

What I Wish I Knew... Single. Dating. Married. I Need Help Connecting with My Spouse • Message 4 Bryan Jones September 8, 2024

I. Introduction

A. This morning, I'm continuing our series *What I Wish I Knew... Single. Dating. Married.*

Years ago, Steph and I were having dinner with a couple that, on the outside, seemed like everything was good. They were friends of ours. During dinner, we were making small talk, and everything seemed fine. Then one of them said something, and the other got offended, and before you knew it, they were fighting and yelling... and I didn't know what to do, so I kept eating the food in front of me. Steph gave me a look that asked *How are you eating at this moment?* And that moment is still seared into my mind for a couple of reasons...

One was the awkwardness of that moment. But the other, I was struck by how many couples look great on the outside but how distant they are from each other on the inside.

It's one thing to live in the same house or to be around a spouse; it's another thing to feel close, to feel known and valued by your spouse.

This couple never dealt with their issues of emotional connection, and over time, they drifted apart and now they are no longer married, so I feel the stakes of this talk are really high...

So today, I want to talk to you about how to close the emotional gap or distance between each other, how to draw closer so you can be a team, so you can be one as God intended.

Because you can be sitting next to your spouse, but emotionally, you can be miles away. So, if you're distant, this talk could be timely, and if you're close, this will be helpful ...

So, I want to give you a few principles from James 1:19-20.

B. Emotional Connection

(James 1:19-20)

1. Start **LISTENING** and stop **FIXING**.

(Job 16:2; 1 Peter 3:12)

I would say this has not only been one of the most transformative principles in my marriage but also in my ministry.

So, where are my talkers at? Listen, I'm one of you. I get it...

One of our Special Friends folks said this...

Sometimes, it's easier to talk than it is to listen.

It's easy to fix and speak... but the challenge is to listen... and not just to listen but to understand.

Sometimes, if I'm in a prayer group, I won't listen to what someone else is praying because I'm thinking about what I'm going to pray... anyone else?

Or, sometimes, if I'm in a Bible study, I'm not really listening to what they are saying because I'm thinking about what I'm going to say. Anyone else?

Or if I'm in a conversation or argument with someone or my spouse, sometimes I'm not listening because I'm thinking of how I'm going to respond... anyone else?

Men, the way to a woman's heart isn't jewelry, chocolate, or gifts.

Those can get you out of trouble, so use those, but the way to a person's heart is right here... (point to ears) because words reveal what's in the heart!

Sometimes, we spend so much time speaking that we don't really listen to the people around us.

Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.

James 1:19-20 (NLT)

Now, in the ancient world, it was actually quite a bit worse than this. They had a saying in the ancient world: "As is the speech, so is the life." In other words, the more important you are, the more words you're allowed to use. That's the way it worked in that world. The really counter-cultural word James uses in this passage is this one. "Let everyone be slow to speak." See, that's not the way it was in Rome or Greece. There, the rule was, "Let the slave be slow to speak. Let the poor be slow to speak. Let the women be slow to speak. Let the peasant... Let the rich and powerful use words a lot to enhance their honor and status."

One of the humbling things is that the most important person in the world, God... actually listens, and He wants to hear from you ... have you ever slow down to think about that?

"For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer..."

1 Peter 3:12a (NIV)

One of the amazing things about God is that He is available at all times. That He always can hear us, that He listens to us...

God does not keep office hours. He doesn't take appointments.

God, the most important person in the universe, listens to us...

Have you noticed how there are certain people you are drawn to share things with and others you will avoid? What's the secret?

I think the people we are often drawn to are the best listeners... they understand us...

I believe it's this principle that, deep down, people don't want to be just fixed; they want to be heard...

Listen to what Henri Nouwen says...

When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay

with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.

Henri Nouwen

Think about how different this is than Job's friends in the Bible.. when he was having a hard time, do you know what they did...?

They didn't listen... they tried to fix...

Remember the story of Job? He has all this trouble and heartache, and his friends come in and tell him what he needs to do and what he's doing wrong. Listen to what he says.

"I have heard all this before. What miserable comforters you are!"

Job 16:2 (NLT)

I love what one person said, "It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt."

Job's friends were at their best when they listened, and they were at their worst when they gave advice.

In your marriage and in your relationships, you must be quick to listen.

Couple things that have been helpful for me in this area...

- 1.) If you talk a lot, ask questions before you speak about your day.
- 2.) This is so important... when you are speaking with a friend or spouse... tell them if you want them to listen or give advice...

There are moments when I share something, and I am told *I just want you to listen. Then, the next time I am silent, I am told why aren't you speaking?* This is so important.

2. Share both your PAINS and GAINS in life.

(Matthew 19:4-5; Acts 2:46-47)

Notice it says be slow to speak, but it doesn't say don't speak.

Listen, it takes no courage to bottle everything up. It takes courage to share what's going on inside... so take a step.

Remember what it says in the Bible, that in marriage, two become one... when you don't ever share what's going on, you take the oneness and create a separateness.

"Haven't you read the Scriptures?" Jesus replied. "They record that from the beginning 'God made them male and female.'" And He said, "'This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

Matthew 19:4-5 (NLT)

But also, leaving home, I believe, is something deeper. Leaving home is about being freed from painful childhood moments from parents, family, or other things that have lodged themselves in us...

(Side note) Part of leaving home is separating from parents and connecting on a different level. This is important because some unhealthy or controlling homes will guilt children for leaving and forming a new family... Sometimes, you will have to create boundaries.

You might go, *I don't have any painful moments...* think about this... most of you in this room are far more aware of your shortcomings than your strengths... you are aware of your insecurities... your failings... but you know what? I caught my 5-year-old daughter... she was walking around the house saying, *I'm awesome... I'm awesome...* but as time goes on, things will happen, and she will get some sharpening that she will carry with her.

And that stuff that is on the inside spills into everything... so many people can't sit or be still because they have so much pain or past things they are carrying around... but God wants you to leave that behind...

There are a couple of ways to deal with what's on the inside...

- 1.) Carry it—this is where you are moved to self-pity. This is where you become a victim, and you carry your anger and hurt like a badge.
- 2.) Bury it—this is where you pretend like nothing happened. Like things don't affect you. Men stereotypically do this, but the problem is it comes out sideways.
- 3.) Transparency—simply sharing what's on the inside. This is where relationships begin to flourish.

There is an old but uncertain story about the origin of the word *sincere*. The ancient Romans used to prize Greek sculptures for their aesthetic excellence. The statues were already a few centuries old, however, and some of them had cracks or gaps where marble was missing. Vendors discovered that if they put wax in the sculptures, these figures looked great — for a season. The wax looked like real marble, but over time, the wax would yellow and harden until it became apparent that the statue was not totally authentic. So, if vendors wanted to sell a statue and it was all marble — the real deal through and through — they would mark it *sine*, the Latin word for “without,” and then *cera*, the Latin word for “wax.” *Sine Cera*. This is where we get the word *sincere*, without wax.

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46-47 (NIV)

Think about this... the early church was exploding... why? Because they met with glad and *sincere* hearts... without wax... people just came transparently... that's the power of the church.

We come as we are without wax, but we always leave different because of the power of the Spirit.

(acquaintances, friends, core friends)

Single, dating or married... everyone needs core friends... the hope is your spouse can be that...

Who are your core friends walking with you? Don't share stuff about your spouse or co-workers.

When you open yourself up to someone, that person has the ability to hurt or manipulate you; people won't open up if they don't trust you.

3. Settle **OFFENSES** quickly.

(Ephesians 4:26)

And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry,

Ephesians 4:26 (NLT)

I said this in a sermon, but the day of your hurt should also be the day you start your healing... this applies really to any relationship...

Some of these things take time.. it doesn’t mean it’s fixed... it means you are starting to journey towards healing... you start it; you don’t have to finish it in a day.

So, there are two things that are important to remember when settling offenses:

1.) **FIGHT** fairly.

(James 1:20)

One of the ways to settle offenses quickly is to fight fairly... You know how some people say *don’t go to bed angry?* I came across this hand towel that says this...

[Show Hand Towel Picture. Keep it up for a little bit]

But we have to make sure we fight fairly.

because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

James 1:20 (NIV)

An angry spirit is not an atmosphere where the spirit and righteousness flourish.

Behavioral scientists say that our anger comes from our frustration, and most of our frustration comes from not getting our way.

6 keys to fighting fairly... I took these from a pastor that I love...

- 1.) Never call names.
- 2.) Never raise your voice... and in text, don’t use capital letters. That is yelling. Lowercase is loving, and all capital letters send you to hell, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.
- 3.) Don’t get historical. (Never go back in time and say, *remember when you did this or said this...*)
- 4.) Never say “always” or “never” (*you never do this... you never say this...*)
- 5.) Never threaten divorce.
- 6.) Never quote me during a fight... leave me out of it 😊

2.) **FORGIVE** quickly.

The worst thing is to keep a record of wrongs. Don’t store stuff up.

I just want to emphasize that point one more time: don’t hold onto the past. Don’t get historical; you have to forget quickly... so if you don’t talk about it, then you need to forgive it... you can’t hold onto it. It’s not right... you either fight fairly or forgive it. Those are the two options...

Conferences—I have notebooks of content I've been waiting to apply.... I've learned so many times that we have become acquirers of information instead of appliers.

Books... I have highlights that I've been meaning to do something with...

Here's what I want you to do... I don't want to fix your marriage; only God can do that... plus, that's overwhelming. I want you to get 2- 3% better.

Take and apply something from this sermon today...