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**5 Simple Ways to Strengthen Your Marriage:**

**Call a Truce on Throwing Verbal Bombs**

**Welcome**

* 1st week of marriage & relationship enrichment series based on the book, 5 Simple Ways to Strengthen Your Marriage… When You’re Stuck at Home Together by Gary Chapman, 5 Love Languages guy (published in May 2020)

**Opening Questions**

* What brought you here today?
* What are you hoping to learn?

**Purposes for gathering today**

* Offer overview of this 5-week series of relationship skills
* Discuss the first skill: Call a Truce on Throwing Verbal Bombs (how we speak to one another)
* Have a conversation with your spouse (notes for a future conversation)

**Opening Prayer**

God of our life, bless the words we speak in this class today.

Open our minds, heart, and spirits,

To the word that you want to speak to us.

In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

**Scripture: James 3.3-10**

* NT letter focuses on everyday wisdom, how to live your everyday life
* Role of the tongue/speech

3If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. 4Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! 6And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. 7For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, 8but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. 10From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.

* Fiery language here
* Images in the first part of the passage: Bridles/bits for horses, rudder for ships, tongue for humans
* Power of blessing and cursing

**Introduction**

* Image of Olympic diving: each dive has a degree of difficulty, part of how the score is calculated
* This fall we had a “Pandemic Parenting” series—all agreed that the degree of difficulty of parenting increased during the pandemic
* The same is true of marriages: the degree of difficulty has increased during the pandemic (stress, some of us—lots of time together)
* “in times of crisis, we need to rediscover the power of our attitude and our behavior” (7); feelings aren’t as foundational as they seem
* 5 weeks, 5 skills (can be learned):
  + Call a truce on throwing verbal bombs
  + Tear down emotional walls
  + Discover & speak each other’s love language
  + Learn the value of teamwork
  + Have a daily “sit down & listen” time
* Straightforward, common sense; still difficult; new habits require practice
* If you can’t make it one week, Zoom recordings and handouts available on the Marriage Resource Page, [www.phpc.org/marriageresources](http://www.phpc.org/marriageresources)

**Chapter 1: Call a Truce on Throwing Verbal Bombs**

* Words have power to heal or to hurt (bombs vs. balms)
* Types of bombs
  + “you always… you never…”
  + Judgment/criticism
  + Bluntness/directness
  + Name calling
  + Line between feedback and bombs: about a specific issue or a general personal attack
* John & Julie Gottman, 4 Horsemen (signs that a relationship is having trouble: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling)
  + A steady stream of criticism is the gateway for the others
* Bombs are when you let your anger sit in the driver’s seat
* “a bomb usually stimulates a retaliation”
* “when we are thrown together 24/7, personality differences may surface more often and more intensely”
* Problem? Anger directed to another person
* Response?

1. Calling a truce on throwing bombs (repeated behavior is reinforced)

1. Catch yourself before you throw the bomb
   * Notice the anger, irritation, frustration
   * Flush in your cheeks, head feels hot
   * Line ready: “I’m feeling angry right now,” “time out,” “break”
2. What conditions lead to you throwing bombs? (individual answer)
   * Basic needs: hungry, tired, thirsty
   * Feeling unappreciated
   * Need time by yourself
   * Need to pray
3. Replace bombs with balms (complaining with gratitude)
   * + Choose what we want to focus on
     + Brain science: negative focus comes easily, positive focus takes work (habit of turning the mind)
     + Gratitude list or notebook (what you’re thankful for about your spouse)
     + Steve sends gratitude texts each day
4. Helps all close relationships, not just spouses or significant others
   * Basic Family Rules: #2 “speak kindly, no name calling”
5. Bombs will be thrown! An apology is the best response!

**Conversation with your spouse**

1. Sign a truce on throwing verbal bombs, yourself or the two of you.
2. Share with your spouse what situations lead you to throw bombs.
3. Decide on a code word or phrase or way to take a break when things get too heated.
4. Start your own gratitude list about your spouse. List specific things you are thankful for.
5. Share your list with your spouse.

**Closing Prayer**

God of our life, bless the words we speak this week, especially to our spouses.

Help us to notice when we are angry.

Help us know when to step away and take a break.

May we use our words to build up others.

Give us chances to use our words for good.

In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

**Looking Ahead**

* Feb 14: Tearing Down Emotional Walls
* Buy the book (pamphlet): paper or Kindle