

**MARRIAGE IS
NOT FOR WIMPS**

**COMMUNICATION
CLASS**

SESSION FIVE

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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 F I V E O U T L I N E

- Week 4 Recap & Opening Thoughts
- Table Talk Time – Homework
- Conflict Resolution: Problem Solving & Conflict Resolution Video
- Table Talk Time
- The Five Love Languages

Reminders from Week 4

#1 – Forgiveness

1. **Thesis** - Our ability to forgive one another has its genesis in God's forgiveness of us. The forgiveness, grace and mercy granted to us in Christ forms the basis of our security, our sure footing and our precedence to forgive others. ***Failing to embrace this concept will set you up for significant future frustrations.***
2. **Keys to Forgiveness**
 - a. Recognize that time alone does not heal
 - b. Whether offender or offended, be the first to take the initiative for restoration
 - c. Give up our right to get even
 - d. Do not hold it over the person's head
 - e. Become understanding of others
 - f. Pray, pray, pray
 - g. Humility

#2 - 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 and issues together, not to attack each other about issues and 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*****

1. Did you have the opportunity to ask for forgiveness or provide forgiveness to your spouse this week?
2. After completing the homework did the Lord reveal any areas of unforgiveness in your marriage? Did you talk about them with your spouse?
3. Did you have a chance to use Speaker/Listener this past week?

~ 4 ~

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Week 5 - Opening Thoughts

"To observe people in conflict is a necessary part of a child's education. It helps him to understand and accept his own occasional hostilities and to realize that differing opinions need not imply an absence of love."

- Milton R. Saperstein

"Whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude."

- William James

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others"

- Philippians 2:3-4

"The first to plead his case seems right, until another comes and examines him."

- Proverbs 18:17

Conflict Resolution: Problem Solving

1. Four Assumptions

- a. All couples have problems
 - i. The kinds of problems couples deal with change over time
 - ii. Key Point – it's not what your problems are; it's how you handle them that will matter most in your marriage.
- b. It is best to handle problems as a team
 - i. You have a **choice** when dealing with a problem. Either you will nurture a sense that you are working as a team against the problem, or you will operate as if you are working against each other.
- c. Rushed solutions are poor solutions
 - i. Two major factors propel couples to rush to premature solutions: Time Pressure & Conflict Avoidance
 - ii. We are not great at being patient & we want the solution now.
- d. Most often, though not always, our inability to come to a mutually beneficial solution is rooted in **selfishness & sin**
 - i. We don't want to be flexible

~ 5 ~

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- ii. We don't want to change
- iii. We don't want to admit we are wrong

2. Step 1 - Prayer

- a. Allow the Lord to participate in finding solutions to important problems.
- b. Beyond the spiritual benefit of praying (e.g. asking God to assist with the issue) there is tremendous value on stopping to pray as you work through conflict. It is a physical way to remind both people that the Lord is present and that oneness is His priority.
- c. It is difficult (though not impossible) to pray for a tender, open and understanding heart and then in the next moments act in a self-serving manner.
- d. There may be times where you literally have to force yourself to pray for an open heart, a team mentality, and discernment.

3. Step 2 - Problem Discussion (Understanding)

a. Preliminary Statements

- i. The goal here is to understand the other person's perspective.
- ii. It is critical to separate problem discussion from problem solving.
- iii. Premature problem solving leads to poor solutions and poor follow through. You cannot solve a problem when you don't really understand the issues.
- iv. 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.

b. Speaker/Listener Technique

i. Rules For Both

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

ii. Rules for the Speaker

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

iii. Rules for the Listener

1. Your job is to listen well.
2. Paraphrase what the speaker is saying
3. You can ask for examples or explanations of something the Speaker said
4. Do not offer your opinion or thoughts until you get the floor.
5. Concentrate on what the speaker is saying and attempt to edit out your internal response.

4. Step 3 - Problem Solving

- a. As you enter the problem solving phase do not use the Speaker/Listener technique. Drop the structure of that technique and follow the flow of the following steps.

b. Set Agenda

- i. Pick a very specific piece of the issue you are working on to try and solve. Make it very clear what you are trying to solve at this time.
- ii. Some problems are large and have many "sub-issues" – pick one of the smaller pieces to work through (ex. Finances might be the issue – but you may have problems with credit cards, retirement accounts, budgeting problems, etc...).
- iii. Stay on this specific focus for solution ideas.

c. Brainstorm

- i. Any idea can be suggested. One of you should write them all down.
- ii. Do not evaluate the ideas during brainstorming, verbally or nonverbally. This includes making faces.
- iii. Be creative. Suggest whatever comes to mind, no matter how ridiculous it might seem.

- iv. Have fun with it if you can. This is a time for a sense of humor: all other feelings should be dealt with in the problem discussion.

d. Agreement & Compromise

- i. The goal is to come up with a specific solution or combination of solutions that you both agree to try (it's not going to work if both people do not agree to try the solution).
- ii. Work through the different ideas that came up.
- iii. Try out different combinations.
- iv. Try for a solution that would work in light of your understanding of what is important to each other.
- v. You will not have a great marriage if either of you gets your way all the time.

e. Follow Up

- i. Set specific time frame to see if solution is working.
- ii. Meet after time frame and evaluate how it is going.
- iii. Make adjustments if needed.

f. Getting Bugged Down or When Emotions Flair Up?

- i. Use a time out if needed.
- ii. If you get stuck in problem solving phase, it often means issues are more complicated or unclear. It can be helpful to cycle back to the understanding phase.
- iii. Break problems down into even smaller pieces for agenda setting.

g. When There is No Solution

- i. Some problems have no mutually satisfying solutions. ***However, there are far fewer un-resolvable problems than some couples might think.***
- ii. If you've worked through the process for some time and no solution is forthcoming then you've got one of two options:
 - 1. Let the lack of a solution damage the rest of your marriage.
 - 2. You can plan for how to live with the differences. You can choose to live together graciously in the absence of a solution.

- iii. Problems with no clear solution or where a compromise cannot be reached must be handled with care & **in the context of your community**.

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

1. How have you traditionally handled conflict resolution within your marriage? Only the strong survives? Compromise? Take turns “winning”? Ignore the conflict?
2. In your marriage who generally leads out in conflict resolution?
3. “Most often, though not always, our inability to come to a mutually beneficial solution is rooted in selfishness & sin” Agree? Disagree? Why?

The Five Love Languages

Overview

“We each come to marriage with a different personality and history...with different expectations, different ways of approaching things, and different opinions about what matters in life...We need not agree on everything but we must find a way to handle our differences so that they do not become divisive...I am convinced that no single area of marriage affects the rest of marriage as much as meeting the emotional need for love.”

– Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*

The Love Tank

“Could it be that deep inside hurting couples exists an invisible “emotional love tank’ with its gauge on empty? Could the misbehavior, withdrawal, harsh words & critical spirit occur because of that empty tank? If we could find a way to fill it, could the marriage be reborn? With a full tank would couples be able to create an emotional climate where it is possible to discuss differences and resolve conflicts? Could the tank be the key that makes marriages work?”

“I am convinced that keeping the emotional love tank full is as important to a marriage as maintaining the proper oil level is to an automobile. Running your marriage on an empty “love tank” may cost you even more than trying to drive your car without oil”

“The five love languages and learning to speak the primary love language of your spouse may radically affect his or her behavior. People behave differently when their emotional love tanks are full.”

– Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*

What are the Five Love Languages

1. Words of Affirmation

- a. Mark Twain once said “I can live for two months on a good compliment.” Verbal appreciation speaks powerfully to persons whose primary Love Language is “Words of Affirmation.” Simple statements, such as, “You look great in that suit,” or “You must be the best baker in the world! I love your oatmeal cookies,” are sometimes all a person needs to hear to feel loved.
- b. Aside from verbal compliments, another way to communicate through “Words of Affirmation” is to offer encouragement. If a loved one listens for “Words of Affirmation,” offering encouragement will help him or her to overcome insecurities and develop greater confidence. Some examples are:
 - i. Reinforcing a difficult decision
 - ii. Calling attention to progress made on a current project
 - iii. Acknowledging a person’s unique perspective on an important topic.
 - iv. Humble words
- c. Two Positive Traits about my husband are:
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
- d. Two Positive Traits about my wife are:
 - i. _____

ii.

2. Quality Time

- a. Quality time is more than mere proximity. It's about focusing all your energy on your mate. A husband watching sports while talking to his wife is NOT quality time. Unless all of your attention is focused on your mate, even an intimate dinner for two can come and go without a minute of quality time being shared.
- b. Quality conversation is very important in a healthy relationship. It involves sharing experiences, thoughts, feelings and desires in a friendly, uninterrupted context. A good mate will not only listen, but offer advice and respond to assure their mate they are truly listening. Many mates don't expect you to solve their problems. They need a sympathetic listener.
- c. An important aspect of quality conversation is ***self-revelation***. In order for you to communicate with your mate, you must also be in tune with your inner emotions. It is only when you understand your emotions and inner feelings will you then be able to share quality conversation, and quality time with your mate.
- d. Quality activities are a very important part of quality time. Many mates feel most loved when they spend physical time together, doing activities that they love to do. Spending time together will bring a couple closer, and, in the years to come, will fill up a memory bank that you can reminisce about in the future. Whether it's sitting on the couch and having a brief conversation or playing together in a tennis league, quality time is a love language that is shared by many. Setting aside focused time with your mate will ensure a happy marriage. It means doing something together where we are giving our full attention to the other. The activity is incidental; the important thing emotionally is that we are spending focused time with each other.

3. Receiving Gifts

- a. Some mates respond well to visual symbols of love. If you speak this love language, you are more likely to treasure any gift as an expression of love and devotion. People who speak this love language often feel that a lack of gifts represents a lack of love from their mate. Luckily, this love language is one of the easiest to learn.

- b. If you want to become an effective gift giver, many mates will have to learn to change their attitude about money. If you are naturally a spender, you will have no trouble buying gifts for your mate. However, a person who is used to investing and saving their money may have a tough time adjusting to the concept of spending money as an expression of love. These people must understand that you are investing the money not in gifts, but in deepening your relationship with your mate.
- c. The gift of self is an important symbol of love. Sometimes all your mate desires is for someone to be there for them, going through the same trials and experiencing the same things. Your body can become a very powerful physical symbol of love.
- d. These gifts need not to come every day, or even every week. They don't even need to cost a lot of money. Free, frequent, expensive, or rare, if your mate relates to the language of receiving gifts, any visible sign of your love will leave them feeling happy and secure in your relationship.
- e. "A gift is something you can hold in your hand and say, 'Look, he was thinking of me,' or 'She remembered me.' You must be thinking of someone to give him a gift. The gift itself is a symbol of that thought. It doesn't matter if the gift costs money. What is important is that you thought of him. And it is not the thought implanted only in the mind that counts, but the thought expressed in actually securing the gift and giving it as the expression of love."

4. Acts of Service

- a. Sometimes simple chores around the house can be an undeniable expression of love. Even simple things like laundry and taking out the trash require some form of planning, time, effort, and energy. Just as Jesus demonstrated when he washed the feet of his disciples, doing humble chores can be a very powerful expression of love and devotion to your mate.
- b. Very often, both pairs in a couple will speak to the Acts of Service Language. However, it is very important to understand what acts of service your mate most appreciates. Even though couples are helping each other around the house, couples will still fight because they are unknowingly communicating with each other in two different dialects. For

example, a wife may spend her day washing the cars and walking to dog, but if her husband feels that laundry and dishes are a superior necessity, he may feel unloved, despite the fact that his wife did many other chores throughout the day. It is important to learn your mate's dialect and work hard to understand what acts of service will show your love.

- c. It is important to do these acts of service out of love and not obligation. A mate who does chores and helps out around the house out of guilt or fear will inevitably not be speaking a language of love, but a language of resentment. It's important to perform these acts out of the kindness of your heart.
- d. Demonstrating the acts of service can mean stepping out of the stereotypes. Acts of service require both mates to humble themselves into doing some chores and services that aren't usually expected from their gender. However, these little sacrifices will mean the world to your mate, and will ensure a happy relationship.
- e. Two things your wife could do to make you feel loved are:
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
- f. Two things your husband could do to make you feel loved are:
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____

5. **Physical Touch**

- a. Many mates feel the most loved when they receive physical contact from their partner. For a mate who speaks this love language loudly, physical touch can make or break the relationship.
- b. Sexual intercourse makes many mates feel secure and loved in a marriage. However, it is only one dialect of physical touch. Many parts of the body are extremely sensitive to stimulation. It is important to discover how your partner not only physically responds but also psychologically responds to these touches.
- c. It is important to learn how your mate speaks the physical touch language. Some touches are irritating and uncomfortable for your mate. Take the time to learn the

touches your mate likes. They can be big acts, such as back massages or lovemaking, or little acts such as touches on the cheek or a hand on the shoulder. It's important to learn how your mate responds to touch. That is how you will make the most of this love language.

- d. All marriages will experience crisis. In these cases, physical touch is very important. In a crisis situation, a hug can communicate an immense amount of love for that person. A person whose primary love language is physical touch would much rather have you hold them and be silent than offer any advice.
- e. It is important to remember that this love language is different for everyone. What type of touch makes you feel secure is not necessarily what will make your partner happy. It is important to learn each other's dialects. That way you can make the most of your hugging, kissing, and other physical contacts.

6. Closing Thoughts on the Five Love Languages

- a. The foundation on which the five love languages are built is service (which coincidentally is the same foundation that Christianity is built on. See also Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve & give His life as a ransom for many). It requires us to act in a manner that pleases and encourages the other person. That may obligate us to do things that may not be the easiest or most natural thing for us.
- b. When we **consistently** love our spouses well it is difficult (though not impossible) for them to respond negatively.
- c. This takes practice, **time** & communication.

Table Talk Time

- 1. Communication Class Evaluation
- 2. Five Love Languages Assessment

Problem Solving Assignment – Wife

From: *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for your Marriage*, page 92-93

Problem Area Assessment

Consider the following list of issues that all relationships must face. Please rate how much of a problem each area currently is in your relationship by writing in a number from 0 (not at all a problem) to 100 (a severe problem). For example, if “children” were somewhat of a problem, you might enter 25 next to “children.” If children were not a problem in your relationship, you might enter a 0 next to “children.” If children were a severe problem, you might enter 100. If you wish to add other areas not included in our list, please do so in the blank spaces provided. Be sure to rate all areas.

_____ Money	_____ In-Laws
_____ Recreation	_____ Alcohol & Drugs
_____ Jealousy	_____ Sex
_____ Communication	_____ Children (or potential children)
_____ Friends	_____ Religion
_____ Careers	_____ Other _____
_____ Fidelity	_____ Other _____

Practice Problem Solving

For practicing this model, it is critical that you follow these instructions carefully. When dealing with real problems in your relationship, the chances of conflict are significant, and we want you to practice in a way that enhances your chances of solidifying these skills.

1. Set aside time to practice when you won't be interrupted. Thirty minutes or so should be sufficient to begin using the sequence on one of the problems you want to solve.
2. Look over your problem inventories together. Construct a list of areas in which each of you rated the problem as being less serious. These are the problem areas we want you to use to practice the model at the start. We want you to practice with more manageable problems and look for specific solutions. That will boost your skills and help you gain confidence in the model.
3. We recommend that you set aside time to practice the Problem Discussion/Prayer/Problem Solution sequence several times a week for a couple of weeks. If you put in this time, you'll gain skill and confidence in handling problem areas together.
4. Keep your notes handy when practicing, and refer back to the steps that are recommended.

Problem Solving Assignment – Husband

From: *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for your Marriage*, page 92-93

Problem Area Assessment

Consider the following list of issues that all relationships must face. Please rate how much of a problem each area currently is in your relationship by writing in a number from 0 (not at all a problem) to 100 (a severe problem). For example, if “children” were somewhat of a problem, you might enter 25 next to “children.” If children were not a problem in your relationship, you might enter a 0 next to “children.” If children were a severe problem, you might enter 100. If you wish to add other areas not included in our list, please do so in the blank spaces provided. Be sure to rate all areas.

_____	Money	_____	In-Laws
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_____	Jealousy	_____	Sex
_____	Communication	_____	Children (or potential children)
_____	Friends	_____	Religion
_____	Careers	_____	Other
_____	Fidelity	_____	Other _____

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