

Marriage Enrichment (8) Communication (2)

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Marriage Enrichment

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We have a small group in front of us but maybe there's more listening at home or otherwise listening to us later. I'd like to start tonight with turning to 1 Samuel 25. It ties in with the subject of this evening when we go into again look at the subject of communication, and this is the story of Abigail and Nabal which, indeed, has a little communication problem here between those two. So I will not read all of the chapter, of course, but let's turn to verse 1 Samuel 25:8 and there is the request that David gives,

8 Ask thy young men, and they will shew thee. Wherefore let the young men find favour in thine eyes: for we come in a good day: give, I pray thee, whatsoever cometh to thine hand unto thy servants, and to thy son David. 9 And when David's young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased. 10 And Nabal answered David's servants, and said, Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master. 11 Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men, whom I know not whence they be?

Now that's the context and then we turn to verse 18 and you notice Abigail begins to take action.

18 Then Abigail made haste, and took two hundred loaves, and two bottles of wine, and five sheep ready dressed, and five measures of parched corn, and an hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and laid them on asses. 19 And she said unto her servants, Go on before me; behold, I come after you. But she told not her husband Nabal.

The end of the chapter in verse 36, and after the whole event has passed and the feast is over, verse 36,

36 And Abigail came to Nabal; and, behold, he held a feast in his house, like the feast of a king; and Nabal's heart was merry within him, for he

was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing, less or more, until the morning light. 37 But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.

Now this for the reading today. It's just the interest, of course, in terms of how did these two people communicate or not communicate is why I read these verses.

So let's together pray first.

Lord, as we gather tonight again briefly to consider marriage life and the importance of communication within the marriage relationship, here in this chapter we read of a couple, a married couple who did not communicate well and much dysfunctionality, Lord, in that marriage is clearly indicated and so it is still in many. And we pray also that thou would graciously bless these instructions tonight for those here present and for those who may listen afterwards elsewhere. Teach thou us, Lord, how to build the relationship in such a way that love may flourish and that our relationships may grow all fonder with each other rather than distant as so often happens. Bless especially those younger couples, Lord, who are at the beginning of their journeys yet and are learning and need to deepen their understanding of how to communicate. Bless then, these sessions also, especially to them to prevent what has developed between Nabal and Abigail as we see in this chapter. Lord, so be mindful of us all. I thank thee for bringing us here safely and let thy word and thy Spirit guide us and keep us in Jesus' name alone. Amen.

So tonight we are looking once again at the communication subject. Welcome. Better late than never. Sorry that I started but maybe some people are waiting elsewhere so...

Now the subject tonight is again on communication. I think there will be one more on that and that's because it's a massive subject in our daily life and our marriage life, isn't it? So in this study of our marriage enrichment, this has a destination but it has no termination point. The destination is obviously we want to see a more joyful, more biblical, more functional, more rewarding marriage life and more romantic, or at least keep it romantic. That's the real purpose and we all are eager to have that.

So that's the destination. The termination point really doesn't exist in this life. A relationship is always capable of going better or getting worse. There is never a static in a relationship, you either regress or you perhaps at an impasse where nothing is happening but that's regression, or you are growing. So let's keep that in mind. You never are to be arrived and I've been there 23 years. Did I say that right? And we still are learning together in our journey.

So looking back, I want to revive something at this moment. In our studies we've looked at this love bank concept, remember, making deposits and making withdrawals by our actions and reactions is one way in which we deal with this love bank concept. We make deposits and we make withdrawals through our words and reactions and we've learned

that nourishing our unique male and female emotional needs is a key to keeping the relationship in a good and romantic condition, and that is what all of our hopes are when we start out our journey, that our honeymoon will never be over. Correct? Maybe it's not over yet but it shouldn't be over. It should remain a journey of love and of excitement and of unity.

So we learned that emotional needs are a key. If you don't remember that, then go back to those notes. We noticed that devoting quality time with undivided attention is crucial. It's very difficult for us men mostly, yeah, to give that undivided attention to this woman that wants to share. Not doing anything else but listening, I'm still learning.

We've also learned that certain things are romantic love-busters. Yeah? Words that we speak that are angry or disrespect, selfish demands on one another, independent behavior, I go my way without checking out whether he or she is in agreement with that. You saw that in this chapter. Nabal and Abigail have gone separate ways, basically. They're two independent people living in a marriage and, of course, there's a lot of history before this that we don't know but this has been a very chaotic, very dysfunctional relationship and when it comes here in the Scriptures on the end part of it, you can see how far apart they are. She never even talked to him about spending all that money on David. That's a lot as we read this and of course when he hears it, he just can't handle that.

Now we also learned that there are opposite actions that are love-igniters. Sacrifice. Unconditional love and unconditional respect are two things that continue to ignite. Sharing honestly and openness.

So those are the things that we've learned so far as I reviewed real quick, then last time we looked at the subject of communication. This is part 2 today. What did I compare communication to? Do you remember yet? On the axle and the wheel was something else, the wheel in itself, right, the tire, the wheel, and it had lug nuts. So communication, you want to run that smooth and you want to run that with an inflated tire and so on, so it's all nice and smooth, it's obviously important that the lug nuts are in place. That's kind of the picture that I created. How good it is is up to you to decide but there are several lug nuts and one of them is all tied to communication.

One of the first ones I was talking about last time was connection. Communication means we have to have a deep-see connection. Deep-see, that means we need to see deep in each other to connect. On your outline today, there are five levels of communication which you connect with each other on a daily basis. Have the cliché conversation, "How was your day?" Now that doesn't tell me a whole lot about you, just about your day. Second level is a little farther when you report facts about each other. Yeah, maybe just more facts than just, "Yeah, it was okay." Third level is when you share ideas and visions and decisions. So now we're getting deeper. The fourth level of connection is when you share your feelings and emotions about what you are feeling. And of course, that comes to the last one where there's a complete emotional and a complete personal communication. That's the riskiest part because in that moment you make yourself very vulnerable to your

spouse. But that's the deep-see connection that we need to strive for where there's no secrets anymore; where you really are open with each other.

So that's one of the lug nuts. We talked a little bit about that the last time. Today I'm gonna look a little bit at conflict or conflict resolution, rather. How to resolve conflicts. How to be winners on both sides of the problem. Yeah? Win/win situation. That's always a win and that's an important part for our marriage functioning. We'll look at that today. Then you can think about choices. We all make choices and every choice has a consequence. So if choose to be angry, that's a choice. That has a consequence: distance, hurt, destruction. Anger never really is positive except if you whisper it might work. That's about what is always a secret but I don't keep that secret myself all the time. So then, of course, the word "charity" is another one of those lug nuts, right? Love covers everything and love sacrifices and love speaks in love and so on.

So those are a little bit the idea of lug nuts but today I like to look with you on the conflict resolution. The problems in marriage is not conflict. As a matter of fact, you're gonna be surprised about this but conflict is healthy. When I meet young couples who have never had a conflict, I'm really concerned. Conflict is healthy. How you resolve the conflict is very the not it. Yeah, that's the problem often, we don't resolve them well.

So let's think about that from three stages in your marriage life or in the marriage development. There's a honeymoon stage, there's a conflict stage, and there's a withdrawal stage. I'll make it real simple this way. I think that was well presented in one of the readings I've been doing.

Let's think about the honeymoon stage. Three years ago, was it, five years ago, how many years? Three years ago. How many years ago for you? Fifteen, 14. And mine is just one year ago because I'm still in the honeymoon stage. So never got out of it. Well, we shouldn't really but that's not really true. I hear that. Michelle, you corrected me. Thank you. But you think back on the honeymoon stage, how did we all enter the honeymoon stage? Most of us at least, we entered into the giving mode. We entered into this relationship of marriage in a giving mode and what is the giving mode is this: I will do whatever I can do to make him or her happy and I avoid anything that makes him or her unhappy even if it makes me unhappy. That would be the ideal, right? That is the giving mode and somehow I think if you look back, that's kind of how we all started, right? We had this great ideal and great purpose to do this, to make the other person happy even if it means that I might be a little unhappy.

So what we did consciously choose to ignore is a little bit of the, not a little bit, maybe a lot of the selfish mode or we could call it the take mode. Give mode versus a take mode. These are two concepts by William Harley I have taken from him, so I give credit to him now. But the take mode is, "I do whatever I do to make myself happy even if that means making him or her unhappy." So that's a really opposite. Now when you take a look at yourself, these two modes are in all of us more or less, but when we start in our honeymoon stage, we all canceled out the take mode, at least we intended to. We're gonna give, give, give. What did that do, by the way? That made honeymoon. That really

made it so beautiful. We just totally ignored our own self in many ways and we moved on and along with that we were in the hope mode and the hope mode is like we hope this will continue forever and ever as we all intended to have honeymoon. So we hope that the person will always meet my needs and always fill my emotional tank.

Now when you are both in this giving mode, what do we have? When we are both in this giving mode with the taking mode switched off, it is really sweet. This is what honeymoon is. This is what beautiful life is. This is what joy is, when we both are in this total giving mode. Now I would again say, friends, that romanticism flourishes in that context and I'm trying to say that romanticism is something that is the flower and the beauty of the relationship in marriage no matter how long you're married, and that we want to keep alive, and that's the conflict so often that these great feelings we had for one another in this romantic passionate love are really challenged as we go on in marriage life and now it's not quite so natural and not quite so beautiful. Why is that, and that's what I'm trying to analyze for a moment with you in my thinking out loud with you, why did that romanticism flourish? Because we both were giving. We showed love and we were considerate and we made sacrifices, and we spent lots of time with each other listening, we gave to each other, we did special things for each other, we showed restraint, we did the loving touches and on and on and on. Recall it all? Hopefully it has been part of you at one time.

Now let's go back for a moment to one of the first or the second session, I tried to explain to you the connection between caring love and romantic love, remember that? Caring actions are conscious actions, conscious choices, conscious things you do even though you don't feel like doing it. That is the fuel for the romantic love. In other words, when you're in a giving mode and the giving mode and you cancel out that taking mode, what's going to happen? You are fueling the other person and if that both goes, both ways to each other, we have this wonderful relationship.

Now I point out, of course, that there needs to be some boundaries and expectations in place here for what is going to happen if giving mode goes too far in giving? Yeah, you get spoiled. You get a spoiled spouse and what happens to a spoiled spouse? What happened to his giving mode? It becomes a taking mode. Yeah? We're so in love with that person, we sacrifice everything for him or for her and we keep on indulging bad habits and now bad habits become stronger and stronger and he becomes a taker or she becomes a taker. So now what happens with the honeymoon? Now we wake up to the reality, "Wow, this is not how it used to be. What has happened?" It is just this, that we have sometimes gone too far as we indulge the other and when that happens, we move into the second stage of marriage, conflict stage.

Now let's go to the first fact. Marital conflict is unavoidable and not necessarily bad. Why is that not necessarily bad? Well, first of all, it is unavoidable. Why is that? Because we're both sinners. You're going to have conflict. You were both failing sinners. We are not always what we are to be anymore since we are fallen people and so we need conversion in marriage life, in daily life, in our relationship with each other, and the way that conversion comes about, how does conversion come about? Think of it spiritually, it

comes through a conflict. God confronts you with sin. How do I usually, how do we react when God confronts us? Put up my pride. Put up my resistance. Put up, I'm not going to accept this, and we have a conflict because confrontation with sin if there is no grace in our heart, we will respond negative to it.

So also in marriage life. We are sinners, we will be confronted by our sin, that may provoke our pride, it may stir up enmity and more anger and we react wrongly. So in marriage life, I married her for being my coach, my corrector, my factor to grow. Remember? Marriage life was a school of refinement and as God put us together, we're both two gems unfinished. Mom and dad did a heroic job but not finished, so now, Tyler, you are the polisher of your wife and, Emily, you are the polisher of your husband and so it is for all of us, and that grows often through conflict where I need to be pointed out what I'm doing wrong or where I do make choices that need to be changed.

So if you have never a conflict, that means either you're in heaven and that's not the case, or what is the other option if there is never a conflict? You're still on your honeymoon? Oh, there would be three options then, okay? It also could be that one of you is not honest in confronting the others about his or her sins or failures in his life. In other words, one of you is giving in or maybe I'll put it this way, is giving and giving and giving and giving in and giving in, and indulging and burying him or herself under the actions of the other which are not good. Now if that goes long on, if that continues to go, that is terrible for the marriage and, therefore, I hope that, you know, the younger ones married listening to this, these topics, will take action on this. Let me quote you Benjamin Franklin and I have a little version on his quote. Benjamin Franklin said before you get married, keep both eyes wide open. After you've married, close one. That's wisdom. However, things go wrong when you close both after you're married. That's wrong. God does not want you to close your eyes on your spouse and let them take and take and take while you give and give and give. If that happens, you are going into conflict zone.

So a conflict is good if it leads to a negotiated resolution that makes you grow. Yeah? I always think of a conflict as a gold-mining experience. You dig into each other, nicely, okay, as you're dealing with the problem in order to find gold to grow or to enrich. So conflicts are not bad but how you deal with them and how we grow out of them is where the positive benefit comes from that. So to reach that goal is really the main thrust of this topic today.

Now what happens when no apologies, what happens when no changes occur in the relationship, when no mending takes place? What happens when someone in the marriage life continues to ignore the emotional, the social, the physical, the spiritual needs of the other and he's just only a taker while he is not a giver? What happens to such a marriage? Yeah, either by control or by neglect or by demanding or by overriding the other person, if this happens in your marriage life, two things will happen: either that spouse that is the constant taker makes the other spouse who is the constant giver a doormat or in a wallflower, and a person who is just existing to serve the other spouse, and that's never going to be God's intention. That is totally dysfunctional and some people, and I know there are marriages like that in which one of the spouses is just basically buried in the

marriage, and exists only to serve the other while he doesn't get served, him or herself, yeah? So the second option is if this relationship doesn't get mended, it goes obviously from romantic honeymoon stage into conflict stage and if that doesn't get resolved, it goes into withdrawal state. So that's the third stage. We'll come to that in a moment.

So now let's sum it up. What is the conflict stage? Very simply when I am giving while the other one is only taking; when my giving mode is switched off and I am overbearing and I am constantly using my position or whatever to be served. Obviously at that moment communication is no more communication, it's angry outburst, it's disrespect, it's demanding, it's nasty. You get all kinds of closed up spirit. You know, you see this in Nabal and Abigail, they don't even communicate anymore. You think marriages like this exist in God's churches? Way too many where they just live.

So the mode in this stage of life, I sum them up, they, you fight for your right, you conflict. You're not wanting the other person to give up and you fight and you get conflict, you get distance, and if that doesn't get changed, then let's quickly look at the third stage, we get the withdrawal stage and the withdrawal stage is no more fighting, it's fighting, it's walking away, it's living individually without fighting anymore. There comes a point that couples just quit fighting. They conclude that it is not worth anymore, it's not anymore worth the fight for and this stage is well described as called emotional divorce and I have seen couples like that in my journey of pastoral ministry. They're not divorced, they live together in the same house but they're emotionally divorced. They don't interact on a personal level. There's no emotional bonding of love. There's no seeking of my emotional needs to be fulfilled in him or her. We just actually live as two independent people in a marriage situation, under the same roof, not always in the same bedroom, no real interaction, just business like. He goes his way. She goes her way. Completely independent.

Now in the world around this, what happens to those kind of marriages? They divorce. They absolutely go apart. In our own churches where we have still a strong conviction about the biblical demand of staying together, that doesn't happen so much but it ends up to be simply a fake marriage. No, I don't want you to be ever there and that's why we're talking here tonight.

So what are the roots of this marital conflict withdrawal? Let's take a look at that. You don't want to stay long in a conflict stage and end up in a withdrawal stage so how do you prevent this from happening? Now some of you are businessmen, some of you are and you don't really have a business that you work with other people in business meetings, right? But imagine for a moment the difference between a business meeting and a marital meeting and those of who who have been at, I've been at church meetings that's kind of like a business meeting, and, Shawn, you probably have been at business meetings, there's a great noteworthy difference between those two meetings. On business meetings, we have men and women working together around the table on a project or on a problem and they work well together. Some men and some women on the business level are the most incredible negotiators, very professional, very capable, and they discuss respectfully

six solutions, come to decisions. I don't know, Shawn, I don't imagine that there's any name-calling on those meetings? Conflict but no angry voices? Huh?

"Conflict usually creates [unintelligible]."

Right, if you could manage it well, right? But we don't sit there name-calling the boss and you don't sit there making all kinds of cutting remarks, and you don't throw cups and pens across the table, right? I cannot imagine that would last very well if it happens on a business meeting. So these people that are experts at their business meeting sometimes they come home and I don't know what happens between there and home, and now they're having a meeting with their spouse and things just don't work. Name-calling comes in. Yelling. Talking disrespectful. They are a professional negotiator at home and an unprofessional sledgehammer at home and it gets ugly, it's foul, there are threats, and maybe you recognize it in yourself. "You know, I can be such a different man at work and it seems like I come home and I just can't handle it with my wife or with the kids." What is that? Well, what is that? And this is a common thing so do not think that you're unique if that's what you must conclude about yourself. What is the main reason that in the marriage relationship we often have conflicts that are so different than a business conflict? We could say, "Well, maybe that's a difference between male and females." Well, that's not entirely true because males and females work very well together in a business situation and they can discuss it, they nicely, and so you can't just say even though we as males and females communicate in different ways and we have different styles and different wordings, it works fine around a business table.

So what is it, then, that makes the marriage relationship so often much more conflicting? Now this has to do with the fact that in your marriage relationship it involves your deepest emotional needs which you don't have a business table. Yeah? I want you to think this through for a moment because it really is helpful for yourself to realize this. When I come in my marriage relationship, I'm hungering to have my emotional needs filled by my spouse. That's what marriage was for. God brought us together to be help meet to one another to meet each other's emotional needs. That's what marriage is for and that's what we all crave for in our marriage. Now we don't go to work to have our emotional tanks filled, at least in a normal situation we don't. We don't go there to receive affection, if you do, you've got a problem and that's how most infidelity starts, right? I don't get it at home, now I go to work and all of a sudden somebody gives me that attention that I should be getting at home. Now that's a danger sign. Now that's usually the way for an infidelity case.

So at home, these emotional needs need to be fed. If they are not fed, what do we get? We get conflict. We feel it. I need to be, I don't go to work for affection or for sexual intimacy or for the deep-see sharing. I don't go for that, I go for work and in marriage we are together dealing with our emotional hunger. So to say it a different way, at work I don't let my emotions take control of me because they're not important at that stage. At home, we often let our emotions take control of us and now comes your conflict.

As we hunger for the emotional fulfillment as a man, I hunger for respect, so when my wife speaks disrespectfully to me, what happens? Boom, something goes in me that's wrong. I feel like acting. I feel like reacting. I feel disrespected in my personal needs. What happens if at work somebody shows a little disrespect to my personal needs? React the same way? Usually not. We just carry that with some grit, but at home we don't. As a male, we hunger for admiration, we hunger for sexual affection, we hunger for the recreational companionship, and as a female, you hunger for affection, you hunger for the love, you hunger for the gentleness, for the understanding, for the support, and as you're working with your husband or with your wife, you are unconsciously looking for the fulfillment of those emotional needs also around the subject of conflict.

So now what's the real problem in conflicts? And I'm going to give you an assignment to look back at some of your conflicts in this week, to replay, and now you don't have to redo the conflict again but you want to think that through for yourself. What is the real problem in marital conflict is when we let the emotions control us in speaking and in listening and especially in resolving. There's an interesting word in the word "emotion," an e-motion. There's a motion, there's a power in emotions. There is something very strong in emotions. They can wipe us off our feet, right? When a young man is in love with a young lady which is not the right young lady to be, you know, we parents can talk to the wall. These emotions are just moving these kids into a direction they become blind. So therefore we tell our kids, "Before you even start thinking, keep both eyes wide open," right? Because you can't handle feelings.

So if we let feelings enter into our marital strife or struggles in conflicts, at least, it is never going to work. Feelings distort your thinking. Feelings distort your listening. Feelings distort your logic. You see, these things are not on the business table. That wasn't happening. We listen carefully. We may not agree with that guy, we may think his idea is absolutely foolish or stupid, but we're not letting feelings guide us, we're listening to him intellectually. You think, "You know what? The pros and cons of this," and we weigh it up and we don't let our feelings guide us as we do in a marriage between husband and wife and also between us and kids, same thing. So when our spouse comes against us and opposes our ideas, we usually react emotionally rather than rationally, yeah, because we think and we listen emotionally.

So instead of using intelligence and facts and figures to resolve the problem, we let our emotion override our thinking and we let our feeling take control. Now you need to ponder this through a little bit with each other as you have a conflict or you had one recently and think through this. Now there's another reason briefly why marital conflict often ends in destructive behavior while a business conflict doesn't. Now why is that? Because we are less mercenary in the home context than we are in the business context, and that word "mercenary" is an old word for a soldier that fought for money, like the mercenary soldiers, they would hire them and you'd get paid for fighting a battle. Now are these people really battling for the heart? They're battling for the money. So let's be honest, once we are in our business, we're not going to name-call the boss, we might be fired tomorrow. We're not gonna throw a cup of water across the table when we get angry because we might be charged with assault or something like that.

So there's a lot of selfish thinking in us and so we are very very concerned making good deposits at work, right? But we don't, we know that yelling and anger and disrespect, demanding to your boss and co-worker, that's no way to get a promotion. So we don't do that. We control it. At home, we allow our sinful selfishness to take control because we think there's little to lose. No paycheck or something like that, and that is just the wrong thinking. You know what? If we lose our job, we lose hardly anything. You can find another job. If you lose your wife or your husband, you're not going to find that again. We lose far more when we are failing to realize what wrong it is when we let our emotional conflicts ruin our marriage.

So how wrong is this, friends? When we lose home, we lose all and, again, I'd like you to be reminded that if your emotional tanks are not filled in the marriage, you and I are setting ourselves up for danger, especially if you are working outside the home with others. The key ingredient that leads to an affair, to a marital infidelity or further break-up is when your own emotional needs at home are not filled. Yeah? Then your boss might pay a little bit more attention to you and that feels good, or that co-worker may pay a little bit more attention, that feels good. This is how pastors and people get into problems, when he gets too much attention from a certain woman and that woman gets feelings for him and that's how many pastors become compromised of their own marriages, they all are dealing with emotions and that's why it's so crucial that you handle your conflicts in your marriage life so well to protect your marriage.

So do a little reflection and about your conflicts, and ask yourself, "Why did I get upset? What was it really that made me now suddenly go in anger mode?" And I recognize that, for example, I have some conflict with my younger sons, younger son, usually because he's acting very disrespectful, right? So my emotional need as a father to be respected isn't met by this young fellow so what happens when that doesn't happen? Well, if I don't control myself, I will raise my voice and I'll begin to really give him a lecture on, you know, high decibel. It is not helpful, but you see what happens, right? The conflict is disrespect but he is touching or not touching my emotional need and we get a conflict. So it is between spouses with each other. You constantly have to ask yourself, "What now did I really get so upset about? What triggered this in me? Why did I stamp off and slam the door? Why do I feel like withdrawing?"

Now the fruits of an untreated marital conflict, I let you read through those yourself, but this is very damaging, friends. If dividing issues remain unclear, sometimes people have no clue exactly what they are having a separation or a division about because you're not listening to each other. We may be assuming things. Conflict drives you more and more apart and, of course, that really opens up your temptations to seek satisfaction outside your marriage. Conflict is going to affect your family and your children. You will give them a terrible example of how to deal with relationships. Conflict is hindering spiritual growth and closeness with God for yourself and with each other, and if it is not handled well, it ends with divorce either actually or emotionally.

So then the last part of this topic tonight is what is a recipe to avoid marital conflict that douses your marriage love? Now let me ask you a question first: do you regret having a honeymoon period in your marriage? No. None of us regret the honeymoon period, right? At least we agree on something here. Perhaps some of you have never had a honeymoon period. There are some couples, indeed, that have no honeymoon period at all because on the honeymoon already they started having all kinds of conflicts that weren't resolved well and from that stage on, that journey has been a constant battle. So if you didn't have a honeymoon period, well, one, maybe you should have never married the person. There would have been so much incompatibility there that, indeed, it's maybe it was never meant to be. Or one of your partners was a complete pirate and a pirate is a deceitful lover, he just wants to love you deceitfully in order to get you and once he or she gets you, has you, turns around to be the real person. Now there are cases like that. I do not necessarily want to speak to that tonight, but that is the reality sometimes. But most of us think back about our early stages of our marriage and we wish that that could really be returned and extended.

Now the good news is that is absolutely easy to accomplish. Now I should take the word "easy" out. That is possible to be accomplished but it is not easy, that's what I meant to say, yeah? It includes repentance and repentance is never easy. It includes a lot of changes and a lot of commitments, and one of the commitments that I want to speak about now is one of the hardest ones to make. Yeah, I will not finish it tonight but we'll look at some of the details of that next time, Lord willing. But the commitment you need to make is to the policy of joint agreement. I borrow that phrase again from William Harley. The policy of joint agreement, he calls it. In a good marriage, friends, your spouse's interest and your own interest need to be treated simultaneously. It's not just only give, give, give, give, it's also receive, receive, receive, receive. Both of you are to be giving to each other and then your spouse's interest and your own interest are to be considered simultaneously. Things go wrong in the marriage when the one is consistently suffering for the other. It's not how God meant it. There are some heroic examples of how that worked well when people that did it, but that's not how it's meant to be. It is not a flourishing marriage when the one is constantly suffering for the other. But what happens when that occurs, then the one gains at the expense of the other. That's controlling. That's demeaning. That's abusive. That is corroding the entire beauty of marriage love.

Now of course, there's an exception in the case of sickness obviously. When your spouse is sick or needy, yes, it will be one way. I've been there. When Melanie got sick, it was basically one way love. There was nothing returning in these last two years of her life basically, yeah? So it was difficult but that's not what we're talking about, we're talking about a normal marriage, there needs to be giving to one another constantly.

So in the policy of joint agreement, you let your mind resolve your conflicts instead of turning them over to your emotions. That's harder than you think and here is the only rule in this agreement. This is not a long policy. There's only one rule. It is never do anything without an enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse. That's the only rule. It sounds simple but notice the word "enthusiastic." That's not simple, especially not when you came from Mars and the other one came from Venus, right? For the one means male

and the other one means female. That's not true. That's not easy but it is the only way in which you will continue this joyful relationship of the marriage. You don't do or we don't move or we don't go in any direction without an enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse. Maybe people say, "That sounds crazy." Yet following this rule in all of your marriage life will absolutely translate in a very long honeymoon and it will flourish in joyful relationship in your marriage life.

Why is that? Let's look at some of the statements underneath. Committing to this policy forces you always to consider your spouse's needs and feelings. Before you do A, we need to go to each other and we need to ask the person, "How do you feel about me doing this or that?" Now that's gonna stop us from making a lot of decisions. First of all, we're not gonna rush anything now because we're going to have to stop and ask, and I'm talking here about things that are going to affect your journey of life together, your relationship with each other. So you force yourself by this agreement to ask the other person about his or her feelings.

Look back for a moment now, think back for a moment on decisions you've made. Did any of us ever make decisions in which we not at all considered the other person, we just took the decision and we just did it? I'm sure that you can think of some situations where you did that and it backfired. It did with Abigail, yeah? She took a decision and it backfired, the man just about had it when he heard this. She informed him on the next day, "I've made this decision to do this." You could say she had to save the whole household from David. Well, that's true and so she was in a difficult situation, not disagreeing with that, but we don't want to make these decisions all the time, right? We just make big decisions and then we go inform our spouse, "I did this," unless there is an agreed agreement that you can do things like that on your own. And that wasn't necessarily the case there.

So committing to this policy, what does that bind you to? That obliges you to negotiate. It obliges you to discuss. It obliges you to seek a way forward in which you both are excited and both are supportive about what you're going to do, and that's crucial for a harmonious relationship. If you want to really have a joyful and fun relationship, you both have to be on the same boat, sailing the same direction. Yeah? That's clear. If that doesn't happen, if one of you is making a decision and the other one is not an excited and enthusiastic partner, what do we get? We get distance. We get hard feelings. We get maybe some bitterness. We get, you know, sour attitude in the other one. So in that sense we need to make sure that it's to be in a very good agreement.

So if you do this, make this policy yours, you will never settle for a reluctant agreement. Think of the word "reluctant" for a moment. Let's say husband A wants to go hunting with his friends on Saturday, right? But wife A wants him to be home because she has this growing list of this honey to-do list and Saturday is the only day the guy has free and now he wants to go hunting. So you walk in as husband and say, "Hey, I want to go hunting on Saturday, what do you feel like or what do you think about that idea?" You feel already reluctant to ask, right, because that's giving quite a bit of influence on a decision. You really want to go. So now you have a discussion and obviously your wife

says, "You know what? These things really need to get done and when does it get done?" And so on, and your wife is discussing with you and you finally reluctantly agree, do not go hunting. You made an agreement but the one is reluctant. So Saturday morning comes around and you have sacrificed your hunting trip and you're sweating away trying to fix this leaking toilet and laying there on the toilet floor and everything goes wrong and what's happening? Right? Shoot, men, I'm the most sour man in the world that day. Why is that? Because this agreement was a reluctant agreement. There was no agreement. The one reluctantly agreed, yeah?

Now these things happen, of course. We always have these things happening in our lifetime, in our marriage journey, but I'm trying to suggest that we need to come to an enthusiastic agreement on this problem if both of you want to be happy and still look in each other's faces at the end of the day and really smile at each other and say, "I love you." But that Saturday I don't think that's gonna happen, right? That's the point.

So the golden rule is to make a joint agreement that you seek to make an enthusiastic agreement or decision with each other. Now that could have been another solution, I'll let you guys figure out other solutions on this Saturday hunting problem, but the golden rule is, guys, if a decision is not in the interest of both of you, it is not in the best interest of your relationship. If it is one reluctant party, it is going to be a strain on the relationship and, therefore, we need to fight and argue, discuss is a better word, and brainstorm and do all that to come up with a solution which both of you become an enthusiastic partner to go forward. Does that make sense?

Now the benefits and now I'm gonna be a salesman, right, because I have to sell this to you, what are the benefits of this policy of joint agreement? Well, first, it keeps you sensitive about the other's feelings because you always have to ask the other person, "How do you feel about what I would like to do or go?" Now you are always forcing yourself to ask that question because you have agreed to it. That means you're going to be sensitive to your spouse's feelings and that's important because if you walk right over each other and you hurt each other or you dishonor each other, that's not gonna help. That's gonna bring strain in the relationship.

So the second, it prevents you from doing thoughtless things unintentionally. I think that a lot of times we do things unintentionally because we're thoughtless. They didn't really mean to hurt but we just on a quick moment, on a spontaneous moment said, "Yes, I'll go hunting with you guys." And we come home and we never really intended to hurt our wife and we weren't really thinking about a long honey to-do list and this leaking toilet problem and so on, we weren't thinking of that so we weren't meant to hurt her yet we ended up if we pushed that decision through. So saying to your buddies, "Hey, good idea but I have to check at home if that's gonna work out. If my wife and I can come to an enthusiastic agreement on it, I will be there." No, they're gonna look at you like, "What is wrong with you?" Right? But anyway it prevents you from doing thoughtless things unintentionally.

Thirdly, again this is the third reason why I want you to really think about this policy, it makes you work like a team instead of two individuals. Yeah, we are yoked together and we have to pull the plow in the same direction and you can't do that if you are not agreeing on it. So if you are ignoring the other person's interests and feelings, we are perhaps pursuing our own interest, you know what we're really doing? We're plowing our spouse's back with sharp objects where I just pursue my own agenda and I have no time and no desire or no consideration of the other person.

Now fourthly, it will force you to change your plan and to negotiate or find an alternative that will honor the emotional needs of your spouse. If you ask this question, if you agree to this policy, you will always satisfy or honor the emotional needs of the other person. You know, when I would come to Michelle and I would ask the questions, "Look, I have this request to do this, what is your feelings about it?" That's going to make her feel valued, right? It's going to make her feel respected. It's going to make her feel loved because I want to hear what her thoughts are and if we make that decision together, we have unity. Yeah? If it's enthusiastic and we're both agreeing to it, then I feel better about doing it too because I know I've got a supportive wife behind me, right? If you don't, you really can't enjoy those things very well either because now you have a conflict brewing in the background. So on every level it's a loss.

This policy, friends, scuttles the love-busters. If you agree to a joint agreement before you do anything, the love-buster of demanding, abusing your power or your situation, forcing your way through is not going to work. If you agree to this policy, there will never be a situation where I win and the other one loses and if you have situations where you win and he or she loses, it is a drain, it's a strain, it's a breaking up of your marriage and it's a dousing of the romantic love.

So it all needs to come to an enthusiastic agreement in both parties. So if you've never operated with this policy of joint agreement, then let's end this day with that. Yeah? Before you end today, you should have committed this rule: never do anything anymore without your enthusiastic agreement. You're gonna have to say that to your spouse. I've never quite said it that way but I think we have agreed to this but I'm gonna say it tonight anyway.

So obviously there are a few more things that we need to work on in how then do you come to this enthusiastic agreement. I mean, to make the agreement is one thing, but to get there is another story, and that's the one I would like to cover in my last topic on communication the next time. So next time, Lord willing, we'll talk about what now will make this negotiation a pleasant experience in which it will end up to be an enthusiastic agreement. So we'll talk about that and I also will talk the next time, Lord willing, on the subject of giving and handling criticism in marriage life. That's a hard one. I hate criticism but I need it, right? So how do you get it and how do you take it and how do you learn from it and how do you in such a way that your marriage will grow and it doesn't become a nagging thing or something like that? So I think it's good to add that to our last session on communication.

Are there any questions? I always make you drink from a fire hydrant, right, on a topic where you just get an avalanche of information but now you have a whole month to deal with the details of it. So Lord willing, and we live, we'll do another month and then we'll have our last, probably our last session unless you have any topic requests that you say, "Could we spend an evening on this particular issue?" You can give them to me privately if you have that, and then we can consider that.

No questions?

Let's pray together.

Lord, thou has meant marriage life to give us the most exquisite joy on this earth that is possible in a relationship, and thou knowest, Lord, that that's not often what it delivers. There are some very sorry scenes that cause us much pain and bring much harm and dishonor also to thee and to each other. We stand all guilty of that, Lord, being sinners together but we pray that as we have looked at this subject of conflict and conflict resolution and communication and agreeing together in all the kind of decisions that we take, we pray that that may also be a blessing, enriching and perhaps redirecting some of us who are not living in this manner. O Lord, we pray that thou would, please, guide us on our way home tonight and remember us all in the furtherance of this day. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.