

How to Have the Most Amazing Relationship With Your Spouse!

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For more than 20 years I have officiated Christian weddings professionally. What I share with you here is a combination of what I learned from my past mistakes in personal relations, and observations of so many couples. My wife and I live by this, and it is the best “one thing” we could have ever done for a beautiful relationship. I consider these pearls for living, so I do not present them lightly.

Part One: God’s Design for Marriage and the First Seeds of Criticism

When God looked upon all that He had made, time and again the verdict echoed: *“It is good.”* The sun and moon, the land and seas, the creatures of the earth were all good. But then, in a surprising and profound shift, God declared something **not good**. *“It is **not good** that **man should be alone**; I will make him a helper fit for him”* (Genesis 2:18, ESV).

Here in Eden's untainted perfection, God saw something lacking in the man, not in the sense of sin or deficiency, but of **incompletion**. The man was not made to walk the journey alone. He needed a counterpart, equal in dignity, distinct in function, suitable in companionship. And so, God formed woman, not from dust as with man, but from his side; thereby signifying closeness, mutuality, and unity.

The marital relationship, then, is **not a mere contract of convenience**, but a covenantal gift of divine wisdom. A husband and wife are meant to be **helpers to one another**, building each other up in love, covering weaknesses, and reflecting the intimacy between Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:25-32). Yet, even in such a sacred bond, **destructive criticism** can slip in like a serpent in the garden, unnoticed at first, but devastating over time.

The First Seed: Negative Criticism Begins in the Heart and Mind

Every wildfire starts with a spark. Marital discord begins much the same. What starts as a **private irritation**, a **passing judgment**, or a **silent complaint** can **smolder** in the mind until it bursts into flames. Before it is ever **spoken aloud**, **criticism begins as a thought**.

Jesus taught, "*Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks*" (Matthew 12:34). What we allow to simmer in the soul will eventually spill from the lips. In marriage, when negative assumptions, resentments, or irritations are **left unexamined**, they become the soil in which destructive criticism grows.

- A wife silently thinks, "**He never listens.**"
- A husband quietly wonders, "**Why does she always nag?**"
- A small behavior is magnified into a motive: "**She *must* be doing this on purpose.**"
- An unmet expectation turns into a character judgment: "**He's just lazy.**"

In this way, **the focus shifts from behavior to identity**, and the heart begins to criticize **the person, not the action**. It may never be spoken at first, but the heart begins to look at the spouse through a *lens of suspicion and disappointment*.

Critical Thinking vs. Criticism: The Crucial Fork in the Road

At this early stage when critical thought first arises, there is a vital opportunity for *spiritually discerning reflection*. Here, **critical thinking** (in the biblical sense) can be redemptive, while **criticism** is reactive and destructive.

Consider the contrast:

Critical Thinking in Marriage

- **Seeks understanding:** "Why did that bother me? Is there something deeper here?"
- **Asks questions:** "Did they mean to hurt me? Could this be a misunderstanding?"
- **Examines assumptions:** "Am I being fair in how I'm interpreting this?"

- **Evaluates evidence:** “Is this a pattern, or just a one-time thing?”
- **Engages with grace:** “How can I address this in a way that builds us up?”

Negative Criticism in Marriage

- **Attacks the person:** “You *always* do this... you’re so inconsiderate.”
- **Assumes the worst:** “You must not care about me at all.”
- **Offers no solution:** “You never change... what’s the point?”
- **Destroys unity:** “Why do I even try anymore?”
- **Elevates self over spouse:** “If you were more like me, this wouldn’t be a problem.”

In essence, **criticism is a judgment**, while **critical thinking is a pursuit of understanding**. The former divides; the latter discerns.

Part Two: When Criticism Speaks: The Tongue as a Sword and a Snare

Once criticism takes root in the heart and mind, it rarely stays silent. What festers internally will eventually be **voiced externally**, and when it is, it often bursts forth **not in clarity, but in frustration**, not in love, but in accusation.

James writes with unsettling clarity:

“The tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness... It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God” (James 3:6, 8-9, ESV).

No environment tests the tongue more than **marriage**, where daily habits, unmet expectations, and emotional vulnerability are all laid bare. What began as a quiet judgment now finds its way into **biting remarks, sarcastic tones, and wounded outbursts**. Behavior is no longer the target, rather the person becomes the object of attack.

- *“You never think of anyone but yourself.”*
- *“Why can’t you do anything right?”*
- *“You clearly don’t care.”*
- *“I’ve told you this a thousand times...what’s wrong with you?”*

Here, the tongue becomes a sword that cuts not just at behavior, but at **dignity, identity, and worth**. The marriage bed becomes a battlefield of words, and both husband and wife become casualties.

But our Lord, Counselor and Creator gives us a word of warning that slices through our self-righteousness like a surgeon’s scalpel. In Matthew 7:1-3, He says:

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?”

These words are not simply about theological judgment; they apply deeply to the everyday tensions of marriage. In essence, Jesus says: **the way you treat others becomes the standard by which others treat you**. In marriage, when we speak criticism, we often provoke the same in return.

Criticism becomes an invitation to a *boomerang of blame*. One spouse **lashes out**, and the other **defends, deflects**, and or **retaliates**. Suddenly, the issue at hand is no longer important. The real battle is now about **who is “more wrong.”** Defensiveness replaces listening. Contempt replaces empathy. Hearts grow hard.

As ministers of the Gospel, and believers alike, we take Jesus seriously which leads us to this profound principle: **We can lower the criticism we receive simply by refusing to initiate it**. The Spirit-filled spouse chooses humility over judgment, clarity over contempt, and gentleness over dominance. This does not mean silence in the face of sin or pain, rather it means we speak **with purpose, not poison**.

The Testimony of a Covenant: A Tongue Bound by Love

It is here that your personal covenant becomes a luminous witness to the power of restraint in speech. **Imagine if every Christian couple made this vow:**

*“From this day forward, I will not **criticize** you **to myself**.”*

*“I will not criticize you **verbally**.”*

*“And I will not criticize you **to another**.”*

This is not a vow of emotional suppression. It is a vow of **emotional sanctification**. It means we submit our thoughts, our speech, and our relationships to the lordship of Christ. It means we guard our inner meditations just as fiercely as we guard our outward manners. It is the choice to **be like Christ in the hidden places** of our hearts, our homes, and especially our heads.

Such a covenant is not legalistic. It is liberating. It does not deny the need for honest communication, but it forbids the spirit of contempt. It compels us to use the tongue, not to wound, but to build up and to speak truth in love, and love in truth.

Part Three: The Wounds of Words: From Frustration to Insecurity and Resentment

When criticism becomes the dominant tone in a marriage, it ceases to be a communication tool and becomes a weapon. Unlike physical wounds, the damage done by the tongue is **invisible**, yet it can cut even deeper. A single phrase, casually flung in frustration, can linger in a spouse's heart for weeks, months and even years.

Where once there was the closeness of companionship, now begins a slow but steady unraveling. The one who receives constant criticism begins to internalize the words. **The sting of “You never...” or “You always...” begins to shape identity.** Confidence gives way to caution. Initiative turns into avoidance. The open door of love becomes a fortress of self-protection.

It is here, in this tender terrain, that **insecurity takes root.**

The wife, once joyful and expressive, now second-guesses her every action.

The husband, once confident and playful, now walks on eggshells.

Each becomes unsure: *“Am I accepted? Am I loved? Am I respected?”*

Eventually, they begin to **withhold themselves**, both emotionally and spiritually.

This phase of the criticism cycle is the **heartache of quiet resentment.** The wounds may not be shouted across the dinner table, but they are *felt in the silence*. They appear in the sighs, the avoidance of touch, the sarcasm, the withdrawal. What was once joyful intimacy becomes an unspoken truce of peace driven by compliance without connection.

Here we must pause and recognize: this is not just poor communication. This is the **slow death of covenant intimacy.** Jesus said, *“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand”* (Matthew 12:25). A marriage built on criticism is a house divided; not always by overt war, but by unspoken hurt and self-preservation.

Let us call this what it is: a **spiritual crisis.** It is **a disruption of God's design for help, unity, and mutual building up.** If left unaddressed, it leads to something still more insidious.

Part Four: From Resentment to Stonewalling and the Quiet Death of a Relationship

What begins as hurt turns into resentment, and what resentment does not poison, **stonewalling silences.** Stonewalling is the act of emotionally shutting down and refusing to engage, to respond, or even to feel. It is a self-protective mechanism: *“If I don't react, I won't be hurt again.”*

But there is a high cost.

Stonewalling breaks the flow of communication.

It paralyzes problem-solving.

It turns two hearts that once beat together into **isolated survivors in the same home**.

At this stage, couples often begin to live like **roommates instead of soulmates**. Tasks are shared. Responsibilities divided. But the **bond of emotional and spiritual unity** has quietly died. And unless resurrection comes, marriage becomes **a shell of its original design**.

This is not God's will for Christian marriage.

Christ calls us to **life, and life more abundantly** (John 10:10), not survival. He has not designed marriage to be endured, but **to reflect His relationship with the Church**. It should be a union marked by love, sacrifice, grace, and truth.

If criticism leads to **death**, then Christ-centered communication leads to **resurrection**.

A Way Back: Rediscovering the Power of a Tamed Tongue

The Gospel truth is that what sin seeks to destroy, **Christ can redeem**. There is hope for every marriage that has wandered into the desert of criticism. There is a path back from the brink.

James writes:

"If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body... From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so." (James 3:2, 10)

Let the tongue that once **cursed** begin again to **bless**. Let the spouse who once criticized begin again to **speak life**. Let covenant overrule contempt by the atmosphere of your words.

Part Five: Turning the Tongue, Tending the Heart: The Path of Reversal and Renewal

In every marriage, there comes a moment of spiritual crossroads where the cycle of criticism can either continue toward death, or be surrendered to the healing grace of Christ. This turning point is not found in learning to speak better alone, but in learning to **love better, by the power of the Holy Spirit**.

Words, after all, are never neutral. Jesus taught, *"On the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"* (Matthew 12:36-37). Our words **reveal** our hearts. But they also **shape** them.

If criticism has become habitual, it is not enough to simply say “I’ll stop.” The mind must be renewed (Romans 12:2), the heart softened, and the **pattern of communication transformed**. Below are three biblical steps for reversing the damage and building a new foundation.

1. Pause to Examine the Thought Before It Becomes a Word

The first battlefield is not in the mouth, it is in the mind. Before the tongue ever stings, the heart simmers. We must learn to catch our thoughts and bring them into submission to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5).

Ask:

- “Is this thought loving or accusatory?”
- “Is this a frustration with behavior, or am I attacking identity?”
- “Would I want this thought spoken about me?”
- “Will this build up my spouse, or simply vent my irritation?”

This is where **critical thinking**, in the biblical sense, is vital. It seeks to understand before speaking. It applies wisdom before assigning blame.

“Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” (James 1:19-20)

2. Speak with Grace-Filled Clarity, Not Emotional Weaponry

There will be times when behavior must be addressed, but Scripture calls us to do so in love and humility (Ephesians 4:15). The issue is not *whether* we speak, but *how* we speak.

Compare the tone:

- **Criticizing the person:** *“You never help around here. You’re so lazy.”*
- **Addressing the behavior:** *“I feel overwhelmed. Can we work together on this more?”*

This simple shift makes all the difference when speaking from **need and invitation** rather than **accusation and insult**. One path creates shame; the other invites cooperation.

Let your speech be governed by:

“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up... that it may give grace to those who hear.” (Ephesians 4:29)

3. Cultivate a Spirit of Blessing Over Your Spouse

The surest antidote to a critical spirit is a **blessing spirit**. You cannot bless and curse with the same mouth and remain unchanged. Begin speaking *words of life* over your spouse; yes, even before you feel like it. You are not performing a trick; you are planting a garden.

- Speak their strengths.
- Pray God's promises aloud.
- Acknowledge their efforts.
- Say, "Thank you," even for small things.
- Encourage their calling, their purpose, their personhood.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits." (Proverbs 18:21)

The Covenant: A Holy Call to Silence the Critic Within

This journey leads us to a moment of holy resolve. What began as reflection must now become commitment.

Your simple, bold, and deeply biblical personal covenant offers a Spirit-led model for every marriage. It is not a vow of silence, but a **vow of sanctified speech**. It is a call to guard the heart, the tongue, and the testimony of your marriage.

But this must be clearly understood: **for this covenant to bear fruit, it must be mutual**. One spouse alone cannot carry the full weight of the marriage's emotional atmosphere. If a husband withholds criticism while his wife continues to speak with contempt. If a wife chooses gentleness while her husband defaults to sarcasm the relationship will remain locked in imbalance and tension.

This brings us back to the words of Jesus in *Matthew 7:1-3*:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you."

When only one spouse commits to changing their tone, the other may continue to mirror judgment with judgment. The dynamic becomes **one-sided self-control met with ongoing accusation**. And this, too, can lead to bitterness and weariness.

But when both husband and wife willingly enter this covenant together, something beautiful happens: the cycle of judgment is broken. Instead of echoing criticism, each begins to **echo grace**. Each becomes the guardian of the other's dignity. Each chooses to be **a helper, not a hinderer**.

Let these words now become the shared call to action for every couple who desires not just peace, but **oneness**:

A Covenant of No Criticism

From this day forward:

- I will not criticize you **to myself**,
- I will not criticize you **to you**, and
- I will not criticize you **to another**.

This is not humanly sustainable by willpower alone. It is **supernaturally empowered** by the Holy Spirit. It is the fruit of abiding in Christ, walking in love, and yielding your speech to the wisdom of heaven. This is the kind of covenant that **reshapes marriages, redeems wounded years**, and reflects the unity Christ desires for His Church.

If only one spouse is ready, pray patiently and persistently that the other's heart will be stirred. But if both are willing, then rejoice for you stand at the threshold of **a transformed marriage**, one rooted not in criticism, but in Christ.

Let the Marriage Speak Christ

In a culture drowning in sarcasm, outrage, and self-centeredness, a Christian marriage governed by **graceful speech and mutual honor** is a radical witness. It speaks to the world of a different way of a Christ who **does not condemn**, but **restores**.

Let your marriage speak Christ. Let your words give life. Let your covenant of no criticism become the soil in which joy, security, and spiritual intimacy grow again.