did for work wasn't really that hard (X) to John and Susan at the party last night (Y); I was really embarrassed & felt under-appreciated (Z)."
 - ii. **Specific Examples** – Unless you are careful, it becomes very easy to fall into nonspecific attacks on character (which lead to defensiveness and escalation). The XYZ is far more constructive because a specific behavior is identified in a

specific context and the “I” part requires you to take responsibility for your own feelings.

Ground Rules for Protecting Your Marriage from Conflict

As we’ve talked about, selfishness, upbringing, gender differences, and personal choices can lead to isolation if we don’t learn to manage the inevitable conflicts and differences that will arise in marriage.

1. Protecting Against Damaging Conflict

- a. **Anticipate problems** -- it’s unrealistic not to expect conflict. You are a sinner and you married a sinner. “But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.” (1 Corinthians 7:28)
- b. **Take responsibility for your behavior** – Don’t shift the responsibility – own what you need to own and then work toward reconciliation. “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” (Romans 12:18)
- c. **Reinforce your partner's efforts to communicate well** – Celebrate when you see your spouse trying to improve. If it’s the first time in a long time don’t respond with “it’s about time!” – give grace and thank him for the effort. “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” (1 Thess. 5:11)

2. Six Ground Rules for Handling Conflict & Differences

- a. When conflict is escalating, we will call a “time out” & either:
 - i. Try using the Speaker/Listener Technique
 - ii. Agree to talk later, using the Speaker/Listener Technique
 - iii. Involve Community in the discussion
- b. When we are having trouble communicating, we will engage in the Speaker Listener Technique.
 - i. This gives everyone a specific way to put James 1:19 into practice, “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”
- c. When using the Speaker/Listener Technique, we will completely separate problem discussion from problem solving.

- i. “He who answers before listening – that is his folly and his shame” – Proverbs 18:13
- ii. Don’t rush to a solution until you both are sure you understand the problems.
- d. Either one can bring up an issue at any time, but the “listener” can say “this is not a good time.” If the listener does not want to talk at that time, he or she takes responsibility for setting up a time to talk in the near future (usually within 24 to 48 hours).
- e. We will have weekly couple meetings.
 - i. This is a tangible way to place a high priority on your oneness by setting aside time to deal with issues & problems in your marriage.
 - ii. It ensures that even if there is no other good time to deal with issues and problems in your marriage, you at least have this weekly meeting as your “default setting.”
 - iii. Having weekly meetings takes much of the day to day pressure off your relationship.
- f. We will make time for the great things of marriage: fun, friendship, and sensuality. We will agree to protect these times from conflict and the need to deal with issues.
 - i. None of us got married because we wanted to have tough conversations all the time.
 - ii. It’s critical that we set aside time for enjoying the God-given blessings of marriage. We need some nurturing and safe times for relaxing – having fun, talking as friends, making love – when conflict and problems are always off limits.

*****Table Talk Time*****

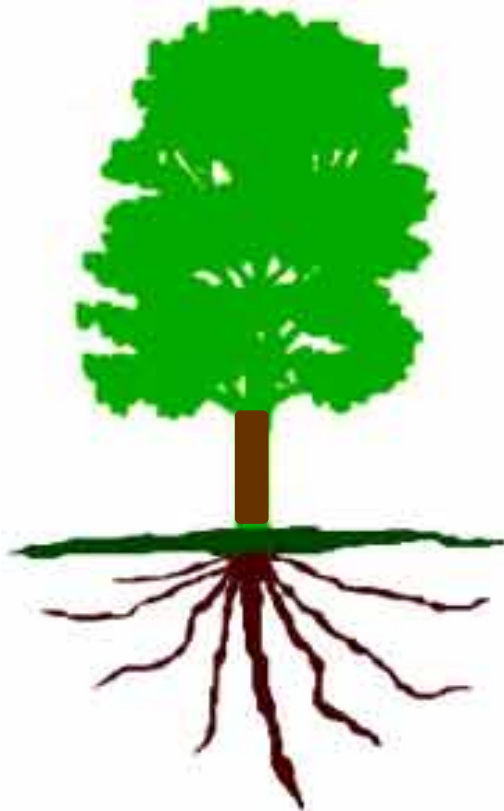
1. How did/do your parents handle the giving of constructive criticism? Toward each other? Toward you?
2. Did you have an opportunity to practice the Speaker/Listener Technique? How did it go? What was the most difficult part of this technique? Where did you get tripped up?

Events, Issues & Hidden Issues

“The four major issues that most married couples say cause problems are money, sex, communication and children. Other things couples commonly fight about are in-laws, recreation, alcohol and drugs, religion, careers, and housework. We call all these things issues. Actually, issues are not the things that couples argue about most frequently. What they do argue most often about are the small, day to day happenings of life. We call these events. We want to help you handle issues separately and then separate the issues that are more apparent – like money, communication, sex – from the deeper, often hidden, issues that affect your relationship.”

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

When trying to distinguish between events, issues and hidden issues the illustration of a tree can be helpful. When you see a tree from afar the first thing we notice are the **leaves**. If we get closer we can examine the **trunk**. But to view the **roots**, which hold the whole tree up, we have to dig deep.



← **Events**
Leaves Bill sent late, Check bounces, argument over dishes, etc...

← **Issues**
Trunk Money, sex, communication, careers, alcohol, children, in-laws, etc...

← **Hidden Issues**
Roots Power, Caring, Recognition, Commitment, Integrity, Acceptance

1. Events

- a. The small, day to day happenings that all couples argue about.
- b. Events often trigger the more important issues in your relationship. (“Triggering Events”)
- c. Events tend to come up at the most inopportune times
 - i. You’re ready to leave for work
 - ii. You’re getting ready to leave for a marriage conference that your mother-in-law paid for as a 1 year anniversary gift
 - iii. You’re trying to get everyone ready to go to church
 - iv. You’re going to bed
 - v. The kids are fighting
 - vi. You’re going out to relax
 - vii. Friends are coming over

2. Issues

- a. The more important areas of life that you have to cope with.
- b. Three major issues that most couples wrestle with are money, sex & communication.
- c. Other common issues include: in-laws, children, recreation, alcohol, careers, and housework.
- d. Most couples only deal with their issues in the context of events.

3. Hidden Issues

- a. Sometimes we get into reoccurring fights about trivial events that don’t seem to be attached to any particular issue (leaving the toilet seat up, not keeping the car clean, not putting the cap back on the milk jug, etc...).
- b. Repeated arguments about these kinds of things could be a sign that you aren’t getting at the real issues. It’s not about money, or careers, it’s not about housework, it’s not really about leaving the toilet seat up. The real issue may be deeper and more elusive.
- c. Hidden issues often drive our most frustrating and destructive arguments.
- d. “Hidden” in the sense that:
 - i. They are usually not talked about openly & constructively.
 - ii. They may require more work to discover

- e. Hidden issues often get lost in the flow of the argument because we focus on the event at hand.
- f. Six Hidden Issues capture a lot of the things going on:
 - i. **Control and Power** - Who's in charge? Do you feel controlled? Are the needs of both individuals equally important? Whose input is most important in key decisions?
 - ii. **Needing & Caring** - The main theme is the extent to which you feel loved and cared for? Does your partner's love seem clear? Does it seem conditional?
 - iii. **Recognition** - Do you feel valued by your partner for who you are and what you do? Are your accomplishments recognized? Although caring issues involve concerns about being cared for or loved, recognition issues are more about feeling valued by your partner for who you are and what you do.
 - iv. **Commitment** - The focus here is long term security. Is your relationship secure? "Are you going to stay with me?" Many people who have gone through a divorce (their own or their parent's) or other forms of abandonment as children, struggle with fears about commitment.
 - v. **Integrity** - Integrity is triggered when you feel challenged in how you see yourself. How do you respond when your spouse questions your motives or intent?
 - vi. **Acceptance** – The one issue that seems to underlie all the others listed above: the desire for acceptance and fear of rejection. At the deepest level we are motivated to find acceptance and avoid rejection in our relationships. This reflects the deep need we all have to be both respected and connected. No matter what our differences or problems, we are called to accept our mates with a richness that frees them to feel safer in the relationship.

4. Signs of Hidden Issues

- a. **Spinning Your Wheels** – Do you find yourself talking about the same issue over and over again but getting nowhere? If an argument starts with "here we go again" you should

suspect a hidden issue. You aren't getting anywhere because you are probably not talking about what really matters.

- b. **Trivial Triggers** – When minor things blow up out of all proportion. Is the response in line with the offense?
- c. **Avoidance** – When one or both is avoiding certain topics or levels of intimacy. It could be that walls have begun to go up between you. This often means that important, unexpressed issues are affecting the relationship.
- d. **Score Keeping** – When one or both starts keeping score. The key is that score keeping reflects something that needs attention in your relationship.

5. **Handling Issues & Events**

- a. Don't try to deal with important issues in the context of triggering events.
- b. Events are often best handled by observing the Ground Rules, especially the Time Out rule.
- c. Issues can be kept smaller and less negatively charged by regularly dealing with the problems that come your way.
- d. Hidden Issues often respond best to open, safe, and clear communication.

*****Table Talk Time*****

Practice the speaker/listener technique (each couple takes turns practicing the Speaker / Listener in front of the other couples):

1. About an event that you often have arguments about (are there any issue or hidden issue underneath?)
2. About an issue that keeps coming up and you seem unable to resolve.
3. Another safe topic.

Things to keep in mind:

1. At this stage please try and avoid "the issue" in your marriage.
2. The Speaker should communicate in short bursts so the listener can accurately paraphrase.
3. Speak for yourself – avoid mindreading
4. Remember to utilize XYZ statements

Homework

Take 30 minutes and answer these questions separately. When you have completed the questions come together to discuss your responses. Use the Speaker / Listener technique to assist you in any sensitive topics.

1. In the last three months how have you done at expressing constructive criticism toward your spouse?

Really Poor Job

Honored my Spouse

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. When I allow my flesh to rule in conflict I find myself most often engaging in the following form(s) of griping:
 - a. Mind Reading
 - b. Character Assassination
 - c. Catastrophic Interpretation
 - d. Blaming
3. When my spouse allows his/her my flesh to rule in conflict they most often engaging in the following form(s) of griping:
 - a. Mind Reading
 - b. Character Assassination
 - c. Catastrophic Interpretation
 - d. Blaming
4. What are two things **you** can do to increase your ability to express constructive criticism in a way that honor Christ?

a. _____

b. _____

5. In the past week what is one thing your spouse has done that you have appreciated and that made you feel loved? _____

6. What are two issues you and your spouse repeatedly having conflict about?

a. _____

b. _____

7. Are there any hidden issues that the Lord has brought to your mind through the week 3 discussion? _____

8. Is there any offense that has occurred in the last week that you need to apologize for and ask for forgiveness? _____
