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***Building Better Marital Communication***

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The \_\_\_\_\_ of our communication  
determines the \_\_\_\_\_ health of our relationships.

**Four Horsemen of the Marriage Apocalypse** (See Four Horseman Handout)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Contempt

4. Stonewalling

**Communication: The \_\_\_\_\_ to Every Relationship**

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**Three Keys to Life-giving Communication**

1. Be \_\_\_\_\_

– Ephesians 4:15

– Proverbs 25:11

**Exercise:** Answer the question, “I feel love when you \_\_\_\_\_.”

2. Be \_\_\_\_\_

– Ephesians 4:29

– Proverbs 18:21

– Proverbs 12:18

**Exercise:** Pick one encouraging thing to say every day this week. Go an entire week without saying anything critical.

3. Be \_\_\_\_\_

– Ephesians 4:31-32

– James 3:2

**Exercise:** Use “I” Statements. “When you \_\_\_\_\_ I felt \_\_\_\_\_.”

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The QUALITY of our communication  
determines the long-term health of our relationships.

## Reflect and Discuss

1. What is the Holy Spirit speaking to you today? How should you respond?
  2. Which of the four apocalyptic communication styles do you most identify in your relationship? What can you do to break that cycle and heal the damage?
  3. What can you do to become more **honest** in your interactions in your relationships?
  4. What can you do to become more **encouraging** in your interactions in your relationships?
  5. What can you do to become more **forgiving** in your interactions in your relationships?
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## Next Week

*happily ever after?*

“Three Keys to Guarantee a Better Marriage”

## UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL

TODAY  
28

- SIGN UP FOR THE SANFORD BLOCK PARTY
- TEEN GROUP SMALL GROUP @ 3:30PM

MAY

THURSDAY  
2

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

FRIDAY  
3

RELAY FOR LIFE (LET'S GO TEAM MCS!)

TUES-TH  
21-23

ANNUAL MULTIPLY CONFERENCE (FAYETTEVILLE)

### UPCOMING GUEST SPEAKERS

- MAY 5TH - ROLAND BEARD
- MAY 12TH - LEAH KLINGER
- MAY 19TH - DR. CARLO SERANNO

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# The Four Horsemen of the Marriage Apocalypse

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The *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* is a metaphor that symbolizes the end of times in the New Testament. They represent conquest, war, hunger, and death, respectively. We use this metaphor to describe communication styles that, based on our research, can be equally destructive in relationships, leading to their eventual demise.

## Criticism

The first horseman is criticism. Criticizing your partner is different than offering a critique or voicing a complaint. The latter two are about specific issues, whereas the former is an ad hominem attack. It is an attack on your partner at the core of their character. In effect, you are dismantling their whole being when you criticize.

If you find that you and your partner are critical of each other, don't assume your relationship will fail. The problem with criticism is that when it becomes pervasive, it paves the way for the other, far deadlier horsemen to follow. It makes the victim feel assaulted, rejected, and hurt and often causes the perpetrator and victim to fall into an escalating pattern where the first horseman reappears with greater and greater frequency and intensity, which eventually leads to contempt.

## Contempt

The second horseman is contempt. When we communicate in this state, we are truly mean—we treat others with disrespect, mock them with sarcasm and ridicule, call them names, and mimic or use body language such as eye-rolling or scoffing. The target of contempt is made to feel despised and worthless.

Contempt goes far beyond criticism. While criticism attacks your partner's character, contempt assumes a position of moral superiority over them:

Most importantly, *contempt is the single greatest predictor of divorce*. It must be eliminated.

## Defensiveness

The third horseman is defensiveness, typically a response to criticism. We've all been defensive, and this horseman is nearly omnipresent when relationships are on the rocks. When we feel unjustly accused, we fish for excuses and play the innocent victim so that our partner will back off.

Unfortunately, this strategy is rarely successful. Our excuses just tell our partner that we don't take their concerns seriously and that we won't take responsibility for our mistakes.

Although it is perfectly understandable to defend yourself if you're stressed out and feeling attacked, this approach will not have the desired effect. Defensiveness will only escalate the conflict if the critical spouse does not back down or apologize. This is because defensiveness is a way of blaming your partner, and it won't allow for healthy conflict management.

## Stonewalling

The fourth horseman is stonewalling, which is usually a response to contempt. Stonewalling occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction, shuts down, and simply stops responding to their partner. Rather than confronting the issues with their partner, people who stonewall can make evasive maneuvers such as tuning out, turning away, acting busy, or engaging in obsessive or distracting behaviors.

It takes time for the negativity created by the first three horsemen to become overwhelming enough that stonewalling becomes an understandable "out." Still, when it does, it frequently becomes a bad habit. And unfortunately, stonewalling isn't easy to stop. It results from feeling physiologically flooded, and when we stonewall, we may not even be in a physiological state where we can discuss things rationally.

Take 20 minutes to do something alone that soothes you—read a book or magazine, take a walk, go for a run, really, just do anything that helps to stop feeling flooded—and then return to the conversation once you feel

# THE FOUR HORSEMEN

## AND HOW TO STOP THEM WITH THEIR ANTIDOTES

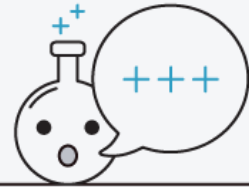
### CRITICISM

Verbally attacking personality or character.



### GENTLE START UP

Talk about your feelings using "I" statements and express a positive need.



### CONTEMPT

Attacking sense of self with an intent to insult or abuse.



### BUILD CULTURE OF APPRECIATION

Remind yourself of your partner's positive qualities and find gratitude for positive actions.



### DEFENSIVENESS

Victimizing yourself to ward off a perceived attack and reverse the blame.



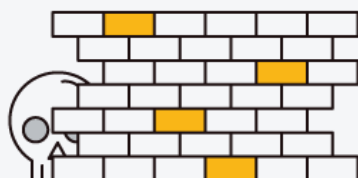
### TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Accept your partner's perspective and offer an apology for any wrongdoing.



### STONEWALLING

Withdrawing to avoid conflict and convey disapproval, distance, and separation.



### PHYSIOLOGICAL SELF-SOOTHING

Take a break and spend that time doing something soothing and distracting.



The Gottman Institute