

Fighting Fair[ly]

Three Key Assumptions

1. ALL couples have problems
2. It's best to handle problems as a team
3. Rushed solutions are poor solutions

James 1:19-20

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be **quick to listen, slow to speak** and **slow to become angry**, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Sounds great doesn't it?!? And it usually is when you and your spouse are in agreement...but...

One of the most helpful things that couples can do is to IDENTIFY and NAME [see] what is destructive and unhelpful:

Identifying Destructive Patterns

- Escalation
- Invalidation [Build]
- Negative Interpretation
- Withdrawal/Avoidance

Escalation – when one or both partners respond negatively with one another...often “upping the ante” where the conversation keeps getting more nasty. In this pattern, the escalator[s] often say things that threaten the very lifeblood of their relationship...hurt one another, hurl insults, demean. Ultimately = wrecks intimacy.

- “You forgot to put the cap on the toothpaste.”
- “Oh, and you never forget anything?!? I always put it on.”
- “Oh, I forgot how compulsive and obsessive you are! You're never wrong are you?”
- “This is the reason I never bring anything up with you, you're so unbelievably negative!”
- “Maybe you shouldn't...just leave!”
- “Maybe I will!”

Escalation can also be going from 0-60 in .1 of a second, blowing up...

Invalidation – pattern where one partner subtly or directly puts down the thoughts, feelings, or character of the other.

- “You missed your doctor's apt again. You are so irresponsible, I could see you dying and leaving me just like your father.”
- “Thanks a lot! You know I'm nothing like my father.”
- “Yes you are. He was thoughtless and so are you.”

- “I'm really frustrated with ____ at work and how they left me carrying the bag again.”
- “That's you're problem, you're too emotional. Look at it as an opportunity to shine...”

Negative Interpretation – When one partner consistently believes that the motive of the other are more negative than is really the case.

- Buying plane tickets to visit in-laws; worried about money; just admit it, you don't want to go b/c you hate them...
- “Fine! I guess I'm the worst husband in the whole world!!!”

Withdrawal/Avoidance – different manifestations, but generally one partner showing an unwillingness to get into, or stay engaged in important discussions.

Others: **Comparison** and **List-keeping** – NOT HELPFUL!

Talking Without Fighting

I think it's safe to say that most couple WANT to communicate well. But MOST have not learned HOW. Things are fine when there's agreement b/w the two of you, but when differences arise...most of us lack the skills to handle those moments well...

There are two keys to good communication that I'd like to share:

1. Make things CLEAR
2. Make things SAFE

One problem with making things clear, and we've all experienced this: we all have filters...**INTERNAL and EXTERNAL filters.**

- **External** – noisy environment, hearing problems, bad mobile connection,
- **Internal** – feeling tired, bored, thinking about other things, distracted by ____, feeling irritable...etc.
- **These things get in the way of CLARITY**

Making it Clear – The Problem of Filters

- Filter of Inattention
- Filter of Emotional States [Build]
- Filter of Beliefs and Expectations
- Filter of Bad Hearing

Inattention – to get rid of this filter: do what's needed to make sure you have each other's attention.

- Imp stuff – find a quiet place/time; don't answer phone/texts
- To make sure, you may even ask: "I'd like to talk to you about _____ right now, is this a good time?"

Emotional States – have you ever noticed that when your spouse is in a bad mood, you get jumped on no matter what is said?

- Studies have show: when we're in bad moods, less likely to give others the benefit of the doubt, AND more likely to perceive what your partner says as more negative than they meant.
- One good defense against mood/emotional filters: ACKNOWLEDGE THEM
- Dinner time, hungry, kids are irritable, long day at work..."Have you paid the bills?"

Beliefs and Expectations – this filter arises from what you expect and what you think in your relationship. Too often we SEE what we EXPECT. This colors and distorts communication. MIND READING...

Bad Hearing/Memory – sometimes we HEAR OURSELVES saying things that we didn't say...or recalling badly what was said...and you end up spending an awful lot of time with he said/she said...

- Don't get stuck in the past or what was said, work on the present and where you ARE NOW...
- WORK ON BEING CLEAR!!! Don't beat around the bush!!!

Making it Safe – Risk, Vulnerability, and Structure

- Structure can build trust
- Structure can help address destructive patterns

When you nurture and maintain an atmosphere of love and respect, clarity and safety, you increase the odds of talking without fear...cert fear of rejection, anger, or escalation. Safety is key.

- For relationships to be healthy, both parties need to feel SAFE enough to risk without retaliation.
- Often NOT the case is it? Be honest...

Just b/c you're married, doesn't mean that all conversations about all things are going to be "safe." We all know what it is to be worried how the other person is going to respond if you bring THAT THING UP.

- By SAFE I DO NOT mean NO RISK...
- If you're going to share, and you will have to share, what's concerning you, then you're going to risk
- The hope is in risking, you're given the gift of ACCEPTANCE FOR RISKING...
- Problem: When you do share and you get rejected, or hurt

Back to our passage: James 1:19-20

It's easier said and done when it's WE who are bringing something to the table that WE need/want addressed...

- Why? B/C often the things that need to be talked about are things that we need to work on...
- We personalize them, get hurt, react, and the opportunity to grow, reach understanding, and ultimately grow in intimacy and oneness fizzles out and drops to the floor
- We do what Adam and Eve did: Cover up our differences and hide from each other

The Speaker / Listener Technique

- Overview of technique – goal – speak with better **clarity** and **safety**
- **Be honest – most of us just can't seem to get to problem-solving**

Advantages to SLT

- Designed to keep a tight reign on our tongue – **less reactivity**
- Helps address destructive conflict patterns
- Awkward, clunky, and weird...**but VERY HELPFUL**
- **Cover these and agree to use them BEFORE conflict arises!!!**

Teach you a phrase: **Whatever I think the issue is, the issue is probably NOT the issue!**

Speaker/Listener Rules for BOTH:

- **The speaker has the floor** – use something; whoever has ___ has floor
- **Share the floor over the course of the conversation** – bite sized chunks; few sentences
- **NO problem solving** – focus on having good discussions so that you can understand one another.

Rules for the Speaker

- **Speak for yourself** – No “mind-reading”; talk about YOUR thoughts, feelings, concerns, perceptions; FIRST-PERSON “I”
- **Speak in small chunks** – a few sentences
- **Stop and let the listener paraphrase**

Rules for the Listener

- **Paraphrase what you hear** – actively listen
- **Focus on the speakers message/ask questions** - “This isn’t a small issue to you is it?” “When you say ____, I hear _____. Is that what you’re saying?”
- **DON’T rebut or offer your opinion** - do not share your opinion, and certainly don’t say WHY they feel the way they do...THIS is the HARDEST part of this (I really hate it when...); pay attention & listen, you’ll get the floor
- **Be sincere, and show respect – TRUST your spouse 1st!!! – HOW you move through this BUILDS TRUST!!!**

Examples of paraphrasing

- Sounds like you’ve gone through more than I thought today!
- So, when I asked/said _____, you heard me say _____?
- I’m sorry your sister got on to you today about how you handled _____. That must’ve been rough.
- So, what I hear you saying is _____ (*be careful not to just regurgitate exact words...your job is to recast what you HEARD said*)
- “Sounds like...you heard me say [this] _____, is that right?”

EXERCISE #1 – Favorite sport/sports team; your dream vacation, best friend growing up, dreams you have for the future, concerns you have at work

EXERCISE #2 – (stuff that’s not likely to spark conflict) Each write out low-level and high-level issues and concerns...work with the lower level things:

- **Choosing a place to eat**
- **Irritating habits, patterns**

Do Your Part

- Practice it! – non-conflict settings
- Grow in your awareness of other techniques - This is ONE technique, there are others!
- **Remind you that when you couple this with what we talked about last week – PUTTING GOD FIRST and PRAYING TOGETHER...powerful things begin to happen**

Helpful Scripture Passages:

- James 1:9
- 1 Cor 13
- Proverbs 12:18; 20:3; 29:11
- Matthew 5:22; 7:1-5
- Galatians 5:13-15
- Ephesians Ch’s 4 & 5
- Colossians Ch 3
- James 4:1ff