

Love^{and} Marriage

Lesson 5: Covenantal Companionship

Questions & Objectives

- Identify Gottman's "Four Horsemen"
- Understand how covenant provides the setting for growth and healing.
- What role does friendship play in marriage? What safeguard effect does it provide?

Lesson

Setting the Stage

Over the next several studies, we will explore common areas of difficulty and what makes marriage work, across three key areas: Covenantal Companionship, Communication, and Conflict.

According to John Gottman, there are "Four Horsemen" of a relationship. They are:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

How is criticism different than complaint?

For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.

- Matthew 12:34 (ESV)

OUR WORDS MATTER, BUT HOW OUR PARTNER RECEIVES THEM MATTERS EVEN MORE!



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Covenantal Companionship

...the LORD has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have broken faith, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

- Malachi 2:14 (BSB)

To this point, we've discussed how marriage has a greater purpose than simply companionship – viz., to reflect God's attributes and foreshadow the marriage of the Lamb. But internally to the marriage, covenantal companionship is foundational.

Covenantal

A marriage covenant means you're committing to _____ together... or living miserably!

REFLECTION How do the restrictions of the marriage covenant create an environment for growth and healing?

MARRIAGE PROVIDES THE CONTEXT AND "OUTSIDE" SUPPORT FOR HEALING AND GROWTH.

Companionship

Companionship is not the primary **purpose** of marriage – but it is foundational and vital internally to a healthy marriage!

Intimacy is about more than just physical connection it's about _____!

Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain...

- Genesis 4:1 (NKJV)

List the 5 Love Languages:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



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Additional Resources



The 5 Love Languages (*book + assessment*)



5 Love Languages Online Assessment (*official*)



Unofficial, Full Assessment (*free*)

REFLECTION What are my primary love languages at this point in time? How have they changed over time, and why might that be? Am I loving my partner in the way that ministers most to them?

Friendship fuels the flames of romance because it offers the best protection against feeling adversarial toward your spouse.

- John Gottman, Ph.D.

A usable motto is: Always assume _____ intent!

There are two things that can override our spouse's intended communication:

- _____ sentiment override
- _____ sentiment override

REFLECTION Does my starting point when communicating with my spouse tilt more toward positive or negative sentiment?



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WATCH

[Guilty](#)

(Credit: Kallmekris)

_____ helps us start from a position of positive sentiment.

In fact, this was so foundational, ancient Israelites they weren't allowed to even conscript a man for a full year after marriage!

If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.

- Deuteronomy 24:5 (NIV)

Why was such emphasis placed on allowing for a marriage to grow in its foundation of friendship and companionship?

Contempt

Although all four "horsemen" can appear in a relationship at various times, it's when they begin to take up _____ that it becomes problematic.

What is contempt?

- A sense of _____ and disdain. It's related to _____.

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

- Matthew 5:22 (NIV)

Though we see issues of slander and libel here, the underlying emotion is contempt.

REFLECTION Are there areas where I feel contemptuous or resentful in my relationship? What is at the source of this? What can I do to help myself or help my partner help me overcome this?



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Researchers found that among unhappily married couples, when they would interact, each partner only noticed half of the positive interactions that actually occurred. They were so used to focusing on their partners mistakes, they missed a full 50% of their partner's positive actions.

What is the antidote to contempt?

Above all, love one another deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.
- 1 Peter 4:8 (BSB)

YOUR SPOUSE IS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD – WITH VALUE AND PURPOSE!

A practical way for us to combat criticism and contempt is by rekindling our fondness and admiration.

You have abandoned your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the first works.
- Revelation 2:4b-5a (BLB)

Actively watch and _____ positive qualities and actions that you can appreciate, and then let your spouse know – *appreciate them!*



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WATCH

[Jordan Peterson – The Key to Healthy Relationships](#)

(Credit: Bite-sized Philosophy)

It may feel awkward at first (especially if you haven't done it in a while), but it gets easier the more you do. And! It creates a positive feedback loop.

- It _____ your partner for positive things.
- It _____ your own fondness and admiration for them to yourself.

Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up the one in need and bringing grace to those who listen.

- Ephesians 4:29 (BSB)

Wrap-Up

- We identified Gottman's Four Horsemen and discussed criticism vs. complaint, and looked at contempt with more depth.
- We reviewed the importance of the covenant of marriage and how this "voluntary slavery" actually frees us to be ourselves.
 - Our spouse is able to help us heal, grow, and overcome as we share ourselves with them.
- Marriage is also covenantal companionship.
 - While not the primary purpose of the marriage, this is particularly foundational and vital internally to a healthy marriage
 - Intimacy is more than physical – it's deep knowledge and understanding of your spouse.
- A foundation of friendship defaults us toward positive sentiment override in our communications.
 - This, coupled with God's love, helps to combat the first two horsemen: criticism and contempt.
 - If we're struggling here, we should go back and do our first works – reinvigorate our admiration and fondness by watching for positive things our partner does and then appreciating them for it.



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Follow-Through

Meditate

Philippians 2:3-4

Consider

In what areas am I putting my spouse's interests above my own? Are there areas where I prioritize myself instead?

What would my marriage look like – practically, in the day-to-day – if I emptied myself of selfishness and pride, and prioritized God and my spouse/family instead? What step can I take toward this vision?

Act

- Take or retake the Love Languages assessment with your spouse.
 - Consider their top love language(s) and how you can show them affection.
- Ask each other some of the Relationship Building questions from John Gottman to deepen your understanding and knowledge of each other.
 - Do this in a spirit of love and fun! If you find yourself getting annoyed, stop the exercise and come back to it later.
- Find something positive to praise your spouse for this week, without expecting anything in return, and appreciate them for it!

References

- *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, John Gottman, 1999, 2015



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Supplemental Materials

<https://info.gottman.com/blog/20-relationship-building-questions-for-couples>

20 Relationship-Building Questions for Couples

Every loving and compassionate relationship needs an additional boost of energy and new ideas for conversation, so we have relationship-building questions for couples. These seemingly simple questions are meant to help you develop a more intimate relationship.

Learning to listen to your partner can help you establish a [brighter future together](#).

How to Use These Questions to Improve your Relationship?

Relationship-building questions assist you to comprehend your partner's thoughts, emotions, and needs. Although not all the questions sound deep and meaningful, the point is to have fun and enjoy every conversation.

These are topics you can discuss when you have valuable one-on-one time and need conversation starters. Just have an open mind and appreciate discovering new things about your partner.

What Was the Highlight of Your Day?

Talking about your spouse's day may be highly beneficial to your marriage. Focusing on the positive aspects of each day should add greater joy to the conversation.

How to Ask About the Highlight of the Day in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Ask your partner this question frequently;
- Learn to listen even when the events seem mundane;
- Share your highlights and use different methods to initiate a conversation.

What Are You Grateful For?

Keeping it positive, you might ask your partner what they are grateful for. This is another great technique to discover your partner's satisfaction.

How to Ask About Gratefulness in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Non-relationship-related things that your spouse is grateful for are not to be judged;
- Show real interest in expanding on those good thoughts;
- [Give examples](#) if your spouse needs more inspiration.



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What Is Your Most Cherished Childhood Memory?

Depending on your partner's childhood, this question can promote closeness and understanding. Dr. Gottman generally focuses on the early years that shape who we become as adults, so ask questions about their [views and needs](#).

How to Ask About Childhood Memories in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Ask about your partner's connection to their parents or caretakers. This might assist you to understand their relationship values;
- Motivate them to talk about the embarrassing and fun events by sharing your own;
- Show affection by being present and initiating physical touch

What Is Your Worst Memory?

Relationship-building questions for married couples are not always about the positive and uplifting. If you truly want to be a part of someone's life you need to acknowledge even the negative things that might have happened.

How to Ask About the Worst Memory in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Choose the timing wisely and be prepared to listen
- Show strength and reassure your partner about being on the same side with words like "I understand this might be difficult to talk about but I'm here for you"
- [Suggest counseling](#) or online classes if you notice your partner might be struggling with trauma

What Are the Qualities You Love About Yourself?

In the variety of relationship-building [questions for newlyweds](#), this question may help you understand your partner's self-esteem and what they like about themselves.

How to Ask This Question in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Experts say these questions are fantastic discussion starters, but be aware that not everyone feels comfortable answering
- Encourage your partner if you notice them struggle and remind them why you love them
- If your partner is not in the mood to discuss, wait and ask again another time

What Are the Qualities You Love About Me?

Another strong question that can demonstrate the level of satisfaction in the relationship and help you get through a discussion.

How to Ask This Question in a Positive and Healthy Way

- Listen without judging with an open mind
- Keep it light-hearted until your partner opens up



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- Be willing to work on your qualities to exhibit improvement
- Learn to [love yourself unconditionally](#)

When Do You Feel Connected with Me?

The answer to this relationship-building question may surprise you. This might reveal a lot about your partner and how they want to be loved. It also fosters closeness and trust.

How to Ask About Your Connection in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Choose a moment of bliss with your partner for this question
- Share the moments when you feel the most connected to your boyfriend or girlfriend
- Build your relationship on this knowledge and remember it when you need a conflict resolution

What Are You the Most Proud Of?

Focusing on your partner's proudest memories may be highly beneficial for your relationship. This will show you what makes them happy and help you communicate better in the future.

How to Ask About the Proud Moments in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Speak about why you are proud of them before asking the question
- Build on the answers and add meaningful comments
- Talk about ways to enhance the things they feel proud of by suggesting coaching, hobbies, and activities

What Alternative Professions or Jobs Interest You Beyond Your Current Career?

The work your spouse has may impact your relationship in many ways, so it's important to demonstrate an interest in both present and future careers. Asking relationship-building questions will help you learn about your partner's dreams.

How to Ask This Question in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Build up to this question with things like "What would you like to do in the next year?" or "What is your dream job?"
- Show commitment by supporting their dreams and hobbies
- Find different resources that might help your partner fulfill those dreams

How Can I Help You Trust Me More?

Most individuals have baggage from previous relationships, so being on the same page and asking questions that develop trust may help a lot. This shows your spouse that you are trustworthy and prepared to listen.



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How to Ask “How Can I Help You Trust Me More” in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Ask this question like you want to improve your relationship
- [Take responsibility](#) for your actions
- Create a safe environment so that your partner feels comfortable opening up

What Are Your Goals for Next Year?

This could tell you a lot about your spouse and your relationship. It's also a great place to start planning and discussing ideas.

How to Ask About Goals in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Talk about the things you have achieved together to spark the imagination
- Show excitement and support when your partner talks about the future
- Suggest counseling if you need additional help with communication

What Habit Do You Want to Break?

Some relationship concerns need a deeper commitment than others. This is why expressing interest in your partner's undesirable behaviors might be beneficial.

How to Ask This Question in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Allow your partner to freely express negative emotions
- Suggest strategies and online classes that might help
- Be there for your partner and show support by saying “I believe you can do this”

What Would I Be Surprised to Learn About You?

Long-term relationships might make you feel like you know someone well, but there is always more to discover. Taking an interest in all aspects of your partner's personality will help you communicate better.

How to Ask This Question in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Show appreciation for newfound facts about your partner
- Mention some unknown facts about you to keep the conversation going

What Is Your Ideal Evening?

This relationship-building question for couples might help you [arrange a fun date](#) night with your significant other. It's basic, easy to discuss, and builds intimacy.

How to Ask About Ideal Evening in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Be receptive to your partner's suggestions
- Suggest [Gottman Card Decks App](#) to spark the conversation



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When Did You Last Cry About Something?

Relationships are [all about love](#), vulnerability, and respect, so sharing emotional moments with your spouse may build closeness and possibly improve your sex life.

How to Ask This Question in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Show compassion and understanding for your partner
- Create a loving and safe environment where they can open up
- Suggest counseling if you notice your partner has difficulties with dealing with emotions

How Would Your Parents Describe You?

The relationship with the parents may reveal a lot about your spouse. Asking them how they view their parents and how they think their parents see them might be eye-opening.

How to Ask About Parents in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Show interest in this topic and find out what the relationship was like
- Don't push your partner if they are not comfortable talking about their past
- Bring the focus of the conversation on positive things and ask what they might do differently as a parent

What Is Your Biggest Fear?

This profound relationship question might expose your partner's most vulnerable side and help you develop a lasting bond. It's not an easy topic to explore, but it will reveal individuality and create trust.

How to Ask About the Biggest Fear in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Keep the conversation safe and reassure your partner with kind words
- Listen to their fears without interrupting and judgment
- Show compassion and suggest different techniques and [therapy that might help](#)

What Is Your Ultimate Fantasy?

Another terrific approach to deepen closeness and [incorporate sex fantasies](#), but it is not restricted to physical connection. The fantasies contain a range of thoughts and are a fantastic way to engage your spouse.

How to Ask About Fantasies in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Always show interest and understanding for your partner
- Share your fantasies to show affection and willingness to grow together
- Dedicate time for these delicate topics



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What Is Your Favorite Book/Movie?

This simple question will show your partner that communication can be a fun activity and motivate them to participate in more serious conversations in the future.

How to Ask This Question in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- There is no wrong way to ask this question and it's always interesting to find out new things about your partner
- It's a great ice-breaker when you want to talk to your spouse after a long day
- If you need more topics make sure to look into [Rituals of Connection & Opportunity Card Decks](#)

Do You Ever Feel Left Out and Why?

People in relationships often feel like they are [not seen or heard](#), so this question will resolve that problem. Your partner will have the opportunity to speak out and share emotions with you.

How to Ask This Question in a Positive and Healthy Way?

- Prepare to actively listen and understand your spouse
- Work on the issues together and save your marriage on time
- Show compassion and understanding if they feel left out before your move forward

Final Thoughts

There are many relationship-building questions you can add to this guide if you are ready to work on improving your happiness. For more information consider:

- [All About Love Bundle](#)
- [Enriching Your Sex Life](#)
- [How To Make Your Relationship Work](#)
- Take the [Free Gottman Relationship Quiz](#) to discover how well you really know your partner

