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CLASS NAME: Prep for Marriage – Enter the Marital Garden | Lesson 4: Don't Jump in the Ring with the Devil!
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Don't Jump in the Ring with the Devil!

Unless You're Ready to Fight!

Did You Know?

- 97% of couples who rate their communication with their partner as excellent are happily married.
- 56% of those who rate their communication as poor rate themselves as unhappily married.

1 Peter 5:8

New International Version

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Many couples never truly understand the impact of ***their own words*** until attempting to communicate with their significant other. According to recent research, ongoing communication difficulties are the number one reason couples divorce in the United States.

© DON'T JUMP IN THE RING WITH THE DEVIL...UNLESS YOU'RE READY TO FIGHT!
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According to one study, **67.5% of marriages** that ended did so primarily due to communication problems. Communication is the foundation of a successful relationship. However, miscommunication brings the opposite effect...divorce.

Some may ask:

- ***“Why is Divorce so common?”***
- ***“Why isn’t anyone doing anything about this?”***
- ***“Why do couples wait so long to seek help?”***

As we stated in earlier lessons: ***most couples would rather pay for an elaborate wedding than take a free course on premarital training.*** It’s sad but true. Pat yourselves on the back for being one of the few invited wedding guests to RSVP for knowledge.

Hosea 4:6

New International Version

6 my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge.

“Because you have rejected knowledge,

I also reject you as my priests;

because you have ignored the law of your God,

I also will ignore your children.

As premarital coaches and counselors, we have seen the evidence or *should we say the lack of evidence*, in the desire for premarital and post-marriage communication training. Some are even afraid to hear the word ***“work”***, especially when associated with healthy communication in marriage. It instantly, to some, makes marriage undesirable. As though, telling the truth somehow made marriage bad. Yes, marriage is work but it is good work! It is so rewarding when marriage is done in God’s way!

However, those in the honeymoon stage of marriage who are in the throes of love and passion forget that the **Power Struggle stage** is the next step in their marital journey.

Love At First Fight!

Remember, there are **4 stages** of emotions within relationships leading to marriage. We have coined the four stages as the following: **“The Honeymoon Stage, The Reality Stage, The Power Struggle Stage, and the Into-Me-See Stage”**. Today we are focusing on the Power Struggle stage since this is typically where most divorces occur.

- **The Power Struggle Stage** or the **tug-a-war stage** as we have coined it is often filled with tension. As one or both spouses begin to realize that their mate is not perfect, some begin to penalize them for it. This begins the *turn-off period*, where one mate becomes unattracted or intensely frustrated with their significant other. Thus, leading away from the marital harmony they both once enjoyed. Leaving **“Into-Me-See”** at a standstill, then followed by more intense fighting. Causing, arguments about frivolous things as well as fights in public and going to bed angry. Anger in the marital bed slowly deteriorates **Into-Me-See**.

Scripture teaches us:

Ephesians 4:26-27

English Standard Version

²⁶ Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.

Give no opportunity to the devil, ponder that. You may ask, “how do you prevent the enemy from seizing the opportunities of conflict in the midst of your anger?” Recognize, offense. Yes, the offense is the bait of Satan. Tension arises as you and your mate counteract your ability to merge as one couple, but offenses begin a hostile take-over of the relationship if left unchecked. Think about it: ***Two independent persons forming a way of life together eventually run into power struggles and must learn to adjust to each other's ways. The intensity and turmoil of this stage vary among couples, but almost every couple engages in this struggle.***

The Devil Fights Dirty!

The devil is a dirty fighter. He uses your own words against you. The definition of the word Satan is “the accuser of the brethren”. All day and all night the devil accuses you behind the scenes. Like a coward...a dirty weak coward. He plans sneak attacks on you and your marriage, looking for cracks, crevices, and chinks in your armor. Picking up every harsh statement and every careless word you speak. Like the way, Satan asked for permission to attack Simon (Peter). **Scripture teaches us:**

Luke 22:31

New King James Version

Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial

³¹ [a]And the Lord said, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat.

Many couples fail to get the help that they need to become functioning communicators in marriage giving way to Satan. Often throwing verbal javelins at each other not taking responsibility for how their careless words will impact the ones *they say* they love.

Matthew 12:36

English Standard Version

³⁶ I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for **every careless word they speak**

Guess, what? Your adversary the devil, loves every bit of it! Yes! The enemy loves when you jump in the ring with him. Especially when you are not prepared to fight. Why? Because fighting dirty is all he does. When you miscommunicate with careless intentions, you are on Satan's turf.

Like a starving wild animal, the adversary looks for you to say out loud your negative thoughts, malicious intentions, he thrives on unruly anger, your below-the-belt comments and he prowls around eavesdropping for every crumb of bitterness and every morsel of divisive talk within the four walls of your home. He seeks to annihilate you and devour you until there is nothing left. Why? Well, he's learning you. He's studying your weaknesses and unlike 67.5% of miscommunicating couples, the devil is a great listener. In fact, he is an excellent listener...most liars are. **Scripture teaches us in John 8:44:**

John 8:44 **New International Version**

⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Fighting Inner Demons

***"It is often easier to fight an external enemy than to confront one's inner demons."** –
Ram Dass*

*The truth is the first examples of communication are often first experienced in childhood. Good, bad, or indifferent you unknowingly may have picked up a few good or bad habits from your parent's or caregivers' communication style. Before starting a relationship, most of us have not learned healthy ways to communicate or how to resolve conflict. One of the worst communication traits we project into adulthood is **learned family behavior**. Whether it is the long-held family secrets that everyone knows about and stays hush about, shameful hidden acts of avoidance that have been recycled for generations, many new relationships have learned poor communication from those who are supposed to communicate with us the most. Absentee biological parents, functioning dysfunctional*

grandparents, and extended family either do not talk about their problems or become explosive when you do!

- ***Ask yourselves, looking back on your childhood experiences of communication does your family's past groundwork really create an environment for healthy communication for you and your current relationship?***

Characteristics of an “Inner Demon” Mindset

Proverbs 18:2 Amplified Bible

A [closed-minded] fool does not delight in understanding,
But only in revealing his personal opinions [**unwittingly displaying his self-indulgence and his stupidity**].

- **Pride**– causes the most lack of communication in a relationship.
- **Lies**– destroys the ability to build trust in communication.
- **Selfishness**– gets one to focus primarily on one’s own point of view.
- **Silence**– leads to false assumptions and unresolved problems.
- **Neglect**– tells your spouse that you don’t care.
- **Disrespect**– tells your spouse I don’t value you.
- **Ignorance**– not knowing how to solve communication problems is a problem.
- **Lack of romance/sex (in marriage)** – intimate expressions of love in marriage are important.
- **Complacency**- you got lazy.
- **Lack of submission to God**– something higher than ourselves needs to perfect us.

*No matter what your family background is, we all choose to choose what characteristics we choose to carry into our adult relationships. **It is up to everyone to decide if they want to allow the skeletons from their family’s past into their future marriages.** However,*

some individuals within relationships refuse to change or enhance their communication style, often saying to their mates, **“That’s how I was raised”, “It is what it is” or “This is who I am”** in a take it or leave it stance, rather than turning those poor communication experiences into growth opportunities. One or both significant others then begin to choose to stunt their **Emotional Intelligence** as well as their communicative abilities, while inflicting the very same blows to their mates they have been scarred by.

Ask yourselves:

- **“Why did we get into a relationship if you have no intention of growing past where you currently are?”**
- An **“it is what it is”** mindset is rooted in selfishness, an unwillingness to **actively** change, and plain old stubbornness.
- If you are unwilling to change then you have a **“poverty of mind”** or a dual thought process (double-minded) and should not pursue a relationship with anyone, let alone get married until God deems you fit to partake in the joys of a relationship.

See What Sticks...

“Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will break our hearts”

Robert Fulghum / All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten

The enemy doesn’t know what hurts you until you tell him. He will keep throwing jabs, firing negative thoughts into your mind to see what sticks. As a computer hacker, the adversary keeps putting in different combinations of offenses until he eventually unlocks your secret code of offense. Keep in mind, the enemy is not omnipresent, nor is omniscient. Only God is! However, unsuspecting couples, are not discerning or are not looking for the trap the enemy sets. The devil widens his net attempting to capture you, your spouse, and most certainly destroy your marriage!

The Bait

The fact of the matter is that most couples have miscommunication because deep down they don't know each other as much as they think. One mate seems to assume the worst, the other seems to take matters too lightly. All create confusion where a few deep thought out questions could shed some light. Let's discuss the 5 styles of Miscommunication. Start asking yourself which style is your most common miscommunication pattern?

The Five Styles of Miscommunication

1. **Placating** – *The placater is a “yes” man or woman, eager to please. “Whatever you want.” Peace at any price. The price paid is feelings of worthlessness.*
2. **Blaming** – *The blamer is a faultfinder who criticizes relentlessly & speaks in generalizations: “You always blah-blah-blah.” Inside, blamers anticipate they will never receive what they want. Often believing the worst of others and judging based upon their past disappointments. Blamers believe the best defense is a good offense. Not big enough to make themselves vulnerable.*
3. **Computing** – *Altogether analytical and super-reasonable. Never admits mistakes, is void of empathy nor displays emotion.*
4. **Distracting** – *The distractor erects smoke screens, focusing on irrelevancies, avoiding eye contact, and direct*

answers. Changing the subject, etc.

5. **Tone is Everything*** – *It's not what you say, it's how you say it!* (Proverbs 15:1 "A soft *and gentle and thoughtful* answer turns away wrath, But **harsh *and painful and careless words* stir up anger.**)

The Ring of Fire

Choose Life!

Proverbs 18:21

New King James Version

²¹ Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruit.

- ***What do you think Solomon meant when he said the power of life and death is in the tongue?***

Solomon understood that as people made in the image of God, we similarly have power in our tongues. We have the power to create and the power to destroy. We can encourage people and lift them up with our words or destroy them with our words.

The Bible teaches us a great deal about communication, since God, the author of the Bible, is a communicator. When he created the heavens and the earth, he did it by communicating. He said, "Let there be light." In fact, through nature, he speaks to us every day. **David said this:**

New International Version

Psalm 19: 1-4

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.

³ They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

⁴ Yet their voice^ᵇ goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens, God has pitched a tent for the sun.

God speaks to us through nature, telling us of his great glory and splendor. He also speaks to us through his Son, who came to the earth not only to die for our sins but also to give us the Father's words. John called Jesus "the Word" ([John 1:1](#)); he was the very communication of God. Jesus said this about his teaching: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me" ([John 7:16](#)). And ultimately God speaks to us through the Scriptures by the Holy Spirit Proper communication is the bedrock of success within marriage.

The Good Fight

As we have expressed since the beginning of class, healthy communication or unhealthy miscommunication will determine the prosperity or detriment of your relationship. Clear, loving communication is the litmus test for love. If you are a strong communicator, it's important to know that communicative success will carry over into your relationships, your family life, parenting skills, and potentially into your career of choice. However, many couples both seasoned and unseasoned often do not realize that there are levels and layered factors to *communicating well*.

- ***If you come to fight at least have a good fight!***
- ***There should always be a takeaway from a good fight.***
- ***Learn boundaries***
- ***Learn when to refrain***
- ***Or learn when to speak up!***

The key is giving your flesh, body shots in the spirit to bring it under submission so that your marriage lives to fight another day!

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

Amplified Bible

²⁴ [Ⓜ]Do you not know that in a race all the runners run [their very best to win], but only one receives the prize? Run [your race] in such a way that you may seize the prize *and* make it yours! ²⁵ Now every athlete who [goes into training and] competes in the games is disciplined *and* exercises self-control in all things. They do it to win a [Ⓜ]crown that withers, but we [do it to receive] an imperishable [crown

that cannot wither].²⁶ Therefore I do not run without a definite goal; I do not flail around like one beating the air [just shadow boxing].²⁷ **But [like a boxer] I strictly discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached [the gospel] to others, I myself will not somehow be disqualified [as unfit for service].**

Learn to V.O.W. = V_____ O_____ W_____.

I Heard it through the Grapevine.

Do you hear the words that are coming out of my mouth?!

Matthew 11:15 Amplified Bible

¹⁵ He who has **ears** to **hear**, let him **hear** and heed **My words**.

Active Listening

Listening is an Action!

Time and again, marriage therapists see faulty communication pull down a marriage with a strong start. Both partners struggle to convey what they want or need in a relationship, not realizing they are speaking a language the other does not comprehend. Over the disappointment, the partners erect defenses against each other, becoming guarded. They stop confiding in each other, wall off parts of themselves and withdraw emotionally from the relationship. **They can't talk without blaming, so they stop listening.**

WHAT IS ACTIVE LISTENING? (IT'S NOT ABOUT THE NAIL) *

Active listening requires the listener to fully concentrate, understand respond and then remember what is being said. You make a conscious

effort to hear and understand the complete message being spoken, rather than just *passively hearing* the message of the speaker.

Why is listening important?

“Listening is the most fundamental component of communication skills. Listening is not something that just happens, listening is an active process in which a conscious decision is made to listen to and understand the messages of the speaker.

Active listening is also about patience, listeners should not interrupt with questions or comments. Active listening involves giving the other person time to explore their thoughts and feelings, they should be given adequate time for that.

We spend a lot of time listening.

Various studies stress the importance of listening as a communication skill. The studies on average say we spend 70-80% of our waking hours in some form of communication. Of that time, we spend about 9 percent writing, 16 percent reading, 30 percent speaking, and 45 percent listening.

Studies also confirm that most of us are poor and inefficient listeners. Most of us are not very good at listening, research suggests that we remember less than 50% of what we hear in a conversation.”

Did God Really Say...?

Genesis 3:1-13

New International Version

The Fall

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, **“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”**

² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

⁴ “You will not certainly die,” the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

¹⁰ He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Listening vs. hearing

Hearing is an accidental and automatic brain response to sound that requires no effort. We are surrounded by sounds most of the time. For example, we are accustomed to the sounds of cars, construction workers, and so on. We hear those sounds and, unless we have a reason to do otherwise, we learn to ignore them.

Hearing is:

- Accidental
- Involuntary
- Effortless
- **Verbal Signs of active listening**
 - **Positive Reinforcement** - *this can be a strong signal of attentiveness, however, too much use can be annoying for the speaker. Occasional words and phrases, such as: 'very good, 'yes', or 'indeed' will indicate that you are paying attention.*
 - **Remembering** - *try to remember a few key points, such as the name or the subject the speaker is identifying. It can help to reinforce that what is being said has been understood. Remembering details, ideas, and concepts from previous conversations proves that attention was kept and is likely to encourage the speaker to continue.*
 - **Questioning** - *the listener can demonstrate that they have been paying attention by asking relevant questions and/or making statements that build or help to*

clarify what the speaker has said. By asking relevant questions the listener also helps to reinforce that they have an interest in what the speaker has been saying.

- **Clarification** - this involves asking questions of the speaker to ensure that the correct message has been received. Clarification usually involves the use of open questions which enables the speaker to expand on certain points, as necessary.

Emotional Intelligence

What is your EQ?

Luke 17:1 New King James Version (**Jesus Warns of Offenses**)

17 Then He said to the disciples, "**It is impossible that no ^[a]offenses should come**, but woe *to him* through whom they do come!

Understanding the key triggers that are embedded in the heart of offenses is vital to recovering, repairing, and healing your communication patterns. **Typically, those with poor communication habits lack emotional intelligence**, experience poor communication in childhood, and never develop the skill set to vocalize disagreements in a healthy manner.

Emotional Intelligence

What is your EQ?

Emotional intelligence is the dimension of intelligence responsible for your ability to manage yourself and your relationships. Each day, in your personal and business lives, you are presented with opportunities and challenges that require maneuvering internal as well as external obstacles. Your EQ enables you to maneuver those obstacles successfully and to persevere over the toughest challenges.

*“It is a lifelong journey to improve your emotional intelligence. But, unlike IQ capacity, which remains fixed or static, the capacity to improve one’s EQ (Emotional Quotient) increases over time. As people mature, life experiences broaden their capacity for emotional understanding. Increased capacity alone will not improve EQ. It only suggests that people have the further capacity for understanding and mastery if they choose to develop it. This can be compared to someone who has the IQ to learn calculus. **Unless the individual chooses** to learn how to do calculus, the capacity to do so will always be present but never developed. **The same holds true for EQ-an individual must choose to learn and develop in these areas.**”*

Mastering Emotional Intelligence” Author | Lynn Leadership Group

The Impact of Low EQ in relationships

Because people with low emotional intelligence do not understand the emotions of others, they experience little empathy for other people, co-workers, family, friendships, and romantic relationships. Marriages are often the first casualty of war since those with low EQs are ill-equipped to handle their emotional baggage and often reject, what they consider to be an overload of emotions from their partner. Using terms such as **“you’re too emotional”** or to blame others for their lack or inability to carry the emotions for others. **Inevitably, they wall off empathy, compassion and ignore the needs of others due to their shortcomings.** Eventually, frustration erupts, conflict ensues all due to low emotional vocabulary between significant others, depriving spouses of solutions only provided within healthy communication.

The Digs!

Dirty Verbal Communication

Ephesians 4:29 Amplified Bible

²⁹ Do not let unwholesome [foul, profane, worthless, vulgar] words ever come out of your mouth, but only such *speech* as is good for building up others,

according to the need *and* the occasion, so that it will be a blessing to those who hear [you speak].

The Top 5 Things You NEVER say in a Relationship!

1. You are Nothing Like My Ex (child's mother/ father etc.)
2. Attacking your mate's manhood.
3. I could find someone better than you in an instant!
4. The word "Divorce" is said in Anger.
5. You Always...You Never...

The Bedrock of Successful Communication

Though communication skills are important, good communication is built first on who you are, and later on what you do. Work on who you are as a person. To enjoy rich communication, four qualities must be present: **humility, warmth, genuineness, and empathy.**

Humility - is recognizing that "We all make many mistakes." (James 3:2). *Because you identify a mistake does not mean that you are better than your spouse.*

Warmth - Your partner comes to you with a cluster of unacceptable qualities, some known, many yet to be discovered. Warmth is loving despite. The key to warmth is acceptance, not conversion. *(Rom 5:8 "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.")*

Genuineness - is being real, being authentic, not having anything hidden. Being genuine, we are not so much focused on "What should I be? What should my partner be? What should I be feeling?" But rather "What am I feeling?" Convey Openness *(1 Cor 11:19 – "So that those who are genuine among you may be recognized")*.

Empathy - is seeing the world from your partner's perspective. Empathy is a great gift, a wonderful way of communicating love. It derives from an intense desire to feel, to understand the other's perspective. Involves active listening from the heart and derives from agape love. **Empathy says, "If I were you, I would act as you do; I understand why you feel the way you feel."**

Are you able to put yourself into your partner's mind and heart? Can you put yourself in your mate's shoes...Ask yourself, **"how is his or her perception different from mine?"**