

Together

BUILDING A GODLY MARRIAGE

LEADER GUIDE

SESSIONS 4 – 6



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DIFFERENCES AND DISLIKES

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this session is to help couples look at the ways they are different from one another. Often these differences can lead to frustration and feeling disconnected from one another. Our hope is to provide some tools for each couple to navigate their differences and grow together in intimacy, learning how to cultivate a grace-filled marriage characterized by appreciation and acceptance.

"Marriage requires a radical commitment to love our spouses as they are, while longing for them to become what they are not yet. Every marriage moves either toward enhancing one another's glory or toward degrading each other."

- Dan Allender and Tremper Longman III

LEADER LETTER

Dear Leader,

This session is a perfect follow up to the last one where we looked at what each spouse brings to the table. Managing differences that surface in marriage is so vital because when a spouse feels unaccepted or unappreciated, their intimacy will be threatened or, worse yet, destroyed.

At this point, let's review:

A Call to Remember: As we live by the design of the Creator we will flourish by allowing God to be the very center of our relationship.

A Call to Selflessness: We can love each other intentionally and selflessly the way Jesus loves.

A Call to Identity: Knowing who we are and why we are here helps us to accept and appreciate our spouse even if they are so very different from us.

In this session, we really want to challenge the couples to cultivate thankfulness, which doesn't come naturally. Be sure in your teaching plan to reinforce the need to put away pride which says, "Why can't you be more like me?" and put on humility which says, "I recognize your worth and value."

Challenge couples to focus on celebrating and applauding differences instead of griping and complaining about them. Be open to share personal stories from your own marriage about how you navigated your differences and dislikes. Couples remember stories!

-AMY, BYRON, AND CARLA

WHAT ARE GOD'S EXPECTATIONS FOR MARRIAGE?

"There is a very subtle form of pride that most people don't identify as pride, even though it's ruinous to marriage: we naturally think our marriages will be happier if our spouses would become just a little more like us." - Gary Thomas

SESSION GOAL – A CALL TO ACCEPT

- To challenge couples to build a grace-based marriage, cultivating gratitude and acceptance even though they know so intimately each other's faults, weaknesses, and struggles.

KEY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- **1 Thessalonians 5:18** – God's will is to give thanks in ALL things.
- **Philippians 2:3-4** – In humility, consider your spouse more important than self.
- **Romans 15:5-7** – God gives unity in marriage enabling you to accept your spouse as Christ accepted you. Oneness does not equal sameness.
- **Matthew 7:3-5** – Consider the plank in your own eye before trying to remove the speck in your spouse's eye.

STARTER QUESTIONS - REVIEW OF PREP WORK

Opener:



Did any of you have the chance to participate in a hobby or activity that your spouse enjoys but is a stretch for you (see assignment 4)? Tell us about it.

Can anyone share how you and your spouse are different (assignment 3)?

In what ways do you need your spouse's differences to balance your weaknesses?

How did the gratitude journal impact your relationship (Assignment 1)?



Pray the prayer on page 52.

TEACHING PLAN

Materials needed: White board, two Mason jars with tight lids, food coloring, water, oil, and egg yolk.

STATE THE SESSION GOAL:

- To challenge couples to build a grace-based marriage cultivating gratitude and acceptance, even though they know so intimately each other's faults, weaknesses, and struggles.

WHY CAN'T YOU BE LIKE ME?

Dating is meant to conceal but marriage is meant to reveal. Oftentimes when we first date and in the initial days of marriage we are unaware of how different we are from our spouse and we are unaware of our spouse's flaws and weaknesses.

However, Tim Keller says, "Marriage is like a Mack truck driving through your life revealing your flaws and humbling your reactions."



Have some fun with these questions and stories:

What initially attracted you to your spouse that possibly later turned into an irritant?

What are some of your differences that maybe you were unaware of while dating?



Oil and Water Experiment – Part 1 (see tools)

Sometimes it appears we are as different as oil and water. Have you ever felt this way?

[NOTE: Let the two Mason jars sit where people can see them.]



Write on white board:

Differences we tend to see in marriage

- Extrovert vs. Introvert
- Fast lane vs. Slow lane
- Verbal processor vs. internal processor
- Task vs. People
- Messy vs. Neat
- Factual vs. Emotional

Our homes of origin are different; males and females are different.

It's our natural tendency to begin to define our spouse before marriage by what they ARE and after marriage by what they ARE NOT. We thought we were **marrying our knight in shining armor only to see him as an idiot in a metal suit.**

PUT AWAY CONTEMPT

Geoffrey Chaucer quote: "Familiarity breeds contempt" which simply means the more you know someone the easier it is to lose admiration for them as you see their faults and differences.



What are some unproductive ways couples try to manage their differences?

[NOTE: Be sure and share examples from your own marriage.]

- Try to remake our spouse into our own image
- Marginalize their differences instead of applauding them
- Think our way is superior
- Compare our spouse with someone else

Why do we want to change our spouse?

- Because their habits irritate us
- We have a self-righteous attitude
- It's for "their" benefit

- We fear what people think
- For the sake of our children

What has been the result of these efforts?

- Tension and resentment
- Destruction of love
- Rebellion
- Discouragement
- Hinderance of God's work



WHITE BOARD: Write two columns.

PRIDE ----- HUMILITY

- Pride says, "Why can't you be more like me?" and humility says, "I recognize your worth and value." **Philippians 2:3-4**
- Pride says "Lord, change my spouse" and humility says, "Lord change me"
- Pride blinds us to the incredible gift God has given us in our spouse. Humility opens our eyes to see the plank in our own eye in comparison to the speck in our spouse's eye. - **Matthew 7:3-5**
- Pride has a ME mindset – "*How's this working for me.*" Humility has an US mindset – "*What am I doing to make this marriage work.*"
- Humility changes our expectations from what we want to what God wants from us for our marriage



How has God humbled you by being married?

**HOW CAN YOU ACCEPT YOUR SPOUSE
FOR WHO THEY ARE?**

Disclaimer: Accepting a spouse doesn't mean accepting destructive behavior. Hurtful behavior must be addressed and cannot be overlooked. There are some things in marriage that you or your spouse need to change. With things that need changing, go to God first and pray for your spouse.

Avoid manipulation, control, and complaining but try to speak the truth in a loving way. Let them know your needs. If necessary, seek help from a trusted friend or counselor.

PUT AWAY CONTEMPT AND PUT ON GRATITUDE

Gary Thomas quote: “Contempt is conceived with expectations. Respect is conceived with gratitude.” Also refer back to Chaucer quote: “Familiarity breeds contempt.”

When we cultivate gratitude for our spouse, the control that contempt has on us is broken. Being thankful takes practice and does not come naturally to us. It’s why the word “thankful” is used over 300 times in scripture.

As **1 Thessalonians 5:18 reminds us**, it’s God’s will for us to give thanks in ALL things. Gratitude shifts our focus from entitlement and expectation to delight and wonder, breathing life into our spouse and bringing great security and freedom to our marriage.



Can a few people share what they are most grateful for in their spouse?

OFFER YOUR SPOUSE THE GRACE THAT YOU’VE BEEN GIVEN IN CHRIST

Those who are able to accept and appreciate an imperfect spouse meditate often on the goodness, kindness, and grace they have been given in Jesus.



Share personally how this has been a game changer for your marriage to realize that God, who knows with complete accuracy the best and worst in you, is neither horrified nor impressed.



He accepts us because of Christ. If we are fully known and not rejected by God, how much more should we extend grace to our spouse as **Romans**

15:7 instructs; “accept one another, then, as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.”

CONCLUDE



Oil and Water Experiment – Part 2 (see tools)

Add the egg yolk to one of the jars and shake the jar while you talk as the oil and water are blended into Mayonnaise.

It is God who becomes our emulsifying agent to blend into oneness. Without Him it is possible we will just repel one another.

Remember the foundational truth for this whole course:

Matthew 19:6 “So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, **what God has joined together let no one separate.**”

Oneness does not equal sameness, but it is God who unites us in intimacy and oneness because of Christ’s death on the cross.



Closing prayer.

TOOLS

Oil and Water demonstration

Do Oil and Water Mix?

Objective: Learn about why water and oil don't mix, and see what it takes to get the two to mix.

Materials: Two Mason jars with tight lids, food coloring, water, oil, egg yolk.

Use food coloring to dye the water a different color.

Learn: Oil and water typically won't mix. There are two reasons for this.

1. Oil is less dense than water. In a jar 1/2 filled with water and 1/2 filled with oil, there are far more water molecules, which means the water will always drop to the bottom.
2. Oil and water have different polarities. Water molecules are positive on one side and negative on the other. This causes water to stick to water. Oil is nonpolar and will only stick to non-polar molecules.

Plan: Put water and oil in both jars. In one, shake the jar to mix the oil and water for a short time. Allow the other jar to sit.

When you shake the the water and oil, it will mix temporarily, but you will be fascinated to see that water and oil immediately separate.

Improve: Is there a way to get oil and water to mix?

Jar 2: The key is to add an emulsifier that changes the molecular structure of the two molecule types. This is where the egg yolk comes into play. Drop the egg yolk into the jar and shake the jar as hard as you can. The oil and water will mix!

Talk about how water and oil molecules are different. When the egg yolk is added, however, the oil and water blend into a foundational ingredient. Egg yolk contains lecithin (LEH suh thn). It is a molecule that has one end capable of binding to water, and another end capable of binding to oil. Chemists call it an "emulsifying agent".

To the naked eye, it appears oil and water will never mix. However, when the egg yolk is added you can't see it without a powerful microscope, but this heterogenous mixture creates Mayonnaise.

So it's the "yolk" that binds it together. When the oil connects and holds fast to the lecithin, and the water does the same, it keeps it all mixed together to form one ingredient. One of the foundational ingredients of Chick Fil A sauce!!! God's great gift to humans!?!

Many Spiritual/oneness illustrations can be found in this visual. Be creative!

- **Video Illustration of oil and water:** If you want to show a video instead of doing the “Oil and Water” experiment live, then JP does a great job in one of his sermons. [Jonathan Pohluda sermon. \[YouTube: 45 minute mark.\]](#)

FLOURISHING IN SEASONS OF STRUGGLE

OVERVIEW

Since we live in a broken and fallen world, all marriages will face crisis and struggle at some point. In this session, each couple will be equipped to grow together when things fall apart. In viewing pain and struggle through God's perspective you will be challenged to make an intentional choice to grow together and endure faithfully when you face life's pressures.

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." -C.S. Lewis

LEADER LETTER

DEAR LEADER,

Couples will be at different places in their journey of navigating disappointments, suffering, and pain.

Some may be in a huge crisis and feel completely overwhelmed and stuck while others may be dealing with a difficult issue that is draining and depleting but manageable. Still there will be others who are in an easy season and not in a struggle at all.

So be sure and address up front that everyone will be at a different place in this session but no matter where they find themselves this lesson is vital in learning how to grow together when life falls apart.

Our hope is to create vulnerable sharing and transparency that will begin with you. Don't shy away from sharing your own struggles and how God met you and brought you through the trial.

Everyone's stories will be a powerful part of this time together. This will also be encouraging for other couples to know they are not alone as they struggle.

We need each other as we navigate tough seasons in marriage.

-AMY, BYRON, AND CARLA

HOW CAN WE GROW TOGETHER WHEN THINGS FALL APART?

"When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends." - James 1:2 (Phillips)

SESSION GOAL – A CALL TO SELFLESSNESS

- To help us grow together when things fall apart. This session will equip us to view trials and struggles from God's perspective so we will not give up. As we consider Jesus who endured faithfully, we will be challenged to make a choice to actually grow through the pressure and experience a deeper intimacy with God and our spouse.

KEY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- **James 1:2-4** - Trials come in various forms and will test our faith and produce maturity and completeness in us. Therefore, we can consider it joy when we face trials.
- **Romans 5:3-5** - We can rejoice in our trials because they develop perseverance, character, and hope in our lives.
- **1 Peter 5:7** - Cast all our anxiety on God because He cares for us
- **John 16:33** – Jesus tells us that in this world we WILL have trouble. We are not to be surprised but we are to take heart because He has overcome the world.
- **Proverbs 3:5-6** - Trust God and don't lean on our own understanding. He will make our path straight.

STARTER QUESTIONS - REVIEW OF PREP WORK

Opener: This week we are being called to persevere when times get tough. Let's take a look at the definition of perseverance as well as its synonyms. Perseverance and endurance are not sexy words.

Have everyone get out their phone and google the definition.

Perseverance (noun): steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. Synonyms: persistence, tenacity, determination, staying power, indefatigability, steadfastness, purposefulness.



Can you think of a time in your life when you wanted to give up but despite it being difficult you persevered? It can be a time in your childhood, or even a recent example.

Tip: Be sure and share an example from your own life.



Gather in groups of 3 couples and answer the following questions from prep work one.

Tip: Give 15 minutes for couples to share.

- What is your natural tendency when things get hard?
- Discuss some of your current coping strategies.
- What is a struggle you are facing right now that is affecting your relationship?
- How might God be asking you to trust Him?

Bring the group back together.

STATE THE SESSION GOAL:

- To help us grow together when things fall apart. This session will equip us to view trials and struggles from God's perspective so we will not give up in our marriage. As we consider Jesus who endured faithfully we will actually grow through the pressure and experience a deeper intimacy with God and our spouse.



Pray for your time together

TEACHING PLAN

THE STRUGGLE IS REAL



Make a list of common struggles on a white board. Be sure to include those that are from outside the marriage and those within.

As each couple shared earlier within their smaller circles, acknowledge that everyone in the room has different struggles they are facing and that some may not be in a season of struggle right now.

However, we know from looking at God's word this week that suffering and pain are an inevitable part of EVERY marriage and family.



Read John 16:33 - In this world you will have trouble.

Tip: You can refer back to the session opener discussion of the common struggles lists.

OUR NATURAL RESPONSE



What are some of our coping strategies and natural responses when life gets hard or our marriage gets hard?

These may be some possible answers.

- We want to quit. Maybe not physically walk away but just quit trying so hard.
- Escape to entertainment, hobbies, kids activities, shopping
- Numb out with Netflix and social media
- Stay busy with work or even ministry
- Bury our hurts and disappointments, not asking anyone for help
- Whine, complain, and worry
- Work ourselves into exhaustion trying to fix it
- Don't sleep well or eat well
- We doubt God and believe that He made a mistake



What effect does it have on our marriage?

These may be some possible answers.

- Grow distant
- Turn away from each other
- Blame each other
- Discouragement and apathy take over
- Quit dreaming together

HOW CAN WE FLOURISH IN SEASONS OF STRUGGLE?

1. **We flourish when we consider God's perspective.**

Ruth Chou Simon's quote

"Heartaches can either mold us into confident worshipers or defensive doubters. Who we become in the wrestling of them is not neutral. The shape we take depends on where we find refuge in the disappointment and the unexpected."



In Prep Work #2 we looked at God's perspective. What did you learn from these verses about suffering and trials?



Read Proverbs 3:5-6 (The Message)

“Trust God from the bottom of your heart, don’t try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he’s the one who will keep you on track. Don’t assume that you know it all. Run to God! Run from evil!”



What should our attitude be in trials?



- **James 1:2-4** – Consider it joy when you encounter trials
Phillips translation- “don’t resent them as intruders but welcome them as friends
- **Romans 5:3-5** – Rejoice in our suffering

Why?

- **Romans 5:3-5** – It produces endurance, character, and hope. Hope does not disappoint us or put us to shame because God’s love has been poured out in our hearts.
- **James 1:2-4** - testing of our faith produces steadfastness so that we are mature and complete lacking nothing

2. We flourish when we choose to grow through the pressure.

We cannot control what happens to us but we can choose how we will respond. The couples who grow together when life falls apart are those who trust God above their circumstances and feelings. They are the couples who don’t allow themselves to wallow around in self-pity but hope and trust that God has a bigger purpose to use this trial as a platform to tell others about Christ.

3. We flourish when we allow others to journey with us.



Why is it so hard to reach out for help?

Especially in seasons of struggle, we cannot endure alone. We need others to come alongside us which requires humility, risk, and vulnerability.

Consider these examples in the bible:

- Jesus asked his disciples to stay awake and pray when he was about to go to the cross
- David and Jonathan
- Ruth and Naomi
- Mary and Elizabeth
- Moses and Aaron
- Paul and Timothy

Share your own story of how others came alongside you in your season of struggle.

4. We flourish as we consider the example of Jesus



- **Hebrews 12:3** – “Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Jesus endured so that we can also. He is strong in our weakness, He is the source of our love, His truth will replace the lies that Satan wants us to believe. He will never leave you when you feel lonely, discouraged and exhausted. Even though you may not see it with your physical eyes, God is working in your struggle!

- **Hebrews 4:14-16** – “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been

tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

CONCLUDE

Final question: After this struggle is over, what is the story you want to be told to your children 15-20 years from now? Are you living that story?

Passing on a legacy of faithful, devoted love to the next generation is so very powerful as opposed to leaving a legacy of quitting and giving up. There is so much at stake in suffering well and enduring the hardships of marriage.

What Legacy will you leave? (rhetorical question)



Read 1 Peter 4:1-2 (MSG)

“Since Jesus went through everything you’re going through and more, learn to think like him. Think of your sufferings as a weaning from that old sinful habit of always expecting to get your own way. Then you’ll be able to live out your days free to pursue what God wants instead of being tyrannized by what you want.”



Closing prayer.

SERIOUSLY?! DID YOU JUST SAY THAT?

Overview

In this section, you will explore different strategies for communication with couples helping them feel more connected to one another. You will encourage couples to be honest, vulnerable, patient and committed to learning how to effectively communicate with one another. Lead couples to understand that one of the greatest gifts they can give one another is for them to feel known and understood by the other. Healthy communication is a game changer for marriage.

"Connection is the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship." - Brene' Brown

LEADER LETTER

Dear Leader,

In this session, your primary goal is to lead couples to understand that effective communication is so much more than simply sharing information. Healthy communication in a marriage allows each person to feel valued, secure, and validated in the relationship.

Knowing our spouse intimately translates into couples feeling more connected to one another, making them more willing to be positive, open, and honest when communicating with one another. They are asked to take a quiz in Prep Work #1 to see how well they know their spouse (they were not supposed to ask their spouse any questions about the quiz and they were to wait to discuss it with one another until your group met). This needs to be a light, fun time where the couples are encouraged to celebrate what they DO know about their spouse. Carefully facilitate conversation away from potentially negative or damaging conversation surrounding what their spouse 'should have' known.

Couples will make the distinction between being listened to and being heard. You will be exploring some of the greatest challenges to positive communication patterns. Having fun with our spouse is crucial for any marriage to thrive. Enjoy the members of your group and encourage them to enjoy one another.

You will need letter-sized paper and pencils or pens for the couples to play your opening activity.

Pray this week for couples to be vulnerable with one another. Ask God to help each person be open to what they will learn about how they communicate with their spouse.

-AMY, BYRON, AND CARLA

HOW DO WE SHARE WITH, LISTEN TO, AND VALUE ONE ANOTHER?

“Being listened to and heard is one of the greatest desires of the human heart. And those who learn to listen are the most loved and respected.” – Richard Carlson

SESSION GOAL – A CALL TO COMMUNICATE

- To focus on how our communication with our spouse often leads to intimacy or disconnection based on how we talk with one another.
- To focus on the patterns of communication each couple usually employs and to make them aware of some of the negative patterns of communication that can sabotage their marriage.

KEY BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- Ephesians 4:15 – Gives us the foundation for all our communication, especially in our marriages.
- Ephesians 4:29 – Helps us understand what information we should communicate with others and why we should communicate it.
- Colossians 4:6 – Tells us how we should communicate with others.
- Proverbs 15:1 – Encourages us to take time before we respond so that we can respond appropriately.

Starter Questions - Review of Prep Work



Opener: Play "Listen and Draw". Have each couple choose the #1 or the #2. The 1's they are the artist and 2's are the instructor.

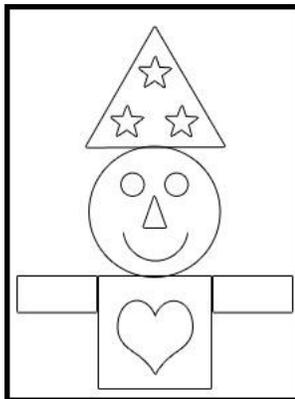
Give the instructors a copy of the following directions and make sure the artists have a blank piece of paper and pen or pencil.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Draw a medium-sized circle in the middle of your paper.
2. Draw a medium-sized square below the circle but have the top of it touch the bottom of the circle.
3. Draw a medium-sized heart in the square.
4. Draw two smaller rectangles, one on each side of the square. Each should go the wide way, not the tall way and they should touch the sides of the square. Also, the top of each rectangle should line up with the top of the square.
5. Draw a medium-sized triangle above the circle. The bottom of the triangle should touch the top of the circle.
6. Draw three small stars anywhere inside the triangle.
7. Draw a small triangle in the center of the medium-sized circle.
8. Draw an arc which curves up below the small triangle.
9. Draw two small circles above the small triangle, one slightly to the right and one slightly to the left.



Put on the screen or have copies.





You know that this week we'll be talking about how we communicate with each other. How many of your pictures looked like they were intended?

Raise your hand if you enjoyed this activity. Call on someone to share why they liked it.

Raise your hand if you did NOT enjoy this activity. Call on someone to share why they did NOT like it.



In Prep Work #1 this week, each of you should have taken a quiz to see how well you know your spouse. Please understand that this is not intended to make you feel guilty if you did not know some of the answers, that's to be expected. It was to shed light on the fact that many times in our marriages we get so busy doing life that we forget to focus on knowing our spouse.

Have each couple face one another and discuss. Take turns sharing the answers to each of these questions. This is NOT the time to process WHY they might have answered differently than you expected. Give the couples about 10 minutes to accomplish this activity. Call them back together and ask them if there were any BIG surprises.



Have Ephesians 4:15 on the screen.

In your Prep Work #2, you were asked to read several passages of Scripture that talk about communication. One of these verses is Ephesians 4:15. What is the foundation for communication suggested by this verse? LOVE! We are to be honest with one another and tell the truth but always with love not judgment or condemnation.



How many of you tried to show your husband/wife how much you appreciated them this week as suggested in Prep Work #3? Was this easy? Did you feel silly? Why do you think showing appreciation for our husband/wife is important?



Pray for God to teach us how to listen and truly hear one another. Ask God to give us strength to share honestly and patience to listen genuinely.

Teaching Plan

Most couples believe if they could improve their communication they would feel more connected in their marriages.



How many of you would let a child touch a hot stove? How many of you would put a sign on your home that says, 'valuables inside; door unlocked'? We want our children to be safe and we want to keep our homes safe. Unfortunately, many of us allow our marriages to be places where our spouse doesn't feel safe. I don't mean they necessarily feel physically unsafe, but if our spouse doesn't listen when we talk, or puts us down when we share our feelings or ideas or doesn't make time for us – we most likely feel hurt and unvalued and we begin to share less and less.

STATE THE SESSION GOAL:

- The goal of this session is to focus on how our communication with our spouse often leads to intimacy or disconnection based on how we talk with one another.
- To focus on the patterns of communication each couple usually employs and to make them aware of some of the negative patterns of communication that can sabotage their marriage.

FOCUS ON HEARING OUR SPOUSE



Around your table discuss this question: "What do you think are some of our most common mistakes we make when listening to others?" Have each group share a few of their ideas.

Some of the most common things we do that make us ineffective when listening to others include (only put the title on screen not the explanation):



- **Distracted Listening:** Are you a multitasking listener? Well, stop. Focus on the person you are listening to – NOTHING ELSE.
- **Impatient Listening:** During conversations, do you stop listening and cut people off while they're talking because you think you know what they're going to say? Be fully present, not thinking about the next question you'll ask in order to guide them where you want them to be. This isn't good communication – it's manipulation.
- **Filtered Listening:** You listen through a filter and your interpretation is based on past experiences and beliefs. Instead, approach each conversation with a clean slate and without preconceptions so you're open to new outcomes.
- **Selective Listening:** Do you hear only what you want to hear? Do you listen differently to different people? Good listening means listening equally to everyone.
- **Verbal-only Listening:** Don't ignore non-verbal cues and body language, such as facial expressions, eye contact, tone, inflection, attitude, transparency, level of engagement and disposition. Instead, allow them to guide you to listening more deeply to foster greater trust and collaboration.

Rosen, Keith. (2019). 5 Listening Mistakes That Are Holding You Back. iMagazine. Retrieved August 14, 2020, from <https://www.iamagazine.com/strategies/read/2019/03/26/5-listening-mistakes-that-are-holding-you-back>



READ John 1:19, "My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."

Good listeners listen, seek to understand and then validate the speaker. Validation is the piece of communication that many of us leave out. When you validate someone, you affirm the validity of a person's emotions. This doesn't necessarily mean you agree with them.



Do you ever talk to your spouse and know they heard your words, but didn't seem to get what you were saying? Or maybe they understood your point but didn't seem to get the emotional toll this situation had on you.

People may listen to us, but we don't feel heard. This is where VALIDATION comes into the picture. It's such a simple concept, but not one many of us use in our marriages.



"Validation (in context of interpersonal skills) is the act of recognizing and affirming the validity or worth of a person's emotions." (Michael Sorenson, "I Hear You: The Surprisingly Simple Skill Behind Extraordinary Relationships")

Effective validation has two components:

1. It identifies a specific emotion.
2. It offers justification for feeling that emotion.

An example of this would be when a friend tells you, "Oh, my daughter was supposed to call me when she got home from dance practice."

- You could offer reassurance – "Oh I'm sure she's fine – she's a teenager she just forgot."
- Or you could jump in with advice – "You should call one of her friends."

To VALIDATE her, you would say something like, "I don't blame you for being worried, especially if she told you she would call an hour ago." This identified a specific emotion (worry) and offered justification for feeling that way (it's been over an hour since she should have called). All people have a need for appreciation and acceptance. This often comes into the picture in our marriages when we are looking for our spouse to validate but we aren't aware of it. This is the case when you share something with your spouse and they immediately try to fix the problem and that's not what you want. Validation is nonjudgmental (don't label your spouse's feeling as 'good' or 'bad'). Also, you can validate your husband or wife when you don't

necessarily agree with them. You are basically saying, "I get why you're feeling the way you are." It is NOT the same as saying, 'you're right' or 'I agree'.



Let's practice together. I'm going to read a statement and you're going to make your fingers into a "V" for "validating" or an "I" for "invalidating".

- "Wow, that would be confusing." – V
- "He really said that? I'd be angry too!" – V
- "Don't worry; things will work out." – I
- "At least it's not _____[fill in the blank]." – I
- "You have every right to feel proud; that was a major accomplishment!" – V

Hopefully, we can all add validation to our communication toolbox – making certain our husband or wife feels heard and appreciated. John Gottman says, "What keeps our love alive in our marriages is each time you let your spouse know he or she is valued during the grind of everyday life."

FOCUS ON UNDERSTANDING OUR SPOUSE

Raise your hand if you think you and your spouse are very different? It is true that often 'opposites attract'. And for those of you who are similar it doesn't mean you don't struggle to understand one another at times.



How do you react when you feel misunderstood by your spouse? What's your 'go to' response?

In the book "The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work," one of the key principles in understanding your spouse is that you are familiar with each other's world whether you're alike or different. You make the effort to know what each other likes and dislikes, what annoys and what brings joy,

the people involved in your spouse's life, etc. It sounds so simple, but the busier we get the easier it is to stop asking open-ended questions and to inquire about the details of each other's lives. This was the purpose of Prep Work #1.

Another key factor in understanding one another is to make friendship a top priority! Have fun with one another.



Share something you and your spouse do for fun.

Why do you think it's difficult sometimes to have fun with our spouses?

FOCUS ON CONSISTENTLY TALKING WITH OUR SPOUSE

Often once children enter the picture, or our jobs become busy, or our families go through struggles, the first victim of the 'busyness bug' is talking with our husband or wife. Most of the time, it's not even intentional. However, it does take its toll when we feel less and less connected to our spouse. It's crazy that current research says that many couples only talk one-on-one for 20 minutes a week!



What are some of the most common barriers to talking with our spouses?

Then, brainstorm some solutions to how to make this a priority in our marriages and how to repair some of the reasons we no longer talk consistently.

Have some people share the common barriers and then the solutions that made the most sense for their marriage.

CONCLUDE



Read Colossians 4:6 to conclude.

We often are most comfortable with our spouse which means they can get the worst of us because we know they love us unconditionally. However, when we never listen to them or validate their feelings, or when we don't have fun very often anymore, it's easy for our conversation to lack grace. Let's commit together to be real with our spouse always but to make sure they also get the best of us at times to balance out the worst.



Closing prayer.