

Premarital Counseling

Session III

Communication & Conflict Stewardship

Name: _____

NOTE: Please ensure that the Scripture study, readings, and exercises are completed before attending the counseling session. Completed worksheets must be submitted to the pastor conducting your premarital counseling at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

Key Ideas

- The goal of communication is not just information transfer; it's about reflecting your union with Christ and deepening your relational intimacy in order to glorify God as you grow in godliness.
- Our model for communication is the incarnation – the Son of God humbled himself, took on flesh, and entered into our experience. Just like Christ, the husband and wife's call is to humble him/herself and enter into their spouse's experience, trying to understand their spouse and offer them grace.

Scripture Study Guide

Instructions: Read each section of verses and then answer the questions about the text. Feel free to use the required readings to help you think through your answers.

Communication

Matthew 12:33-37

- What is the connection between heart and fruit? What does it mean that “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”? How does this impact our communication?
- Why is it theologically incorrect to say, “You made me mad!”?

Ephesians 4:17-32

- According to verses 25 and 29, what should come out of your mouth? According to verses 29 and 31, what shouldn't come out of your mouth?
- Practically speaking, how might “corrupting talk” manifest itself in your marriage?
- In verse 29, what is meant by the phrase “as fits the occasion”?

- How does godly communication “give grace to those who hear”?
- In verse 32, what’s the motivating factor for godly communication and forgiveness? Why is it important to understand this?

James 1:19-26; 3:1-18

- How does James describe communication in terms of listening, speaking, and anger? How does James exhortation (vs. 19) contrast with how we normally communicate?
- In 1:22-23, what is the next step after listening? Why is this important?
- According to 1:24-27, what’s the relationship between listening, remembering, and doing? If you don’t keep “a tight rein” on your tongue, what does that say about your religion?
- In 3:1-18 James gives us a few word pictures. What are they and what do they tell us about our words?

Conflict Management (adapted from *Peacemaking for Families* by Ken Sande)

- Conflict is a stewardship opportunity.
 - A peacemaker views conflict not as an accident, but as a stewardship opportunity, where we can use the resources God gives us to glorify him, serve one another, and grow to be like Christ.
 - A steward also realizes that only God can control the outcome, and that successful peacemaking means focusing not on results but on faithful obedience.
 - Conflict provides a prime opportunity to apply the gospel to our lives.
- The four G’s to steward conflict:
 - **Glorify God:** How can I please and honor God in this situation? (1 Cor. 10:31)
 - **Get the log out of your own eye:** How can I show Jesus’ work in me by taking responsibility for my contribution to this conflict? (Matthew 7:5)

- **Gently restore:** How can I lovingly serve others by helping take responsibility for their contribution? (Galatians 6:1)
- **Go and be reconciled by the gospel:** How can I demonstrate the forgiveness of God and encourage a reasonable solution to this conflict? How does the gospel help me in this situation? (Matthew 5:24; Ephesians 4:25-32)
- Three rules of confession:
 - **Confess directly:** Avoid “if,” “but,” and “maybe”
 - “If I have offended you, I am sorry;” “I shouldn’t have lost my temper *but* I was tired;” “*Maybe* I could have tried harder to help.”
 - **Confess specifically:** Admit exactly what you are confessing, not just a general statement
 - This statement is vague: “I know I hurt you *by not being nice*.”
 - A true apology is clear, simple, and specific – “I was *harsh with my words*...”
 - **Ask for forgiveness explicitly**
 - Not just, “I am sorry for hurting you...”
 - True forgiveness confesses the specific offense and explicitly asks for forgiveness: “I am sorry for hurting you. I confess my harsh words against you. Will you forgive me for my anger?”
- **Counseling:** Make an agreement now that if at any point in the future either of you think that you need to seek counseling from another Christian couple, pastor, etc., you will seek go to those in you church family and seek help. In other words, even if one of you don’t think outside input is necessary, but the other does, then agree to get help from someone in your church family.

Practical Advice

- Plan for regular, proactive, meaningful, honest, and vulnerable conversations
 - **Plan** – Intentionally set aside time to talk with each other apart from distractions.
 - **Regular** – Make this type of communication a regular occurrence (e.g. weekly or bi-weekly).
 - **Proactive** – Following this advice provides proactive times to talk about marital strengths, struggles, and opportunities. Plan during peacetime for conflict!
 - **Meaningful** – These conversations should involve more than logistics, scheduling and circumstances; aim for the heart, helping each other love Christ more.
 - **Honest & Vulnerable** – During these times be open and honest with each other. Ask each other questions like:
 - “How am I doing serving you?”
 - “What do you think about the health/status of our marriage?”
 - “Are there areas where I need to start doing something?”
 - “Are there things I need to stop doing?”
 - “How are you doing spiritually?”
 - “Where is God at work in your life right now?”
 - “What is one specific way I can serve you this week?”
- Avoid using “*never*” and “*always*” in the midst of conflict—they are usually attack words and aren't true; these words exaggerate and overgeneralize in a way that provokes a spouse to defensiveness.

- “You never listen when I have something to say...”
- “You always leave when I try to talk to you...”
- “You always come home late and never show up on time...”
- “Your only concern is your own comfort.”
- “You never take my feelings into consideration.”
- “You always prioritize work over me.”
- Be a student of your spouse.
 - Pay attention to how your spouse best communicates his/her thoughts/emotions (e.g. expressive or reflective; spontaneous or planned, etc.).
 - If you don’t know how your spouse best communicates, ask him/her! And if you are asked, tell!
 - If you don’t know what your spouse needs/desires in a given moment, ask him/her.
 - Example: “Do you want me to help you try to fix this issue or just listen to you?”
- Timing and tone matter – they do!
- When talking to others about your spouse/marriage, make sure you are looking for advice not just advocates for your position.
 - Don’t gossip to parents, family, or friends to get people on your side.
 - Ask your spouse if it’s okay for you to talk to someone else about the issue.
 - General Rule: Under normal circumstances, when talking to the husband’s extended family, let the husband communicate what you decided as a couple. When talking to the wife’s extended family, let the wife communicate what you decide as a couple.
- 4 Good “Rules”
 - **Encourage frequently** – With your words, preferably face-to-face, encourage your spouse by identifying evidences of God’s grace in his/her life.
 - **Serve daily** – Do at least one thing each day to practically serve your spouse. If you don’t know how ask him/her, “Is there any way I can serve you today/right now?”
 - **Surprise regularly** – With consistency, do something to let your spouse know you are thinking of them and love them (doesn’t have to be something big, just thoughtful)
 - **Eat dinner together**—The dinner table provides a natural place to catch up with one another and do brief check-ins. Even when your table is shared with others (which it should be as Christians!), talking together over food . Eat food, turn off the TV, put your phones down, and talk!

Exercises

“With this admission we confess that our communication struggle is not primarily a struggle of technique, but a struggle of the HEART. Our war of words is not with other people; it is a battle within...As we see in Genesis 3, word problems are often interpretation problems...WE are the common element in all of our communication problems.” (Paul David Tripp) Discuss this statement with each other in light of Matthew 12:33-37.

Discuss the strengths of your communication. Discuss any areas that need improvement.

How have you handled conflict in the past? Where do you see God's grace? What needs to improve?

Readings

- *The Meaning of Marriage* by Tim & Kathy Keller – Chapters 4-5
- *The Cross and Criticism* by Dr. Alfred J. Poirier