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2

session two

communication
& conflict

communication & conflict

introduction | experience growth through
mutual understanding

the purpose

The goal of communication is _____

| *“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.” – Proverbs 18:2*

the patterns to avoid*

**Adapted from the book A Lasting Promise by Scott Stanley, Daniel Trathen, Savanna McCain, and Milt Bryan (2014, Jossey-Bass).*

1. _____ and _____

Unwillingness to get in or stay in important discussions

Examples: Physically leaving or emotionally checking out; changing the subject; deflecting with humor; stuffing feelings; putting off hard conversations.

A Better Way: Stop faking peace – learn to deal with conflict in a healthy way.

2. _____

Negative responses to another that lead to increased hostility and negativity

| *“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” – Proverbs 15:1*

Examples: Increasing intensity, anger, volume, or depth; aggression, sarcasm: at the most extreme – physical, verbal, or emotional abuse.

A Better Way: Call a “time-out” when you sense things are getting out of hand.

Abuse is **never** okay.

If you experience any form of abuse (physical, sexual, verbal, etc.), seek outside help immediately.

3. _____

Assumes the motive of the other person to be more negative than it really is

Examples: Incorrectly interpreting words, situations, or body language as being more negative than they actually are. Often originating from areas of insecurity.

A Better Way: Believe the best; don't assume the worst.

4. _____

Subtle, indirect put-downs of the other's thoughts, feelings, or character

"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear." – Ephesians 4:29

Examples: Always having to be right; manipulating situations or words; saying things like, "You shouldn't feel that way" or "You're overreacting!"

A Better Way: Accurately identify and name the emotion the other person is feeling, then bring comfort by problem-solving with them.

the plan

See conflict as an _____ for _____

Prioritize _____ over winning

Own your _____

“Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” – Matthew 7:3-5

Choose the right _____ and _____

| *“Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger...” – Ephesians 4:26*

h _____ a _____ l _____ t _____

Take a _____

- Honor the request
- Seek God’s guidance during the timeout
- The one who calls the timeout proposes a time to start up again.

Practice _____ listening

| *“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” – Proverbs 18:13*

the “speaker-listener” technique*

rules for the speaker:

*Speak only for yourself.
Speak in short phrases.
Stop often and let the
listener paraphrase.*

rules for the listener:

*Paraphrase what you hear.
Don’t attempt to prepare
a rebuttal.
Focus on what the speaker
is saying.*

rules for both:

*The speaker has the floor.
The speaker keeps the floor
while the listener
paraphrases.
Share the floor.*

*Adapted from Dr. John Gottman at the Gottman Institute, gottman.com

Be quick to ask for _____

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” – Colossians 3:12-13

forgiveness is **not**:

Excusing – There is no excuse for sin. God will make sure all sin is paid for.

Denial – Do not pretend you are not hurt. Honestly bring your pain to God.

Feeling – Forgiveness is a decision you can make no matter how you feel.

Forgetting – To forgive you must remember the offense, God’s justice, the cross, and God forgiving you.

Trust – Forgiveness is a gift, but trust must be earned.

Optional – God commands us to forgive. Refusing to forgive is rebelling against God.

Reconciliation – Reconciliation takes action from both sides; forgiveness is between you and God.

Ask for _____ when you are stuck

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.” – Matthew 18:15-17

group discussion questions

1. How does your family of origin communicate and deal with conflict?
How does it differ from your significant other's family?
2. How do you feel about conflict? Are you conflict-averse, or do you enjoy it? In what ways do you need to adjust your view of conflict?
3. Which of the four negative communication patterns do you most closely identify with?
4. "Mutual understanding" should be the goal of communication, but often it isn't what we experience. What things can get in the way of this goal? Which do you struggle with most?
5. How well do you and your significant other handle situations where one of you needs to ask for forgiveness? Does anything need to change in how you ask for and grant forgiveness?
6. Practice the Speaker-Listener technique. Pick a recent, small, resolved conflict to talk through.
7. What are some topics/issues that typically lead to conflict in your relationship (i.e., in-laws, money, sports, church/religion, personal preferences)? Why do you think these topics lead to conflict?
8. What is one step you can take as a couple to communicate in a healthier way?

homework session two

summary

Marriage, like all relationships, depends on communication to grow and thrive. That's why it's so important to get it right – seeking to understand, not just to be understood – and to intentionally develop better communication skills. Conflict in marriage is inevitable, but when approached correctly, it's an opportunity for growth rather than an obstacle to oneness. Communicating in a healthy way may not be easy, but it will bring life and blessing to your marriage.

supporting scriptures

Wisdom for Communication: Proverbs 15:1, Proverbs 17:14, Proverbs 18:1-2, Proverbs 18:13, Proverbs 20:3

Godly Conflict & Communication: Colossians 3:12-14, Ephesians 4:25-29, Matthew 7:3-5, Matthew 18:15-17, Romans 12:18

prayer

Father, reveal the unhelpful ways I communicate. Root out my pride and stubbornness. Show me how I can communicate healthier with my significant other, friends, family, and beyond. Let my words bring life and healing rather than pain or hurt. Let my lips honor you in all that they say. Amen.

key verse

“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”

Proverbs 18: 2

on your own questions

1. Which of the negative communication patterns do you and your significant other most closely identify with? Watch for them in the weeks ahead.

	Withdrawal & Avoidance	Escalation	Negative Interpretation	Invalidation
You	☐	☐	☐	☐
Significant other	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. What are some specific strategies you can put into practice to guard against your most prevalent negative communication pattern?
3. What are three topics, circumstances, or settings that usually lead to conflict or hard feelings in your relationship? Is there a recurring ditch that you keep finding yourselves in? (e.g., in-laws, finances, schedules)
4. Is there anything you need to share or discuss with your significant other? Start by thinking about anything you need to ask forgiveness for, then share with one another when you discuss the “together” questions.

together questions

1. Discuss your general attitude and approach toward conflict.
2. Share your responses to question 1 from the “On Your Own” section above. Did you agree with one another’s answers? If not, discuss why you chose what you did.
3. Discuss how your family of origin resolved conflict. How has that impacted the way you deal with conflict?
4. What communication best practices would you like to bring into your marriage from your family?

expectation questions

1. How and when do you want to discuss any problems that come up (for example, bring them up right away, no matter the setting vs. wait until we have privacy)?
2. How will you resolve an issue if you disagree on what should be done? Where will outside counsel fit in?
3. When will it be appropriate to share marital struggles with others (family, friends, etc.)? What role will the church play in this, if any?
4. How well will you know each other's dreams, goals, hurts, habits, hang-ups, and frustrations? How will you continue to learn about them?
5. How will you handle conflict that arises late at night? Will you resolve before sleep, or just get to a point where you aren't angry?

couple exercise

Practice the Speaker-Listener technique on a previously resolved conflict. You can also try the same technique with a compliment, rather than a conflict. Here are the steps:

1. Select a recent conflict
2. Identify what prompted the conflict (was it something someone said? An action or inaction on the part of one or both? Were other factors involved, such as tiredness or stress?)
 - Describe the feelings that were present during the conflict – especially those that originally led to the conflict. Use at least one “feelings” word (see the chart on the following page for some examples).
3. Beginning with the partner who first felt wronged, describe what happened from your perspective and share the feeling(s) it prompted.
4. The listener then repeats back to the speaker what they heard. If the speaker accepts this as an adequate summary, the listener may then share their side.
5. Do this until you are both able to feel understood by the other.

Finally, conflicts are rarely entirely one-sided. Be sure to own anything you did wrong, even if it was responding poorly to a genuine hurt by the other. Our response is our responsibility.

couple exercise | feelings chart

Begin by identifying whether you are feeling positive or negative, and whether you are high- or low-energy. Then find the word that best describes your emotion. There are many more emotion words than these, so use these to prompt others that may be more specific or accurate. Expanding your emotional vocabulary will greatly help you identify and process feelings in the future.

feelings chart								
negative			positive					
high energy	enraged	fearful	offended	confident	playful	elated		
	humiliated	anxious	annoyed	excited	joyful	inspired		
	upset	frustrated	angry	happy	thankful	hopeful		
low energy	ashamed	confused	sad	good	content	curious		
	helpless	discouraged	indifferent	satisfied	chill	understanding		
	depressed	lonely	numb	mellow	peaceful	relaxed		

For the next week, be intentional about tracking your feelings.

tracking chart		
day 1	morning _____	night _____
day 2	morning _____	night _____
day 3	morning _____	night _____
day 4	morning _____	night _____
day 5	morning _____	night _____
day 6	morning _____	night _____
day 7	morning _____	night _____

couple challenge

Men, plan a special date night for your significant other. Plan something that will surprise and encourage her – make sure it is something that she would like to do on a date night. Try to think outside of the “dinner and a movie” box. Enjoy the date and keep conversation fun!

conflict resolution road map

 am I in conflict? ROMANS 12:18	 can I overlook it? PROVERBS 19:11	 what is my part to own? MATTHEW 7:3-5	 how can I seek reconciliation? MATTHEW 18:15-17
 How to determine if you're in conflict: • Has someone sinned against me? Have I sinned against someone? (Matt. 5:23-24) • Has someone broken my trust in them? • Have I spoken poorly about someone? (Prov. 26:20) • Am I imagining payback, revenge, or justice? (Rom. 12:19-20) • Am I actively avoiding someone?	 Can you try to privately overlook the offense, make allowance for faults, forgive, and move on? (Eph. 4:1-6, Col. 3:12-13) When to NOT overlook an offense: • If the offense dishonors God (Rom. 2:23-24) • If the offense broke a relationship (Prov. 18:19) • If the offense is hurting others (Phil. 2:4) • If the offense is hurting the offender (Jas. 5:19-20)	 Recognize that blame rarely lies 100% with any single party. (Gal. 6:3-4) • What of your actions – however big or small – have contributed to this conflict? • When apologizing, do so thoroughly. See reverse side for navigating an apology.	 Gently point out another's part in the conflict and try to make amends. (Gal. 6:1-2) • First, talk in private, one-on-one. • If they don't listen and repent, try again with one or two others. • If they don't listen and repent, try again with a group from the church. • If they don't listen and repent, remove them from the fellowship of church membership. • If at any point they listen and repent, forgive. (Col. 3:12-13)

navigating an apology

- 1 **admit what you did wrong.** Acknowledge the harm you caused without justifying or downplaying your actions. Express empathy for how your actions might have made them feel.
- 2 **apologize.** Tell them you are sorry for what you did. Be specific.
- 3 **ask for forgiveness.** Say the words, "Will you forgive me?"
- 4 **accept the consequences.** Do what you can to make it right and alter your behavior. You are not truly sorry if you continue causing harm.