

Couples Workbook
Marriage Communication and Conflict Workshop

Friday 8/28/2026, 7pm-9pm (Session 1 & 2)
Saturday 8/29/2026, 7pm-9pm (Session 3 & 4)
Location: Living Hope Church RVA
Facilitator: Pastor Carter Tan & Winnie Wang

Content:

1. Session 1: Learning from Biblical Couples (page 2-6)
2. Session 2: Daily Habits That Draw You Closer (page 7-11)
3. Session 3: Communicating Well When Tensions Rise (page 12-17)
4. Session 4: Repairing Trust, Restoring Connection (page 18-22)
5. Recommended Resources (page 23)

In marriage, our assignment is not to work on our spouse. Our assignment is to examine our own heart, take responsibility for our own attitudes and actions, and ask God to help us become a better spouse. Our hope is that this workshop will help you grow closer to one another and to Christ as you learn what Scripture teaches about communication, conflict, forgiveness, and covenant love. Above all, we pray that your marriage will be strengthened, your connection renewed, and your relationship will more clearly reflect the love of Christ.



Modern Family Introduction Clip
youtube.com/watch?v=cXygSlFxnKs

Session 1: Learning from Biblical Couples

Examine marriages and relationships of couples mentioned in the Bible to discover what God teaches about communication, conflict, and covenant love.

1. Opening prayer

2. Key ideas

Scripture does not hide the struggles of marriage but uses real people and real relationships to teach us about communication, conflict, and covenant love. Couples will learn from both the successes and failures of biblical couples, identifying patterns that strengthen relationships and those that create distance and conflict. As we examine couples in the Bible, we will discover that the same relationship patterns that strengthened or strained their marriages can be found in ours today.

3. Case studies

Consider these observation questions during the case study. What actions or words in this passage bring couples closer together? What actions or words in this passage create separation, conflict, or distance? Which of these patterns do we see most often in our own marriage? What would it look like to practice patterns that strengthen in our marriage?

I. Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve's story is more than the account of the first man and woman; it is the Bible's first portrait of marriage. Their relationship allows us to observe how a husband and wife responded to one another before sin entered the world and how their interactions changed afterward.

Bible Passage	Patterns That Strengthen	Patterns That Create Distance
Genesis 2:18-25	Companionship; unity; openness; no shame between them	None explicitly stated
Genesis 3:6 -13	None explicitly stated	Disobedience; hiding; fear; concealment; blame; avoiding responsibility

II. Abraham and Sarah

Abraham and Sarah (originally called Abram and Sarai) were a married couple whom God called to leave their homeland and follow Him to a new land, promising that their descendants would become a great nation. As they waited many years for God to fulfill His promise of a child, their marriage experienced seasons of faith, doubt, fear, impatience, and conflict.

Bible Passage	Patterns That Strengthen	Patterns That Create Distance
Genesis 12:11-13	Sharing concerns	Dishonesty and misrepresent
Genesis 16:1-6	Addressing concerns directly	Blame; avoiding responsibility; mistreatment; separation
Genesis 18:9-15	Engaging God in uncertainty	Doubt; denial; dishonesty

III. Priscilla and Aquila

This couple provides a positive example of partnership, teamwork, and shared ministry. They worked together in serving Christ, opening their home, and helping others grow in faith, demonstrating mutual support and unity.

Bible Passage	Patterns That Strengthen	Patterns That Create Distance
Acts 18:1-3	Working together; shared mission; teamwork; mutual support	None explicitly stated
Acts 18:24-26	Ministry partnership; teaching together; serving together	None explicitly stated
Romans 16:3-5	Sacrifice; hospitality by opening their house; investing in others together; commitment to God's kingdom	None explicitly stated
1 Corinthians 16:19	Valuing one another; mutual care of others	None explicitly stated

IV. Christ and the Church

Marriage ultimately reflects the covenant relationship between Christ and His people. Jesus models sacrificial love, grace, forgiveness, and commitment, which become the foundation for healthy communication and conflict resolution in marriage.

Bible Passage	Patterns That Strengthen	Patterns That Create Distance
Ephesians 5:21-33	Mutual submission; respect; sacrificial love; selflessness; nurturing; cherishing; commitment.	None explicitly stated
Isaiah 62:4-5	Delight; covenant joy; rejoicing, belonging	Abandoned, separation; neglect of the relationship

- V. What do we learn from biblical couples?
 No marriage in Scripture is perfect except the picture of Christ and the Church. Some couples demonstrate patterns that create distance, while others model patterns that strengthen relationships. The goal is not to compare our marriages with theirs but to identify the patterns we are practicing and intentionally choose those that move us toward greater unity, trust, and covenant love.

4. In-Class Role Play

The purpose of this role play is to help couples identify relationship patterns that either strengthen connection or create distance. By examining the experiences of biblical couples and introducing healthier patterns, couples can see how different choices lead to different outcomes and learn practical ways to strengthen their own marriage.

- I. Instructions for Couples
 - a. Choose a biblical scenario from Adam and Eve or Abraham and Sarah.
 - b. Use the **Reference Sheet Summary of Relationship Patterns** on page 6 as a guide.
 - c. Read the passages together and identify conflict patterns.
 - i. What patterns created conflict, tension, or distance in the relationship? What words, attitudes, or actions contributed to the negative outcome?
 - d. Identify strengthening patterns that could have changed the interaction.
 - i. What could they have said or done differently? How could they have demonstrated trust, honesty, humility, responsibility, grace, patience, or partnership?
 - d. Recreate the conversation. Role-play the same scenario again, this time introducing relationship strengthening patterns that could have led to a healthier outcome.
 - e. Reflect together:
 - i. How did the second conversation feel different?
 - ii. Which conflict or strengthening patterns do you recognize in your own marriage?

5. Home practice

Healthy marriages are shaped by daily patterns. *The quality of a marriage is often shaped not by a single event, but by the patterns that are repeated over time.* This week, focus on noticing the patterns you are already practicing and intentionally choosing those that bring you closer together and closer to Christ.

1. Home Practice: Catch the Pattern

- a. Each spouse should notice and write down:
 - i. One strengthening pattern you observe in your spouse.
 - ii. One strengthening pattern you observe in yourself.
 - iii. One distance creating pattern you would like to change.
- b. At the end of the week, share your observations and pray together. You may want to consider making this a weekly exercise for the next several months until it becomes a natural pattern in your marriage.

6. Closing prayer

Session 1 Reference Sheet

Summary of Relationship Patterns

Use this matrix as a quick reference during the role play. As you revisit Adam and Eve or Abraham and Sarah's interaction, identify which patterns created distance and which patterns could have been introduced to produce a healthier outcome.

Patterns That Strengthen	Patterns That Create Distance
Companionship	Isolation
Unity	Division
Openness	Concealment
Vulnerability	Hiding
Honesty	Dishonesty
Taking Responsibility	Blame
Humility	Pride
Trust	Fear
Patience	Impatience
Partnership	Positioning Against One Another
Mutual Support	Self-Protection
Shared Mission	Competing Priorities
Grace	Harshness
Forgiveness	Unforgiveness
Delighting in One Another	Neglect
Nurturing and Cherishing	Abandonment
Sacrificial Love	Self-Centeredness
Respect	Disrespect
Engagement	Avoidance
Reconciliation	Separation

Session 2: Daily Habits That Draw You Closer

Small daily habits often determine whether couples grow closer or drift apart. This session equips couples with practical communication habits that strengthen connection, build emotional safety, and reduce conflict before it escalates.

1. Opening prayer

2. Key ideas

Communication is more than exchanging information; it is how couples build trust, understanding, and connection. The goal is not simply to be heard, but to understand and be understood. When couples listen well, speak truthfully, and respond with empathy, they create an environment where trust and connection can flourish.

3. Practical daily habits

There are many communication tools couples can learn, but the three below are the foundational habits that give couples the biggest return in everyday marriage. If couples practice these consistently, they can prevent many small frustrations from becoming larger conflicts.

Skill	Primary Question	Key Idea
Active Listening	“Do I understand what my spouse is saying?”	Understanding the message
Validation & Empathy	“Does my spouse feel understood?”	Acknowledging the emotion
Speaking Truth with Grace	“How do I communicate my own concerns?”	Expressing yourself constructively

I. Active Listening

- Key Idea: Most couples listen to reply, defend, or solve. Healthy communication begins when **we listen to understand**. Feeling heard often reduces tension before a problem is even solved. Active listening does not require you to agree with every statement or solve the problem immediately. It requires you to slow down long enough to understand what your spouse is trying to communicate.
- Key Scripture: James 1:19–20. *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.*
- What does it look like in daily communications?

What Active Listening Look Like	What You Can Say
Put away distractions	“Let me put my phone down so I can focus on you.”
Make eye contact	“I’m listening.”
Reflect what you heard	“What I hear you saying is...”

Check for understanding	“Did I get that right?”
Invite more sharing	“Tell me more about that.”

d. Sample scenarios:

Situation	Not So Helpful Response	Active Listening Response
Feeling overwhelmed at home Spouse: <i>“I feel like I’m carrying most of the responsibilities around here.”</i>	“I am busy too. We both have a lot going on.”	“What I hear you saying is that you feel overwhelmed and that too much has been falling on you. Did I understand you correctly? Tell me which responsibilities have been weighing on you the most.”
Spending money without discussion Spouse: <i>“I was surprised to see that purchase on our account.”</i>	“It is my money too. I did not think it was a big deal.”	“What I hear you saying is that the purchase caught you off guard and you wanted to be included in the decision. Did I get that right?”
Feeling ignored Spouse: <i>“Sometimes I feel like your phone gets more attention than I do.”</i>	<i>(still scrolling)</i> “Uh-huh... I am listening.”	<i>(puts phone down and turns toward spouse)</i> “Absolutely. What is on your mind?”

II. Validation & Empathy

- Key Idea: Even when you understand what your spouse is saying, they may still not feel understood. Validation and empathy communicate that your spouse's **feelings matter**. The goal is not to determine whether their feelings are right or wrong, but to acknowledge and care about what they are experiencing.
- Key Scripture: 1 Peter 3:1-9 *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*
- What does it look like in daily communications?

What Validation & Empathy Look Like	What You Can Say
Acknowledge feelings	“I can see why that upset you.”
Demonstrate compassion	“I’m sorry that was difficult.”

Avoid minimizing concerns	“I can see why this is important to you.”
Invite your spouse to share more	“What part was most frustrating?”

d. Sample scenarios:

Situation	Not So Helpful Response	Validation & Empathy Response
Feeling overwhelmed at home Spouse: <i>“I feel like I’m carrying most of the responsibilities around here.”</i>	“Everyone is busy.”	“That sounds exhausting.”
Spending money without discussion Spouse: <i>“I was surprised to see that purchase on our account.”</i>	“It’s not that much money.”	“I can see how that would catch you off guard.”
Feeling ignored Spouse: <i>“Sometimes I feel like your phone gets more attention than I do.”</i>	“That’s ridiculous.”	“I would not want you to feel unimportant. Thanks for telling me.”

III. Speaking Truth with Grace

- Key Idea: Healthy couples address concerns honestly without attacking one another. The goal is not to avoid difficult conversations, nor is it to win an argument. The goal is to **express yourself constructively** in a way that strengthens the relationship. Speaking truth with grace focuses on the issue rather than criticizing the person.
- Key Scripture: Ephesians 4:29–32. *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen...get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*
- What does it look like in daily communications?
Use the simple formula: ***I felt*** _____ ***when*** _____ ***because*** _____. ***Could we*** _____?

Speaking Truth with Grace Looks Like	What You Can Say
Express your feeling	“I felt disappointed...”

Describe the specific situation	“When that happened...”
Explain why it matters	“Because it was important to me...”
Make a respectful request	“Could we do it differently next time?”

d. Sample scenarios:

Situation	Not So Helpful Response	Speaking Truth with Grace Response
Feeling overwhelmed at home Spouse: <i>“I feel like I’m carrying most of the responsibilities around here.”</i>	“You never help around the house.”	“I felt overwhelmed when I handled everything by myself because I needed help. Could we talk about sharing the responsibilities?”
Spending money without discussion Spouse: <i>“I was surprised to see that purchase on our account.”</i>	“You never think about anyone but yourself.”	“I felt left out when the purchase was made without discussing it because I value making decisions together. Could we talk first next time?”
Feeling ignored Spouse: <i>“Sometimes I feel like your phone gets more attention than I do.”</i>	“Can’t you see I’m busy?”	“I felt disconnected when we were both focused on our phones because I was hoping we could spend time together. Could we set aside a few minutes to talk?”

5. In-Class Role Play

The purpose of this role play is to help couples experience how a conversation changes when they intentionally practice active listening, validation and empathy, and speaking truth with grace. By building on each skill step by step, couples can see how healthy communication reduces defensiveness, increases understanding, and strengthens connection before conflict escalates.

- I. Choose one scenario (feeling overwhelmed at home, spending money without discussion, feeling ignored because of phone use). Decide who will be the speaker and who will be the responder.
- II. Round 1: Active Listening
 - a. The speaker shares the concern using the scenario.
 - b. The responder practices active listening

- c. Discuss: Did your spouse accurately understand what you meant? What helped you feel heard?
- III. Round 2: Validation and Empathy
 - a. Repeat the same scenario.
 - b. The responder now focuses on acknowledging feelings and showing empathy.
 - c. Discuss: How did the conversation change when your feelings were acknowledged? Did validation make you more open to continuing the conversation? Why or why not?
- IV. Round 3: Speaking Truth with Grace
 - a. Switch roles.
 - b. The new speaker uses the formula: *I feel _____ when _____ because _____. Could we _____?*
 - c. Discuss: How did focusing on the issue instead of the person change the conversation? How did this response feel different from blame or criticism?

5. Home practice

- I. Set aside 10 minutes once a week for an intentional conversation. During that conversation, practice all three habits.
 - a. Practice Active Listening by giving your spouse your full attention, reflecting what you heard, and asking follow-up questions before responding.
 - b. Practice Validation & Empathy by acknowledging your spouse's feelings without correcting, minimizing, or rushing to solve the problem.
 - c. Practice Speaking Truth with Grace by using the formula:
I felt _____ when _____ because _____. Could we _____?
- II. After the conversation, discuss:
 - d. Which communication skill felt most natural?
 - e. Which skill was most challenging?
 - f. When did you feel most heard and understood by your spouse?
 - g. What skill would you like to keep practicing?

Finish by praying together and asking God to help you use your words to build trust, understanding, and connection in your marriage. You may want to consider making this a frequent exercise for the next several months until it becomes a natural pattern of communication in your marriage.

6. Closing prayer

Session 3: Communicating Well When Tensions Rise

In conflict, spouses can easily begin treating one another as opponents instead of members of the same body. This session helps couples respond to tension in ways that honor Christ, strengthen their relationship, and move them toward understanding, ownership, and reconciliation.

1. Opening prayer

2. Key ideas

Most marital conflicts begin with hurt feelings, unmet expectations, and misunderstood motives, and the way couples respond often matters more than the issue itself. Healthy conflict requires humility, self-control, and a commitment to understanding before being understood. Conflict is not the greatest threat to a marriage; unresolved conflict and unhealthy responses are.

3. Practical daily habits

There are many conflict-resolution skills couples can learn, but the three below are the foundational habits that provide the greatest return when tensions rise. When practiced consistently, they help couples manage emotions, reduce defensiveness, and move conflict toward understanding and reconciliation.

Skill	Primary Question	Key Idea
Pause Before Reacting	“What is shaping my response right now?”	Managing your emotions before responding
Take Ownership Instead of Shifting Blame	“What is my part in this conflict?”	Taking responsibility for your contribution
Seek Understanding as You Move Toward Reconciliation	“Do I truly understand my spouse’s perspective?”	Prioritizing understanding and restoration over winning

I. Pause Before Reacting

- Key Idea: When emotions rise, our first response is often our worst response. Pausing gives us time to recognize what we are feeling, seek God's wisdom, and choose a response that honors our spouse and protects the relationship. Healthy conflict begins when we slow down long enough to respond thoughtfully rather than **react emotionally**.
- Key Scripture: James 1:19–20. *My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.*
- What does it look like in daily communications?

What Pause Before Reacting Looks Like	What You Can Say
Recognize your emotions	“I’m feeling frustrated right now.”
Slow the conversation down	“Can we take a moment before we continue?”

Resist the urge to defend	"I want to think about what you said before responding."
Invite God's help	"Lord, help me respond with wisdom and grace."

e. Sample scenarios:

Situation	Not So Helpful Response	Pause Before Reacting Response
Feeling overwhelmed at home Spouse: <i>"I am tired of carrying everything around here. Every time I ask for help, nothing changes."</i>	"That is completely unfair! I do plenty around here, but apparently nothing I do is ever good enough for you."	"I am feeling defensive right now, and I do not want to respond harshly. Can I take a moment so I can listen to what you are saying?"
Spending money without discussion Spouse: <i>"You made another major purchase without asking me. How am I supposed to trust you?"</i>	"I work hard for this money too! I should not have to ask your permission every time I want to buy something."	"I am feeling criticized, and I can tell that I want to defend myself. Let me pause so I can respond thoughtfully instead."
Feeling ignored Spouse: <i>"I am talking to you, and you are still staring at your phone. Do you even care what I am saying?"</i>	"Can't you see that I am busy? You always expect me to drop everything the moment you want attention."	<i>(Puts down the phone.)</i> "I am feeling irritated, but I do not want my irritation to control my response. Give me a moment, and then I want to hear what you are saying."

II. Take Ownership Instead of Shifting Blame

- Key Idea:** Conflict often escalates when each spouse focuses on the other's faults. Taking ownership requires the humility to **acknowledge our own contribution** to the problem before pointing out our spouse's mistakes. Ownership lowers defensiveness, builds trust, and creates space for reconciliation.
- Key Scripture:** 1 Peter 3:8-9 *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*
- What does it look like in daily communications?

What Taking Ownership Looks Like	What You Can Say
Admit your contribution	"I was wrong when..."
Avoid shifting blame	"I can see my part in this."
Accept responsibility	"I should have handled that differently."
Offer an apology	"I am sorry for the way I responded."

d. Sample scenarios

Situation	Not So Helpful Response	Take Ownership & Not Shifting Blame Response
Feeling overwhelmed at home Spouse: <i>"I am tired of carrying everything around here. Every time I ask for help, nothing changes."</i>	"Maybe if you told me exactly what you wanted instead of expecting me to read your mind, we would not have this problem."	"I have not paid enough attention to how much you have been carrying, and I am sorry. I can see where I have not helped as much as I should have."
Spending money without discussion Spouse: <i>"You made another major purchase without asking me. How am I supposed to trust you?"</i>	"You have bought things without asking me too, so do not put all of this on me. You are just as responsible as I am."	"I was wrong to make that purchase without talking with you first. I can understand why that damaged trust."
Feeling ignored Spouse: <i>"I am talking to you, and you are still staring at your phone. Do you even care what I am saying?"</i>	"You are on your phone all the time too! Why am I always the one who gets blamed for everything?"	<i>(Puts down the phone.)</i> "You are right that I have not been giving you my full attention, and I am sorry."

III. Seek Understanding as You Move Toward Reconciliation

- Key Idea: When tensions rise, it is easy to assume motives, draw conclusions, and focus on winning the argument. Healthy conflict **seeks understanding** before judgment and reconciliation before victory. The goal is not to prove your spouse wrong but to restore connection and unity.
- Key Scripture: Ephesians 4:29–32. *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen...get rid of all bitterness, rage and*

anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

- c. What does it look like in daily communications?

What Seeking Understanding Looks Like	What You Can Say
Ask before assuming	"Help me understand..."
Clarify before concluding	"Can you tell me more?"
Focus on unity	"I want us to work through this together."
Pursue reconciliation	"How can we move forward?"

- d. Sample scenarios:

Situation	Not So Helpful Response	Seek Understanding & Move Toward Reconciliation Response
Feeling overwhelmed at home Spouse: <i>"I am tired of carrying everything around here. Every time I ask for help, nothing changes."</i>	"So now you are saying I am lazy? You act like you are the only person who does anything around here."	"Help me understand which responsibilities have felt heaviest and where you have needed more support from me."
Spending money without discussion Spouse: <i>"You made another major purchase without asking me. How am I supposed to trust you?"</i>	"You are only upset because you want to control every dollar I spend. Nothing I buy is ever acceptable to you."	"Can you tell me more what concerned you most: the amount, not discussing it beforehand, or something else?"
Feeling ignored Spouse: <i>"I am talking to you, and you are still staring at your phone. Do you even care what I am saying?"</i>	"You are always accusing me of ignoring you. You use your phone just as much as I do, so stop acting like I am the only problem."	"I may not realize how often this has happened. When have you felt most ignored by my phone use?"

4. In-Class Role Play

The purpose of this role play is to help couples experience how a conversation changes when they intentionally practice pause before reacting, take ownership instead of shifting blame, and seek understanding as they move toward reconciliation. By building on each skill, couples can see how healthy conflict communication lowers defensiveness, increase understanding, and move the relationship from tension and division toward connection and unity.

- I. Choose one scenario (feeling overwhelmed at home, spending money without discussion, feeling ignored because of phone use). Decide who will be the speaker and who will be the responder.
- II. Round 1: Pause Before Reacting
 - a. The speaker shares the concern using the scenario.
 - b. The responder practices pausing before reacting by identifying their emotions and resisting the urge to become defensive, retaliate, or immediately justify themselves.
 - c. Discuss: How did pausing affect the tone of the conversation? What might have happened if you had reacted immediately?
- III. Round 2: Take Ownership Instead of Shifting Blame
 - a. Repeat the same scenario.
 - b. The responder now practices taking ownership by acknowledging their contribution to the conflict instead of minimizing, deflecting, or blaming their spouse.
 - c. Discuss: How did ownership affect defensiveness? Did taking ownership make it easier to continue the conversation? Why or why not?
- IV. Round 3: Seek Understanding and Move Toward Reconciliation
 - a. Repeat the scenario one final time.
 - b. The responder now practices seeking understanding by asking questions, showing curiosity, and focusing on restoring the relationship rather than winning the argument.
 - c. Discuss: What did you learn when you asked questions instead of making assumptions? How did understanding your spouse's perspective change the conversation?

5. Home practice

- I. Prepare for one difficult conversation this week. Choose one minor tension, frustration, or unresolved issue that needs to be discussed.
- II. Before the conversation, commit to practicing all three conflict habits from this session.
 - a. Practice Pausing Before Reacting by identifying your emotions before responding and taking a moment to choose a thoughtful response rather than an impulsive reaction.
 - b. Practice Taking Ownership Instead of Shifting Blame by acknowledging your contribution to the conflict and resisting the urge to become defensive or keep score.
 - c. Practice Seeking Understanding as You Move Toward Reconciliation by asking questions, listening carefully, and focusing on restoring the relationship rather than proving your point.

III. After the conversation, discuss:

- a. What emotions did you notice during the conversation?
- b. Which conflict habit was most challenging?
- c. When did you feel most understood by your spouse?
- d. What helped move the conversation toward reconciliation?

Finish by praying together and asking God to help you respond to conflict with humility, wisdom, and grace. Consider making this a regular practice over the next several months until healthy conflict habits become a natural part of your marriage.

6. Closing prayer

Session 4: Repairing Trust, Restoring Connection

Conflict may end in a moment, but healing often takes place afterward. This session helps couples repair trust, extend forgiveness, and rebuild connection so that conflict becomes an opportunity for growth rather than ongoing division.

1. Opening prayer

2. Key ideas

Conflict may reveal weaknesses in a relationship, but repair reveals its strength. Lasting connection is built when couples choose restoration over resentment and healing over simply moving on. The goal after conflict is not returning to where you were before, but growing stronger through the process of repair. The strength of a marriage is not measured by how often couples disagree, but by how well they reconnect afterward.

3. Practical daily habits

There are many ways couples can repair a relationship after conflict, but the three habits below provide the greatest return in rebuilding trust and restoring connection. When practiced consistently, they help couples move from hurt and disappointment toward healing, forgiveness, and renewed intimacy.

Skill	Primary Question	Key Idea
Offer a Meaningful Apology	“Have I acknowledged the hurt I caused?”	Taking responsibility and expressing genuine remorse
Extend Forgiveness	“Am I willing to release resentment and move toward healing?”	Choosing grace over bitterness and retaliation
Rebuild Trust Through Intentional Action	“What will we do differently moving forward?”	Restoring trust through consistent actions, not words alone

I. Offer a Meaningful Apology

- Key Idea: Many people say, “I’m sorry,” but never **acknowledge the hurt they caused**. A meaningful apology requires the humility to name the specific wrong, take responsibility, and express genuine remorse without making excuses or shifting blame.
- Key Scripture: James 5:16. *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”*
- What does it look like in daily communications?

What a Meaningful Apology Looks Like	What You Can Say
Acknowledge the offense	“I was wrong when...”
Take responsibility	“That was my responsibility.”
Express remorse	“I’m sorry for hurting you.”

Avoid excuses	“There is no excuse for how I responded.”
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f. Sample scenarios:

Situation	Not So Helpful Response	Meaningful Apology Response
Feeling overwhelmed at home Spouse: <i>“I’ve been thinking about our argument, and I still feel overwhelmed and unsupported.”</i>	“I already said I was sorry. I do not know what else you want from me.”	“I have been thinking about it too. I was wrong for not paying attention to how much you were carrying, and I am sorry.”
Spending money without discussion Spouse: <i>“I’m still hurt that the purchase was made without discussing it with me.”</i>	“Are we really still talking about this?”	“I understand why that hurt you. I was wrong to make that decision without including you, and I am sorry.”
Feeling ignored because of phone use Spouse: <i>“I’ve been feeling disconnected since our conversation the other night.”</i>	“You’re making this a much bigger deal than it really is.”	“I can see how my actions made you feel unimportant. I am sorry for not giving you my full attention.”

II. Extend Forgiveness

- Key Idea: Forgiveness is not pretending the hurt never happened, nor is it excusing wrong behavior. Forgiveness is **choosing to release** resentment and move toward healing, even when trust still needs time to be rebuilt.
- Key Scripture: Ephesians 4:31–32. *Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*
- What does it look like in daily communications?

What Forgiveness Looks Like	What You Can Say
Acknowledge the hurt	“What happened hurt me.”
Choose forgiveness	“I choose to forgive you.”
Release retaliation	“I don’t want to punish you for this.”
Refuse to keep score	“I’m not going to hold this over you.”

d. Sample scenarios

Situation	Not So Helpful Response	Forgiveness Response
Feeling overwhelmed at home Spouse: <i>"I'm sorry for not helping more."</i>	"Well, this isn't the first time."	"I was hurt, but I appreciate your apology and I want us to move forward together."
Spending money without discussion Spouse: <i>"I was wrong to make that purchase without discussing it."</i>	"I don't think I'll ever trust you with money again."	"I'm still hurt, but I choose to forgive you as we work through this together."
Feeling ignored because of phone use Spouse: <i>"I'm sorry for not giving you my attention."</i>	"You always say that, and nothing changes."	"Thank you for apologizing. I want us to rebuild our connection."

III. Rebuild Trust Through Intentional Action

- Key Idea: Trust is rebuilt through consistent actions, not promises alone. Healthy couples **identify what needs to change and take practical steps** to demonstrate repentance, reliability, and renewed commitment over time.
- Key Scripture: 1 Peter 3:8-9 *Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*
- What does it look like in daily communications?

What Rebuilding Trust Looks Like	What You Can Say
Identify what needs to change	"What can we do differently next time?"
Create a practical plan	"Let's agree on..."
Follow through consistently	"I want my actions to match my words."
Focus on growth	"Let's learn from this together."

d. Sample scenarios:

Situation	Not So Helpful Response	Rebuild Trust Response
Feeling overwhelmed at home Spouse: <i>"I want to make this right."</i>	"Just trust me. I will do better."	"Let's look at our responsibilities together and decide how we can share them more fairly."
Spending money without discussion Spouse: <i>"I want to rebuild your trust."</i>	"You should just get over it."	"Let's agree on an amount that we'll always discuss before making a purchase."
Feeling ignored because of phone use Spouse: <i>"I want us to feel connected again."</i>	"You're making too much of this."	"Let's set aside 15 minutes of phone-free time each evening just for us."

4. In-Class Role Play

The purpose of this progressive role play is to help couples experience how a relationship moves from hurt toward healing when they intentionally practice offering a meaningful apology, extending forgiveness, and rebuilding trust through action. By building on each skill, couples can see how healthy repair restores connection, strengthens trust, and helps a marriage grow through conflict rather than remain divided by it.

- I. Choose one scenario (feeling overwhelmed at home, spending money without discussion, feeling ignored because of phone use). Decide who will be the spouse who caused hurt and who will be the spouse who was hurt.
- II. Round 1: Offer a Meaningful Apology
 - a. The hurt spouse shares the lingering hurt.
 - b. The other spouse practices offering a meaningful apology.
 - c. Discuss: What made the apology feel genuine? Which parts of the apology communicated responsibility?
- III. Round 2: Extend Forgiveness
 - a. Repeat the scenario and offer the apology.
 - b. The hurt spouse now practices forgiveness.
 - c. Discuss: What helped you move toward forgiveness? How did forgiveness change the tone of the conversation?
- IV. Round 3: Rebuild Trust Through Action
 - a. Repeat the scenario one final time.
 - b. Both spouses work together to identify a practical action that would help rebuild trust and prevent a repeat of the same hurt.
 - c. Discuss: What specific action would help restore trust? What would help you believe that real change is taking place?

5. Home practice

- IV. Choose one recent conflict, hurt, or misunderstanding that still needs healing or closure.
- V. Set aside 10-15 minutes together to practice the three restoration habits from this session.
 - a. Practice Offering a Meaningful Apology by acknowledging the specific hurt, taking responsibility, expressing remorse, and avoiding excuses.
 - b. Practice Extending Forgiveness by acknowledging the hurt honestly while choosing grace over resentment and retaliation.
 - c. Practice Rebuilding Trust Through Intentional Action by identifying one practical step each spouse can take to strengthen trust and connection moving forward.
- VI. After the conversation, discuss:
 - a. Which part of the apology felt most meaningful or genuine?
 - b. What helped you move toward forgiveness?
 - c. What commitment can each spouse make moving forward?
 - d. What helped you feel loved, valued, and reconnected?

Finish by praying together and thanking God for His forgiveness, grace, and faithfulness. Ask Him to help you become a couple that practices humility, forgiveness, and restoration when conflict occurs. Consider making this a regular practice over the next several months until healthy conflict habits become a natural part of your marriage.

6. Closing prayer

Recommended Resources

Scan QR Code to order from Amazon



1. The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, John Gottman

A practical marriage book that teaches everyday habits to strengthen friendship, improve communication, and help couples navigate conflict before it damages the relationship.



2. The Peacemaker, Ken Sande

Many couples know they should forgive and reconcile but struggle to know how. Sande provides a biblical framework for confession, forgiveness, repentance, and restoration that turns conflict into an opportunity for spiritual growth.



3. Sacred Marriage, Gary Thomas

This book helps couples see marriage as more than personal happiness. Thomas challenges readers to view marriage as one of God's primary tools for spiritual growth and Christlike character formation.



4. The Language of Love & Respect, Emerson Eggerichs

Many couples feel stuck in recurring arguments because they misunderstand each other's emotional needs. Eggerichs helps husbands and wives recognize common communication patterns and develop greater empathy and understanding.



5. Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, Marshall Rosenberg

This book teaches couples how to communicate honestly without attacking, criticizing, or becoming defensive. Rosenberg's simple framework helps spouses express feelings and needs in ways that promote understanding rather than conflict.