



2019 NCS New England Couples Retreat
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Understanding
Changes
Everything
(for couples)

Spiritual Guide: Dr. Mark Gordon Fee

1. GETTING ALONG: Biblical Steps for Healing Conversations – Stopping Relational Madness!
 - a. Just location, location, location is everything to real estate, understanding, understanding, understanding is everything to healing conversations.
 - b. But even more important, is seeking to understand **before** being understood.

2. We are supposed to love one another, but sometimes we wrong and harm each other Paul writes: **“Love does no harm** to a neighbor [no wrong, NASB. The Greek word has both meanings]. Therefore **love is the fulfillment of the law.**” [Romans 13:10, NIV]

3. Knee-jerk reactions when we have been wronged or when we have wronged someone.
 - a. When we have been wronged: pain – anger – retaliation/justice.
 - b. When we have wronged: fear (guilt and shame) – hiding/blaming (lying, excusing, justifying, etc.)
 - c. Struggle to do what Jesus commanded: “go and be reconciled”, “Rebuke and forgive”, “point out their wrong”.

4. What are the biblical steps? How can we hope to stop our relational madness?
 - a. **STOP:** In your anger (or fear) do not sin!
 - i. God says through David: [Psalm 4:4a] “Be angry and do not sin (or, **“In your anger do not sin”**, Ephesians 4:26, NIV) . . .”
 - ii. Call out to Holy Spirit for help! Paul writes: “For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and **self-discipline**” (2Timothy 1:7), and **“self-control”** (Galatians 5:23).
 - iii. How do we sin in our anger? Hopefully rarely or never overt verbal, physical and property abuse, or neglect. More common are passive forms of retaliation: ignoring, avoiding, giving the “silent treatment,” using verbal jabs and cuts in an underhanded way (potshots, zingers, sarcasm, cynicism), withholding affection, withdrawing, withholding information, not answering questions, using disparaging facial expressions or noises.

b. **LOOK:**

- i. “Be angry and do not sin (or, “In your anger do not sin”, Ephesians 4:26, NIV); **when you are on your beds, search** [“meditate in”, NASB; “ponder in”, ESV] **your heart and be silent.**” [Psalm 4:4]
- ii. Be silent, go to a private place and examine your thoughts and emotions.

c. **LISTEN:**

- i. “If you hear it said . . . then you must inquire, probe and investigate it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved . . . [Deuteronomy 13:12-14]. **Check it out!** *“Oh the peace we often forfeit, oh the needless pain we bear, all because we did not check out, if our thoughts were truth or err.”*
- ii. “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” [James 1:19]
- iii. “The gold standard (of listening) is working for mutual understanding. Not mutual agreement, necessarily, but a better understanding of each of your stories so that you can make informed decisions (alone or together) about what to do next” (*Difficult Conversations*, p. 145).

d. **LOVE:** Colossians 3:12-14: *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”*

e. **CHANGE:**

- i. “Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another . . . (Instead), let us make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification (building one another up). . . . Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself” [Romans 14:13, 19; 15:2-3]
- ii. T.L.C. Speak with “tender, loving, care.” Topic, Language, Collaboration

f. **LOVE-BASED APOLOGY**

g. **MEMORY HEALING PRAYER**

A Summary of the LOOK CHART
(Questions to ask yourself regarding each category)

TRIGGERS	EMOTIONS	WRONGS	IMPACT	JUDGMENTS	ACTIONS
<p>What did one or more of my five senses experience?</p> <p>[Remember: No emotions or thoughts.]</p> <p>This information is the content of my “Check Out” question.</p>	<p>What is my anger level?</p> <p><i>bothered, ruffled, irritated, displeased, annoyed, steamed, irked, perturbed, frustrated, angry, fed up, disgusted, indignant, ticked off, boiling, infuriated, fuming, livid, seething, explosive, enraged, irate, incensed, burned, burned up, outraged, furious.</i></p> <p>Is it proportionate to the incident?</p> <p>Am I experiencing other emotions?</p> <p><u>Generally:</u></p> <p>Sad = loss</p> <p>Anxiety and fear = anticipated pain</p> <p>Disappointment /frustration = unmet expectations</p> <p>Other emotions?</p>	<p>Is it fact or fiction?</p> <p>Did it actually happen or is it my perception or interpretation of the event?</p> <p>Did they break a known rule -- of God, government, or culture?</p> <p>Or, did they break an unknown rule of mine?</p> <p><u>Unknown rules:</u></p> <p>These often are based upon beliefs about self-worth, emotional/physical needs, convictions/values, protection, expectations.</p> <p><u>Emotional needs can include:</u></p> <p>Attention Acceptance Affection Approval Appreciation Comfort Encouragement Respect Security Support</p>	<p>How has, or how will, this cost me?</p>	<p>What are my negative thoughts about their behavior and character?</p> <p>What are my thoughts about intent:</p> <p>Purposeful? Or</p> <p>Accident?</p> <p>Blind?</p> <p>Ignorance?</p> <p>Self-absorbed?</p> <p>Am I believing the best? Is this out of character?</p>	<p><u>Stop:</u></p> <p>Do not sin in fear or anger. Help Holy Spirit!</p> <p><u>Look:</u></p> <p>Ps. 4:4; Dt. 13:12—14</p> <p>Check it out!</p> <p><u>Listen:</u></p> <p>Jm 1:19</p> <p>Start with the H.E.A.R.T. don’t R.E.A.C.T.</p> <p>Understand before being understood!</p> <p>Open-ended questions</p> <p><u>Love:</u></p> <p>Col 3:12-14</p> <p><u>Change:</u></p> <p>Rom. 14:13-19</p> <p>T - opic L – anguage C – ollaboration</p> <p>Does the relationship need to change?</p>

5. Forming the “check out” question:

- a. (Deuteronomy 13:12-14) “If you hear it said . . . you must **inquire, probe and investigate** it thoroughly. And if it is true and it has been proved . . .” *Oh the peace we often forfeit, oh the needless pain we bear, all because we did not check out, if our thoughts were truth or err.*
- b. **“Believe the Best” of them:** Don’t assume the worst if their action is uncharacteristic.
- c. **The “Check Out” question:** The “check-out” question is formed from the content of the “Trigger” column. The task is to frame it in such a way that we only inquire about the meaning of the trigger. It is critical to exclude our thoughts (belief, perceptions, interpretation) and our emotions. If our question contains our feelings and our pre-drawn conclusions, they will feel challenged or attacked and become defensive and reluctant to openly share their honest thoughts. Here are a few examples contrasting a “challenge” question with a “check out” question:
 - i. **The trigger/input:** We see dishes in the sink when we expected not to because our spouse/friend agreed to wash them.
 1. **Challenge question:** “I can’t believe you left the dishes in the sink again. You are so inconsiderate. Did you do this just to hurt me?”
 2. **Check out question:** “Hey, can I check something out with you? I noticed that the dishes are still in the sink and not washed. Can you help me understand what happened?”
 - ii. **The trigger/input:** Your spouse is being quiet, which has often been a way that he/she makes you pay when he/she is mad at you and he/she promised not to do it any more.
 1. **Challenge question:** “Why are you quiet? You said you wouldn’t be quiet anymore. I hate it when you are quiet. Are you mad at me?”
 2. **Check out question:** “Hey, can I check something out with you? I’ve noticed that you have been quiet today. Is everything ok?”
- d. **The “Rebuke” check-out question** (Luke 17:3; Matthew 18:15):
 - i. We begin with telling them the trigger, what our body (one of our five senses) experienced. We might begin by asking; “Do you remember when you said (or did) . . .” Or, if it is related to the Bible, we might begin by asking, “Do you remember what the Bible says about . . . (If they say “yes”, continue with), How do you

understand, interpret, or apply it?” If they don’t know, simply share the passage with them and then allow them to think about how it applies to their behavior.

- ii. Then we ask: “How do you view your behavior? Do you think it’s ok?” It gives them the chance to evaluate themselves first. We may discover from their answer that we don’t have shared beliefs and that they don’t believe they have done anything wrong. The ensuing conversation will likely be challenging; possibly concluding to agree to disagree.

- e. **Check out an issue quickly.** The moment we feel anger, we can often determine the trigger and the wrong quickly in our minds. The sooner we form the check out question and go ask them, the sooner we know what reality is and we can address the situation appropriately. Remember, *Oh the peace we often forfeit, oh the needless pain we bear, all because we did not check out, if our thoughts were truth or err.* Also, don’t collect them [don’t “keep a record of wrongs”, 1 Corinthians 13:5]. **Stay 0 – 1 – 0 with people.** We want to maintain zero issues with one another. When one arises, we address it quickly so that we can return to zero issues.

6. Start with the H.E.A.R.T, don’t R.E.A.C.T.

- a. Before we LISTEN, we prepare our own H.E.A.R.T. for the conversation in order to LOVE them during the conversation. Paul defines the critical attributes of love necessary for a healing conversation in Colossians 3:12-14: *“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”* [See appendix A for a brief explanation of each of these.]
 - i. **H**-umility: We are also weak and sinful. We are not superior to them. Always be ready to apologize or forgive if necessary.
 - ii. **E**-mpathy: Show **compassion** and **gentleness**. Try to understand their experience by putting yourself in their shoes.
 - iii. **A**-cceptance: Value them as God values them. Be **patient** with where they are in their maturing process. However, acceptance does not necessarily mean agreement.
 - iv. **R**-espect: Show **kindness** and **patience** towards them (bear with them) and their perspective because in the moment it is their reality, whether fact or fiction.
 - v. **T**-eachable: How did we contribute to the conflict, to the problem? What can we learn about ourselves and them that we didn’t know? What might I need to apologize for?

- b. **Reminding ourselves to not R.E.A.C.T. especially in the way we know we are weak.** We will always have reactions to what we hear. This is about identifying our reactive behaviors that stop us from listening.
 - i. **R**-ehear responses in our minds. When we do this we are no longer listening to understand. We are usually looking for a moment to interrupt and talk too soon.
 - ii. **E**-valuating, judging what we're hearing. When we do this we are no longer listening to understand. We are usually looking for a moment to interrupt and talk too soon.
 - iii. **A**-ttack or defend. We just interrupt and attack or defend. When we do this we are no longer listening to understand.
 - iv. **C**-lown around or **C**lose down. We do this if what we're hearing becomes too uncomfortable. We stop listening. But it is OK to call a time out. But be sure to commit to calling "time-in."
 - v. **T**-ake over (control). We talk too soon.

7. The Love-based Apology:

- a. Sin, non-love, does not just break a rule but wrongs and harms another.
 - b. **The goal:** To begin to restore trust with them and to help them heal.
 - c. **Show care/Express remorse:** "For you became sorrowful, (felt "deep sorrow and ardent concern", v. 7) as God intended . . . Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." (2 Corinthians 7:9-10)
 - d. **Confess and take responsibility:** "Therefore, **confess** your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" [James 5:16]. "When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the LORD, that person is guilty and must **confess** the sin he or she has committed." (Numbers 5:5-7; See also Leviticus 6:1-5)
 - e. Commit to **change / repent:** "Rebuke them and if they repent . . ." (Luke 17:3-4). "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." (Matthew 3:8)
 - f. Embrace **consequences / make restitution:** "They must make full restitution for the wrong they have done, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the person they have wronged" (Numbers 5:7; See also Leviticus 6:1-5). Zacchaeus: "If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." [Luke 19:8]
8. **How long?** Four factors: The severity of the wound; If it's one time or a pattern; How diligently the "wronged" pursues healing; How diligently the "wrong-doer" works to change and how consistent the change is over time.

Love-Based Apology

NOT

Shame-Based Apology

<p>Care about their pain. Express remorse: (Expresses love; Helps heal) It might sound like: <i>“I am so sorry for the pain and damage I have caused you. It truly grieves my heart to see you suffering like this. I want to understand what you are going through.”</i> This is very difficult to do because the natural tendency is to be preoccupied with our own emotional pain of embarrassment, shame, regret, loss or fear of the consequences. Sometimes we can be preoccupied with being angry at ourselves or with the ones who exposed us or even with the person we wronged because we blame them for “causing” us to behave this way. But when we care about their pain and the harm done to them, they feel validated and loved. It is important to them that you care more about them than yourself. It demonstrates that you realize that committing the sin was about harming them and not just failing to keep the law.</p>	<p>We use the words “I’m sorry” but focus on our emotions, what we think of ourselves.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“I’m sorry I hurt you. I’m so ashamed. I feel so embarrassed. I was such an idiot. I’m so mad at myself. I hope this doesn’t change how you see me.”</i> <p>Or, we minimize their pain and the wrong. We try to shame them for how they are feeling or behaving.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>“Ok. I’m sorry I hurt you. But aren’t you being a bit too dramatic, too emotional? You’re making such a big deal out of this. I hate it when people get like this.”</i> • <i>Ok. I’m sorry. But I think you’re being a bit of a wimp. You need to toughen up a bit.”</i>
<p>Confess the wrong and take responsibility: (Helps begin to restore trust) It might sound like: <i>“I’m so sorry that I wronged you by-_____. I believe it was wrong and it is never OK under any circumstance.”</i></p>	<p><i>“I guess it was wrong. But others have done it or worse. It wasn’t that big of deal. It was really just a stupid mistake.”</i> <i>“I know it was wrong. But honestly, if you hadn’t . . . It was really you’re fault. You make me act this way.”</i> Skirting responsibility and ownership of the wrong through blaming, minimizing, excusing or attacking significantly undermines trust. Whether the sin was hidden or seen, taking responsibility is an important first step to restoring trust. It validates the victim’s belief that they were unjustly treated. It places ownership of the wrong on the one who must correct it.</p>
<p>Commit to change – Repent (Helps begin to restore trust) It might sound like: <i>“With God’s help, I will not do this again and I commit to do whatever is necessary for me to change.”</i> (“Necessary” can include counseling, a class, healing prayer, a book, etc.).</p>	<p><i>“I’ll try to change, but it’s just the way I am. I hope you can accept me this way. I just can’t help myself. It’s a real struggle, but I’ll try. Nobody’s perfect. Some things just make me act that way.”</i> Blaming others, the circumstances or making excuses to justify your wrong behavior undermines trust because it communicates to the “wronged” that you cannot be trusted to exercise control when tempted to sin this way again. It leaves them feeling doubt, fear, and anxiety.</p>
<p>Embrace the Consequence/Cost – make Restitution: (Expresses love; Helps heal) It might sound like: <i>“I embrace the cost to pay for or do whatever is necessary to help you heal and to restore trust.”</i> This communicates love, respect and value. It communicates that you understand that your actions cost them, and therefore, you should pay in some way. It communicates that you are serious about healing and change which also demonstrates love and rebuilds trust.</p>	<p><i>“Ok. I said I’m sorry. I hope you can just forgive and forget. I hope you’re not going to make a big deal out of this.”</i> <i>“Ok. I said I’m sorry. Are we good now? Are we back to normal?”</i> <i>“Hey, I said I was sorry. You should be over this by now. I wonder if you have a problem with forgiving.”</i></p>

[Note: Being insincere or mechanical can undermine the process. Wait until your heart is ready.]