

SEMESTER

2

Marriage MATTERS



*Teaching
Transcripts*

Defensive Emotions

SEMESTER TWO

WEEK THREE

Transcript #3



INTRODUCTION:

Recently I came across a quote that I wanted to share with you tonight. A German poet once penned these words:

“Be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart. Try to love the questions themselves.”

I hope that, as we are in week three now, you are really looking inward and asking yourself some good questions. I think a lot of times when we come into a workshop like this, we have a lot of questions for the person we are married to. But, we hope, and we really want to encourage you, that you are beginning to ask yourself some questions as well.

Tonight our teaching is on Managing our Defensive Emotions, and that is a topic in which typically we want to say, “I am not defensive,” and point to the other person. It doesn’t take long to even find the irony that we don’t want to admit our defensiveness.

As we explore this tonight I encourage you to look inward and think about what questions you may have around your defensiveness and where it might come from. Not that you will find all the answers, but to be comfortable with the questions and know that it is a process towards wholeness. Please join me in a word of prayer.

God, we come before You tonight and we are so grateful for the opportunity to be here. We acknowledge, as we have done on other weeks, that there are often so many emotions represented here in this room. It is my prayer that You will meet each one of us exactly where we are. Lord, the truth is that we do have a lot

of questions, some of them even around You. I ask, God, that You would help us to be patient with ourselves with those questions and learn to love the questions. God, I pray that You would help us to really be listening for what it is that You want each one of us to be aware of tonight: a new learning, a new understanding, or a new insight.

We thank You for our teacher and we thank You for his willing heart to come and share with us. And so, it is with this spirit of expectancy that we come before You and ask right now that You come and be among us. In Your name we pray, amen.

TEACHING:

Your marriage will improve dramatically when you stop responding defensively. The interesting thing is that defensiveness destroys intimacy. When you and your spouse are defensive, there is no way that you can have a sense of closeness. Defensiveness destroys dialogue and as you have been learning about how to dialogue, you know that defensiveness is the one thing that kills ongoing conversation.

Defensiveness destroys our spouse’s spirit, which is probably the worst of the three. When our spouse feels that we have crushed his or her spirit, then it becomes much more difficult to restore the relationship.

We come into the world with the skill to be defensive. So I want to thank Adam and Eve for that, because we inherited defensiveness from them. Do you remember the story where Adam blamed Eve and Eve blamed the serpent, and I guess the serpent didn’t blame anyone, but that is a good illustration of how,



in the early stages of human history, defensiveness was right there.

Defensive behavior patterns are the result of defensive feelings. The defensive feelings are primarily three: scare, anger and sadness. Now with scare there is a sense of threat, with anger there is a sense of hurt and with sadness there is usually a sense of rejection.

So if we understand that when we get defensive we are feeling either scared, angry, or sad, but we haven't said to our spouse, "I'm feeling scared. I'm feeling angry. I'm feeling sad," that is one of the skills that I would like to teach you to do and encourage you to do. When you do feel defensive, tell your spouse that you are feeling scared, angry, or sad.

There are really four issues that I want to address here. One is being critical, the other is having the experience of your spouse minimizing or denying—rationalizing or projecting, the third is a sense of disrespect or contempt and the fourth is withdrawing or avoiding. I want to take each one of these and give several examples of the critical statements, the minimizing statements, the disrespecting statements, and the withdrawing statements and then give you ways of responding to those.

Let's take, first of all, the criticism. I am suggesting to you that you hear your spouse's criticism as a request. "I need [blank] from you, but for some reason can't ask for it." So here your spouse is saying to you, "You are driving too fast," and this happens to be an illustration right out of my marriage.

What my wife is really saying is, "I am not feeling safe. Please slow down." Now she didn't say that, but I have had to learn to translate that when she is critical of me she is really making a request. So can I translate the criticism into a request?

Another example, "Can't you ever remember to close

the garage door?" For some reason or other the door between our house and the garage I am having an awful hard time closing. I get it partially closed but not completely closed and my wife gets really irritated at that. So I can be defensive and say, "What's the big deal?" Or, I could say, "Yes, I am frustrated, too, when I don't remember to close the garage door. I will work on it."

Can you hear how a tender and understanding response stops the criticism from the person and restores the communication, the dialogue, the relationship? "You never help around the house." Now obviously we are going to get defensive if someone says that to us, right? But, "You sound overwhelmed. What can I do to take some pressure off of you?" would be a helpful response.

"Can't you ever be grateful for what I remember to do?" A response, "I'm sorry. I really do appreciate all you do. How could I ever live without you?" You laugh, you think this is funny, but I tell you if you talk to your spouse this way, you will not get a laugh from him or her. You will get them moving towards you. Hear the criticism as a request.

Hear the minimizing as, "My person feels attacked." That is really what your spouse is saying when he or she is minimizing, denying, or projecting. An example of minimizing is, "Oh, calm down. I've never gotten us in an accident." "You hear me criticizing you?" would be a helpful response.

Here are some examples. First, "I'll close the garage door when you cook supper on time." Now some of you are laughing because you talk this way, right? A helpful response might be: "When you leave the garage door open I don't feel safe." Or, "I understand when I leave the garage door open you don't feel safe?" Second, "I provide you with clothes, shelter, and food. Housework is your job." A response: "I really appreciate you going to work every day. You



provide well for me and the kids. Sometimes I get overwhelmed and I need some help. I know that sounds unfair to you.” Third, “Can’t you ever be grateful for what I do?” A response: “I’m feeling really sad that you don’t experience me as grateful for all the hard work you do.” Are you starting to get the idea?

Hear the disrespect as hurt and anger. “I hear your sarcasm and ridicule as contempt.” “If you existed, I would divorce you.” This happens to be a line from *Whose Afraid of Virginia Wolf*. “Wow, you don’t feel that I am showing up with you.” “You are a poor excuse for a spouse.” Now we may not say that in those words, but we do send that message from time to time.

How about, “So I have disappointed you.” Now listen please to my tone of voice because the tone of voice and the facial expression can change the meaning of those words, right? The words themselves are not the key. The key is the tone of voice, the attitude that you have, and the facial expression that you have when you say that.

“You’re acting just like a child.” “Really, how am I coming across as a child?” This reminds me of something that my wife has said to me recently. She said, “You’re whining,” and I said, “I am nooot!” That wasn’t very effective. “You’re an embarrassment to me.” Now there are a lot of different ways our spouse might say, “You’re an embarrassment to me,” maybe not so directly as that. “Oh sweetheart, that breaks my heart that I embarrass you.” Wouldn’t that make your spouse melt?

Withdrawal is the fourth behavior that often causes us to be defensive, and oftentimes withdrawal really is a result of the person trying to protect themselves. “Please don’t remain silent. I need to know you still love me.” Isn’t that a wonderful statement rather than a criticism? “I get scared when you walk away from

our conversations. I feel rejected.” “I look forward to you coming home from work. I feel very lonely when you come home late.” Wouldn’t you respond well to those kinds of comments?

Defensiveness is insanity. The definition that I like of insanity is that it is repeating the same behavior over expecting different results. Now if defensiveness worked, you would not be sitting here tonight. If defensiveness worked, most of us counselors would be out of a business because it is defensiveness that gets us into trouble.

So behind every defensive pattern is a defensive feeling, and I have just given you some illustrations of those defensive behaviors and how you can respond to those responses differently.

In addition to defensive behavior being caused by defensive feelings, defenses are also caused by having an immature part of us. Behind every defensive feeling is a defensive child part. There are really six parts of us, as you see on your outline, there is the nurturing parent but there is also the critical parent, there is a protective adult but there is also an underdeveloped or missing adult, and there is a defensive child and then the counterpart of the defensive child is the acting out child.

When we are defensive, our nurturing parent and our protective adult are smaller or feel smaller or act smaller than our defensive child. With our defensive child being larger than the adult or the parent, our behavior is going to come out of that immature side of us.

If you look at your outline, you will see that your spouse also has a parent/adult/child dynamic. Let me explain how this works. The defensive child in us either responds to the critical statements of our spouse or responds to the acting out part of our spouse. Probably the fastest response that any of us





have is that under stress we have a way of regressing. So if I believe my wife is critical of me I seldom respond out of my nurturing parent side and say, “What is it that you need? What is it that you are asking?” I often respond out of my defensive child part.

If I respond out of my defensive child part, I am either going to get more criticism from her or I am going to get her immature side and acting out side. Now we have two children going back and forth in the relationship. You don’t have a very good marriage when you have two children interacting.

Now the other possibility is that my defensive child can get hooked, but instead of my nurturing parent responding, my critical parent can respond to her critical parent, and now we have two critical parents shouting and acting out at each other or we have two children acting out. Neither is productive for dialogue and neither is productive to developing and managing a marriage very well.

The defensive feelings are the result of our child part reacting to our spouse’s critical parent or acting out child. So the critical parent is critical, can be blaming and shaming and disrespectful and can even be withdrawn. Even though I have a critical parent, it is possible that that parental side of our spouse can also act out in other ways—the minimizing, the denying, the disrespect, as well as the withdrawal.

Now our child part always listens for what it didn’t get as a child and is really saying back to you, “I am not getting this in my relationship with you now.” So the child part will interpret what our spouse’s message is about himself or herself. The child part will interpret the message as being about me, not about you and the message will usually be negative. The negative message will be something like, “You’re dumb. You’re crazy. You’re bad. You’re silly.” Translating that into other languages, “You’re unlovable. You’re not valuable. You’re inferior.” We are, even as

chronological adults, we still are emotionally vulnerable to hearing our spouse give us the kind of negative messages that we got from our mom and dad, from our siblings, and even from our peers.

When you feel like your spouse is telling you that you are dumb, crazy, bad, or silly, or any of those negative messages, you know that your spouse has hooked the part of you that is still wounded from your past.

We need to understand that our past continues to color our present interactions until we heal our past. So some of us have gone into counseling because our marriages are in trouble, but often our marriages are in trouble because one or both of us in the marriage has childhood wounds that need to be healed.

If you find yourself getting stuck in the defensive child mode or in the acting out child mode, or in the critical parent mode, it may be that you will need to go back and do some work about what really happened to you as a child in order for you to translate what your spouse is saying to you about them rather than about you.

That is the key to managing defensiveness: to hear what your spouse is saying to you as about them, not about you. So we need our nurturing parent and our protective adult to interpret the child part and the critical parent part for us. The adult will interpret the message about the spouse’s feelings and needs rather than about our own feelings and needs.

Whatever my wife is saying to me, if I can keep in mind that it is about something that she feels and something that she needs. The other day I was vacuuming the house. We were going to be having some company. My wife has a bad back so I bought this nice vacuum cleaner that is self-propelled. It still hurts her back so I vacuum the house because I am concerned about her back.



I finished everything, I thought. I had the vacuum put away and she said to me, “You forgot the family room.” Now inside I was feeling, “You ungrateful so and so. After all I’ve done for you—I went grocery shopping, I vacuumed the house. Now you are being critical of me.” I was thinking that, but that is not how I responded to her verbally. What I said to her is, “Oh, thank you for reminding me, I really did forget to vacuum that.”

Now our day went very smooth. If I were to say to her, “Can’t you be grateful about anything? Just because I make a mistake, you have to make a big deal out of it.” We would have had tension. You understand that, right? You would have had tension in your house if you had responded that way.

The more I can stay in my nurturing parent side, and if I can develop my adult side, then I am not going to respond defensively. I am going to respond positively. That is the key. When we’re defensive, we are not in our adult or in our nurturing parent role.

Unmet needs are at the root of defensiveness. Think of what emotional and relational needs you wanted most as a child. Did you want love? Did you want acceptance? Did you want security? Did you want to be valued? Did you want to be esteemed? Did you want to be appreciated? Did you want a sense of being wanted? Probably all of those.

I would like you to think about what it is that you want because what you wanted as a child, what you needed as a child, if you aren’t getting that need met in your marriage, that is going to cause you to be defensive or to act out.

So here is a way of going about that. What specifically would you like your spouse to say, to feel or to do to meet those needs? Many of the people whom I see for counseling, if I ask them what it is that they really want from their spouse, sometimes they know, but

oftentimes they have a very hard time asking for what they need and want.

Oftentimes what they want and need they express in a behavioral way rather than in an emotional way. Instead of saying, “I want to be close. I want to feel really valued by you,” I might say, “I want you to come home on time from work.”

The message is the same, but if you understand, as a spouse, that whatever your partner is saying to you that it is expressing an unmet need. The reason that we get married is that we want our spouse to meet our unmet need. Now it is not possible for our spouse to meet all our unmet needs, or even necessarily to meet any one need completely, but we should be able in our relationship to begin to meet some of the needs in our life and when we can be specific about what that is then the chances are we will not feel criticized, disrespected, or withdrawal. We will be able to say, “Oh, is that what you need?”

I know of a couple and the lady is angry because the man has been sleeping in the basement. So she is telling him that she is angry at him, and I said, “What is it that you really want?” She said, “Well, I want him to sleep with me.” I said, “How are you telling him ‘I would like you to sleep with me?’” She is not telling him that, she is telling him, “I’m angry at you. You don’t care about me. You are withdrawing from me. You are avoiding.” She doesn’t tell him what the need really is.

So, he is having a hard time hearing that, but his responsibility is to hear what the need is underneath the criticism, the minimizing, the disrespect, or the withdrawal. The child part will often interpret and exaggerate the spouse’s message negatively. The adult will interpret the critical parent’s or acting out child’s messages as something like, “It is about my spouse’s feelings and needs.” “Oh, that is what is going on. You feel something and you need something. Let me fig-



ure out what that is.” Or we say to ourselves, “It is coming from my spouse’s critical parent and acting out child. My spouse is having a hard time telling me their positive parent side.”

So what am I responsible for? First of all, I am responsible for my provoking and reactive behavior, however I am saying, talking, looking, behaving towards my spouse—I am responsible for that, even if my spouse is triggering that behavior. I am responsible for my feelings. I am responsible, not necessarily for the occurrence of the feeling, but how I express those feelings.

So I might be tempted to say to my spouse, “You make me mad.” What really is happening is that my spouse has provoked me and has brought the anger out of me. So, surprisingly, I am not responsible to control my spouse’s behavior and feeling. I am responsible for provoking my spouse’s behavior and feeling.

Now here is the biblical principle, our reactions reflect what is inside of us. Nobody puts it in us, it is already there. Our spouse can only provoke the sinful reaction that is present in us. Now when I first heard this I was really angry at this and I was resentful about this. “No, I am not responsible for being angry and the way I am expressing my anger to my spouse. She is making me feel this way.”

I wanted to hold onto that idea that it was my spouse’s fault for why I was reacting that way. It is my spouse’s responsibility to understand how she provokes me. But the Bible says, “Don’t provoke.”

What am I responsible for? Let’s make sense out of our negative emotions. Our defensive responses inform us about our spouse’s feelings and needs. There are five different feelings: hurt, hate, humiliated, horrified, and hounded. When I feel hurt, that tells me something about what my spouse is going

through. My spouse is really making a request and I am missing it. When I feel hatred, my spouse is feeling frustrated because he/she is not able to get a goal, something he/she wants. When I feel humiliated, my spouse needs affirmation. When I feel horrified or scared, my spouse is feeling powerless. When I feel hounded or nagged, my spouse needs to be listened to.

Now if I could understand that whatever I feel gives me a clue to what my spouse needs, that will help me be non-defensive. That will help me be receptive to what my spouse is saying even though my spouse might be saying it in a way that is not all that positive.

What we need to do is become conscious of our nurturing parent and our protective adult, and by conscious I mean really remember that you do have a nurturing parent and a protective adult going on inside you, you don’t just have that defensive child. Remember the defensive child and the acting out child is only one part of us. Now that should be very good news.

It may be that your nurturing parent and your protective adult aren’t very well developed, but that really is the task for us in growing up. Remember we can choose to behave out of our nurturing parent and protective adult parts, we still do have a choice when we are feeling hurt and when we are feeling angry.

Remember when we feel criticized, minimized, disrespected, or avoided, it is about our spouse’s feelings and needs not about ours. Remember when we criticize, minimize, disrespect or avoid our spouse it is about our feelings and needs, not our spouse’s personhood. The sad thing is that when we are negatively responding to our spouses, frequently our spouses will feel that it is about their character and about their personhood, which will then in turn trigger more defensive responses.



You can respond receptively, not defensively. If we are Christians, we can always ask the Holy Spirit to help us. You can see on your outline all that He provides. What do I want you to take home with you tonight? Two things: hope that you can respond non-defen-

sively—to know that your marriage will improve dramatically when you learn to respond non-defensively; second, that you can learn how to make your marriage better by practicing the non-defensive responses.

MANAGING

Defensive Emotions

SEMESTER TWO

WEEK THREE



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I. Defensiveness destroys:

- A. Intimacy.
- B. Dialogue.
- C. Our spouse's spirit.

II. Defensive behavior patterns are the result of defensive feelings.

- A. Defensive feelings are primarily:
 - 1. Scare.
 - a. Sense of threat.
 - 2. Anger.
 - a. Sense of hurt.
 - 3. Sadness.
 - a. Sense of rejection.



B. Four important components of defensiveness and alternatives to understanding them:

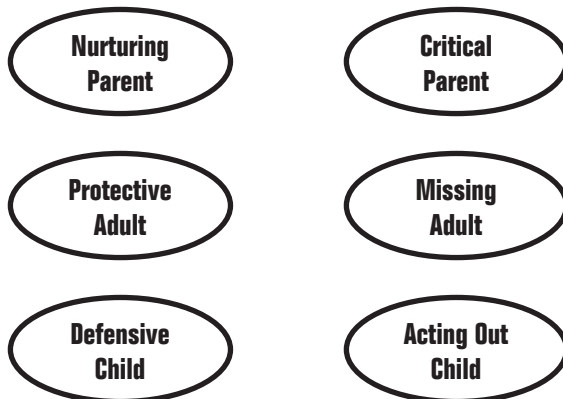
1. Criticizing. (Hear this as a request. “I need _____ from you.”)
2. Minimizing. (Hear this as “My person feels attacked.”)
3. Disrespecting. (Hear this as hurt and anger.)
4. Withdrawing. (Hear this as a form of self-protection.)

III. Defensiveness is insanity.

- A. Insanity is repeating the same behavior expecting different results.
- B. If defensiveness worked, none of us would be at Marriage Matters.

IV. Defensive behavior patterns are the result of an immature part of us.

- A. Behind every defensive feeling is a defensive child part.
- B.





C.

Nurturing Parent

Protective Adult

Defensive Child

V. Our spouse and our P.A.C. (Parent/Adult/Child).

A. My P.A.C.

Nurturing Parent

Critical Parent

Protective Adult

Missing Adult

Defensive Child

Acting Out Child

My Spouse's P.A.C.

Nurturing Parent

Critical Parent

Protective Adult

Missing Adult

Defensive Child

Acting Out Child

B. Defensive feelings are the result of our child part reacting to our spouse's critical parent or acting out child.

- 1. The critical parent is critical or blaming or disrespectful or abandoning.





- 2. It is the failure of our nurturing parent or protective adult that results in our child reacting defensively.
- C. Our child part always listens for what it didn't get as a child and may not be getting as an adult: e.g., attention, affection, affirmation, safety/security, significance/belonging/esteem, love, influence, intimacy, control.
- D. Our inner child will respond to the present as if the message is from the past.
 - 1. The child part will interpret the message about him/herself.
 - 2. The message will usually be negative, e.g., dumb, crazy, bad, mad, silly, unlovable, unacceptable, inferior, immature.

VI. We need our nurturing parent and protective adult to interpret the critical parent or acting out child message two ways.

- A. It is about the spouse's feelings and unmet needs.
 - 1. Unmet needs are at the root of defensiveness.
- B. Responsibility.
 - 1. I'm responsible for my behavior.
 - 2. I'm responsible for how I express my feelings.
 - 3. I'm not responsible for my spouse's behavior.
 - 4. I'm responsible for how I respond to my spouse's feelings.

VII. Our defensive responses inform us about our spouse's feelings and needs.

- A. When I feel hurt, my spouse is making a request.



- B. When I feel hatred, my spouse is frustrated in reaching a goal.
- C. When I feel humiliated, my spouse needs affirmation.
- D. When I feel horrified, my spouse is feeling powerless.
- E. When I feel hounded, my spouse needs to be listened to.

VIII. Become conscious of our nurturing parent and protective adult and choose to behave out of them.

- A. When we feel criticized, minimized, disrespected, or avoided, it is about our spouse’s feelings and needs.
- B. When we criticize, minimize, disrespect, or avoid our spouse, it is about our feelings and needs, not our spouse’s personhood.
- C. If we are Christians, we can always ask the Holy Spirit for help to respond non-defensively.
 - 1. He has all the resources we need to grow up
 - 2. He has all the resources for us to act our chronological age
 - 3. He will empower us to love without losing ourselves.
 - 4. The Holy Spirit wants to grow in us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control.