Communication that Counts
Thank you for downloading this guide to better communication in your marriage!

The 7 simple steps that are provided on the following pages are designed to help you grow closer and ease into more open communication with your spouse in just 15 minutes a day.

These 7 exercises are taken from a section of our best-selling book 15-Minute Marriage Makeover. The full book expands beyond the basics of strong communication to help improve your romance, sex/intimacy and even your finances.

If you enjoy this sample and find value in the 7 communication exercises, we know you'll love the full book. You can pick it up (along with 6 awesome bonuses) at the following link:

http://www.15MinuteMarriageMakeover.com

Thanks for being part of the Engaged Marriage Community!

Enjoy and God Bless,

Dustin & Bethany Riechmann
Founders of Engaged Marriage
15-Minute Marriage Makeover

Refresh Your Relationship,
Add Sizzle to Your Sex Life &
Be Happier in Just Minutes a Day

Dustin Riechmann
Engaged Marriage
Disclaimer

This book is intended to provide useful advice and fun exercises to help good marriages be even better. It is not a substitute for professional counseling or therapy. The author is not a licensed professional in marriage or family counseling or therapy, and the advice contained herein should be considered educational only and applied at your own risk.

Aside from all this legal stuff, enjoy your spouse and enjoy the book!
“Do you ever feel like the only thing you don’t have time for is your marriage? Yes, marriage tends to take the back burner to ‘more important things’ like the laundry, dishes and breaking up sibling fights.

This book is truly a life raft for worn out parents everywhere. In only 15 minutes a day, you can revive your tired marriage to be the relationship you’ve always dreamed of. The advice is practical and sexy at the same time. A must read for parents – I loved every chapter!”

Melissa Gorzelanczyk,
The Hybrid Homemaker, PeaceandProjects.com

“Dustin’s created a great resource to energize marriages. It’s straightforward, practical, and full of tasks and tips you can use right away to help take your marriage to the next level.

I highly recommend the 15 Minute Marriage Makeover.”

Dr. Corey Allan,
Marriage & Family Therapist, SimpleMarriage.net

“Working a day job as a Supervisor and a night job as a Pizza Driver doesn’t leave me with much time to focus on my marriage. Reading ‘15 Minute Marriage Makeover’ has motivated me to reconnect with my wife.

Dustin shows that it only takes 15 minutes a day to unlock the passion again. Even though I’m always busy, I will take the time to connect with my wife. She is worth every minute.”

Jeff Kosola of Livonia, Michigan,
Married 5 Years
“How refreshing to read a marriage resource from someone who truly understands the challenges of full, busy lives! Dustin speaks out of his own journey, and I was encouraged at how real he is. As someone who blogs about sex, I spend a lot of time digging through marriage resources. Dustin definitely hits the mark with his eBook.

I don’t take it lightly when I recommend a resource to couples. This is definitely one, though, that my husband and I are going to use to strengthen our own marriage. 15 minutes a day – who can’t devote such time to the most important relationship of their lives?”

*Julie Sibert, IntimacyInMarriage.com*

“I love the way that Dustin has broken this down into daily, bite-sized, practical action steps that a couple can tackle even with busy schedules. In today’s world, it is more important than ever to spend focused time tending to your most important relationship. However, with so many other commitments, this can be difficult. Dustin’s plan makes it easy. In just 15 minutes per day, over the course of a month, you can really take your marriage from good to great! If you have an average marriage, but want more, then get this book and follow Dustin’s advice.”

*Jeff Nickles, MySuperChargedLife.com*

“15 Minute Marriage Makeover is a brilliant guide to helping you and your spouse become closer and more connected in just 28 days. Dustin does an amazing job not only sharing insights of why this is good, but how you can make your marriage a priority in just 15 minutes a day.”

*Tony & Alisa DiLorenzo, Authors of Stripped Down & Hosts of the One Extraordinary Marriage podcast*
“I wasn’t really sure what to expect from 15 Minute Marriage Makeover. I certainly didn’t think I needed it – I’ve only been married for five months, and my husband and I have plenty of time to spend today. But several of these chapters made me really think hard about some little niggles we’ve been having. Chapter 5, for instance, made me realise that my poor husband is NOT being thoughtless when he doesn’t carry out some “obvious” (to me) task around the house…he’d be only too happy to do it if I explain that I’d like it done.

Although I’m enjoying a very happy and loving marriage, I realise there’s always room for improvement! Both my husband and I are trying to live out our marriage a little differently to our parents’ marriages (his parents are divorced, and in my family, it was dad who went out to work and mum who gave up her career to stay at home with us kids) – and we’re also the only couple among our close friends to be married. So, often, I feel like we’re making it up as we go along – and it’s really great to have some tips and some reassurance from a marriage pro like Dustin.”


“As a therapist, I have seen a range relationship issues causing many different problems. Dustin’s obvious devotion to his wife, family, and community of readers is reflected in each action filled page of this book.

In reading the review copy he generously allowed me to see, I found myself desiring the same deep love he and his wife share and how they have shaped it into utility for the wide audience he has built, friend by friend. He balances the demands of life, love, and work well, and any couple would benefit from his easy to implement mindfulness course.”

Jeanie Witcraft, MSW, LCSW
Therapist, JWitcraft.com
“Dustin does it again! In the world of marriage advice, sometimes you run across someone who is so solid, genuine, and helpful, you do a double-take. Dustin is one of those men. His book is clear, concise, practical, and useful. Read this. Use it. Absorb it. Your marriage will most definitely thank you for it.”

Sarah Baron, Anonymous8.com

“The advice in 15 Minute Marriage Makeover will help anyone’s marriage. Whether you have been married for 15 months or 15 years, every couple can put Dustin’s advice to good use. Even if you only actively use a few ideas from the book, your marriage will dramatically improve more than you can ever imagine. It will take work of course, but your marriage is too important to not work hard on.”

Rob Ward, Financial Coach, DailyFinancialSolutions.com

“15-Minute Marriage Makeover is more than a book; it’s a plan designed to refresh your relationship, add sizzle to your sex life and bring more happiness to your marriage. And all of that in just 15 minutes a day!

The exercises in this book focus on the four pillars of a happy marriage — communication, romance, intimacy and finances — with time management tools, mini lessons, couple time tasks and a weekly date night to review the topic of the week.

I loved it!”

Mandi Ehman of Life Your Way
A Marriage Makeover is not about repairing a torn marriage, but refreshing a good marriage to be the best it can be.

–Dustin
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Resources
I’m not sure where I first heard the advice that would change my marriage and my life forever. At some point a few years ago, someone told me that investing just 15 minutes each day in a passion would allow anyone to achieve greatness.

I heard the words and retained them in the back of my head, but I didn’t take action. It wasn’t until months later that I would realize just how profound this idea would be for me and my family. While facing an incredibly hectic life full of two careers, small children, community involvement, church activities, a load of debt and no plans to reverse the downward spiral into constant stress and busyness, my wife Bethany and I found ourselves deep in a state of feeling overwhelmed. This was not what we had envisioned for our life together when we got married several years earlier, but it seemed like this was what life as a young family had to be for us.

It was at this low point that we were asked to attend a marriage retreat through our church. While we honestly didn’t think we had time to take an entire weekend away amidst all the chaos, we finally decided that we would make it happen. This was the catalyst for what turned out to be a life-changing decision.
Faced with the realization that our Dream Marriage was never going to happen unless we took action, we committed to do better. It was at this time that I remembered the advice about investing in a passion, and I realized that the most important relationship in my life needed some real attention.

From that day forward, we committed to spending 15 minutes each day free from distractions to work on our marriage and take proactive steps toward getting our life in order. We didn’t have a Marriage Makeover book to guide us, but we found ourselves working through all of the big issues that were weighing us down.

And it worked. Our marriage is not perfect, but our life is so much more fulfilling, intimate and happy since we worked through our “do-it-yourself” marriage makeover.

After writing and interacting with many busy couples on my Engaged Marriage blog (EngagedMarriage.com) over the past several years, it became clear that our struggles were not unique. Almost every couple faces these same constraints, and I decided to put together a concise plan for others to follow in refreshing their relationship.

I’m so happy that you’ve decided to share this journey with your spouse, and I know that you’ll have a stronger and more love-filled marriage for life after you invest 28 days to improve your communication, romance, sex life and finances together.

Congratulations on being proactive and standing up for your spouse and your family!

**How to Use This Book**

The 15-Minute Marriage Makeover is broken into 28 unique days that each contain a lesson that applies to your life, a short Couple Time Task that you’ll complete together, and stories from the personal experiences that my wife and I have shared throughout
the good, the bad and the ugly days of our journey from busyness to contentment.

The best way to use this book is to complete each day in order, which will guide you through all four of the pillars of a thriving marriage. However, if you want to focus on a given area, you are welcome to skip to that particular chapter. Regardless of which path you choose, please complete Day One, as it’s a foundational exercise to find the all-important 15 minutes each day.

The four pillars covered in each weeklong chapter include:

1. Communication that Counts
2. Real Romance for Real Busy Couples
3. Better Sex and Deeper Intimacy
4. Control Your Finances...Together

For each of these topics, the daily lessons are broken into seven days so you will complete them over the course of a week. The first day focuses on a time management topic related to that pillar, days two through six are mini-lessons with 15-minute Couple Time Tasks, and day seven is the culminating event for the week requiring a longer (but always fun) time spent together.

Although you can match them to your busy schedule, most couples will find it’s best to start each week on Sunday. This will put the longer last lesson on Saturday when you likely have more flexibility to spend more time together.

Let’s get started!
Communication is the core of any relationship, and it’s especially vital to communicate well within your marriage. Remember how much you used to talk early in your relationship and how much you enjoyed it?

Well get ready because you’re about to revisit the power of high-quality communication and rekindle your passion for one another in the process. In Week One, we’ll find our 15 minutes of Couple Time, make it truly quality time, and learn what it means to Take the Lead in our marriage. By the end of this week, you’ll likely feel closer to your husband or wife than you have in years.
Day 1: Find Your 15 Minutes

With all of the craziness we face each day, it can sure feel like there just isn’t any time available to devote specifically to our spouse. We have careers to build, households to maintain, charitable causes to help and maybe even young children to raise. And then there’s that whole sleep thing...

It’s not that we don’t care about our marriage or love to spend quality time with our husband or wife. We just simply don’t have any time!

Well, time may certainly be tight, but you may be surprised how little time is really necessary to make a big impact on the quality of your relationship.

Today’s Lesson

15 minutes. What can you do in such a short time?

How about connect deeply with your spouse, take your marriage to a new level of fulfillment and get out of a relationship rut? More specifically, in the next 28 days, you will enhance your communication, rekindle the romantic spark between you, improve your intimacy and sex life, and get your financial lives rolling on a path to success.

And all you have to do to start is find 15 minutes each day to make it happen.

Today’s Couple Time Task

To kick things off, our first task is simply to figure out where you will find your 15 minutes of Couple Time every day. If you are super-busy, your first thought may be that this is just not possible.

What if you found out that you had to spend 15 minutes each day getting a medical treatment that you needed to survive? Less dramatically, what if you could voluntarily give this time to help
your spouse achieve a great deal of happiness? Or give yourself a feeling of real contentment and joy?

You can find the time. After all, we are literally only talking about 1% of your day here!

To get you started, here are some areas where you might be able to cut back a bit:

- Watch less television (this should do it for most of us)
- Cut out 15 minutes of mindless web surfing (this should take care of the rest of us)
- Check Facebook less often
- Focus better at work so you can leave a bit earlier
- Only check your email twice per day
- Cut down on video games
- Exercise at home instead of driving to the gym
- Put the kids to bed 15 minutes early
- Wake up 15 minutes early
- Quit reading EngagedMarriage.com - this is an absolute last resort and is not recommended!

For us, finding our 15 minutes was a matter of using our time more effectively and making our conversation a top priority. Each evening, after we get the kids to bed, we turn off the T.V. and sit together on the couch to talk. After our quiet Couple Time, we get back to the busyness, the to-do lists and the multi-tasking like a good, young family!

If something is important to you, you will find the time to address it. I’m confident that your spouse and marriage are a top priority in your life, and they certainly deserve your time.

So please go ahead and identify some areas where you can cut back just a bit to find that precious time for your spouse each day.
Make a commitment to each other that for the next 28 days, your husband or wife gets 15 minutes of your time each day without exception.

I promise that you won’t regret it.

**Today’s Tips**

- Plan ahead at least a week in advance and put your 15 minutes of *Couple Time* in your calendars.

- Remain flexible because life will get in the way some days. You may need to switch your Couple Time from evening to morning (or vice-versa) occasionally or even complete some lessons over the phone if travel is an issue.

- It may seem difficult to block out distractions and focus solely on your spouse for 15 full minutes during your first few days. Don’t worry, it will get easier to put your multi-tasking tendencies aside after you start to see the benefits of your quality time together.
Day 2: Just Talk

Our attention is constantly strained nowadays with information bombarding us from all directions and from multiple sources. It’s not unusual for many of us to hold conversations while checking email and eating, all with the television on in the background.

Unfortunately, our interactions with our spouse are no exception, and it can be a real struggle to focus during our conversations and really listen to what they say.

It takes some effort, but we can all be better communicators by being proactive and narrowing our focus to what’s most important at the moment.

Today’s Lesson

We talk to our spouse every day and never give it a second thought. It’s just part of our daily routine, and the reality is that we probably don’t remember half of the words that we spoke in their direction. The conversations just weren’t all that important or noteworthy.

When you sit down without distractions and have a meaningful conversation with your wife or husband, you may find it a little bit awkward. This is the person you share a bed with, but when was the last time you looked into their eyes and had an intimate conversation for 15 minutes without interruptions?

Today’s Couple Time Task

Just talk to each other for 15 minutes today.

How’s that for a simple task to ease into this challenge? Well, we aren’t talking about the kind of interactions you’ve probably had for the last 28 days. Today, we will be having a truly engaged conversation.
You can choose any topic to talk about. If nothing compelling comes to mind, I would suggest you share with each other why you chose to pick up this book and commit to this challenge.

As you interact, please make sure you do the following:

✧ Avoid interruptions to the best of your ability. The kids should be in bed or away from the house, and your cell phones should be in another room.

✧ Turn off all distractions. The T.V. must be off, no magazines should be lying nearby and don’t even think about having a computer within your eyesight.

✧ Speak freely and share what’s really on your mind.

✧ Listen better than you’ve listened in years.

✧ Hearing is not the same as listening. When you listen, you’ll not only physically hear your spouse’s words, but you’ll remember them and feel their impact.

✧ Face each other and maintain eye contact as much as you comfortably can.

✧ Hold hands

As mentioned above, it may feel a bit awkward to communicate in this way if you haven’t had an intimate conversation for a while. I know this took some getting used to for my wife and me, and it’s still not easy to maintain focus and really be present for 15 minutes some days.

Today’s lesson is intended to help you break the ice a bit and also work on your listening skills. This distraction-free, intimate environment will be key to getting the most out of today’s conversation as well as the next 26 daily challenges.
Today’s Tips

✓ Pick a time that allows you to avoid interruptions

✓ Choose a location for your talk that keeps distractions at bay

✓ Clear your mind and always remember that you have 99% of your day to worry about the things that are less important than your marriage

✓ Enjoy this quiet time with your husband or wife!
Day 3: A Little Affirmation Goes a Long Way

Life can feel pretty thankless some days. We spend our time running from task to task and meeting all of our daily obligations as best we can. After a while, all of the energy we spend starts to get taken for granted, and we can even get a little bitter that no one seems to notice.

Of course, we would never choose to let our wife or husband feel this way. We really do appreciate all that they do for our family, and we would be lost without them in most cases.

Well, it’s time to let them know.

Today’s Lesson

In marriage, it can be so easy to overlook the “little things” we do each day. After all, we typically spend every day with our spouse, and every household develops a routine where the husband and wife take on certain roles and obligations.

For us, this means that I always mow the yard, and my wife always does the laundry. Trash night is all me, while getting our middle daughter’s hair under control each morning is the work of my wife’s magic hands.

I’m sure you have similar routines in your home. So when was the last time you said thank you to your spouse for “meeting their obligations” around the house?

Sometimes we get so busy and preoccupied with all of the craziness in our lives, we can even take the special “extra” things for granted. It’s not that we don’t appreciate it, we just don’t think about expressing our thanks.

And that’s not good for anyone. Not only does our spouse need support, but there’s no better way to get them to repeat their kindness than through positive reinforcement.

If you want your wife or husband to do something extra special again, just tell them how awesome they are for doing it the first time!
**Today’s Couple Time Task**

During your 15 minutes today, tell your spouse three little things that they did today that you enjoyed. Then think of one “bigger” thing they did within the last year that still just warms your heart, and let them know how much it means to you.

I can guarantee that your spouse will feel great hearing this affirmation, plus you’ll become more aware and appreciative of the blessings in your marriage. That’s what I call a win-win!

And the best part is that this is so simple. This could be as easy as saying thank you for an encouraging text message or sharing how cool you thought it was that they spent time playing with the kids outside while you prepared dinner in a quiet kitchen.

For some of us, a “big” affirmation could be the time she encouraged you to go play golf with your friends one afternoon with no guilt trip to follow. Or the morning he let you sleep in while he took care of the kids and kept them away from your bedroom.

A little affirmation really does go a long way!

**Beyond Today**

I would strongly encourage you to make these affirmations a part of your daily routine as much as possible. Each evening, just pick one good thing that your husband or wife did that day and tell them that you liked it. How is that for simple romance?

My wife and I often use these little “thank yous” as a way to start our 15 minutes of Couple Time each evening. This has been fantastic for our relationship.

I continue to learn more about the little things she enjoys, and she notices the good stuff I do better. And the nice part is that this works both ways, so this little romantic treat makes us both better spouses.

And even us super busy couples can pull this off!
Today’s Tips

✔ Don’t over-think today’s task. You may be surprised how happy your spouse will be when you acknowledge even the smallest daily effort.

✔ Really listen to the affirmations that your spouse offers up. You should find out what “acts of service” mean the most to them.

✔ Once you know what little things really knock your spouse’s socks off, you’ll know where you can make a bit more effort to really impress them!
Day 4: FIGHTS Happen—Make It Count!

Every couple fights. Of course, some fight more than others (and more “passionately”), but even the best of marriages will include disagreements and emotional exchanges.

So, you know you’re going to fight occasionally, yet you want to have a great marriage. What is a happy couple to do?

Make it count!

Today’s Lesson

If you wait until the heat of the moment before you ever discuss the “rules of engagement” for your marital discord, you’re setting your marriage up for some hurtful and counterproductive arguments.

Why not take a proactive approach and talk about the rules for fighting fair now while you’re both calm and enjoying each other’s company?

Remember, when an argument arises, your goal is to resolve the issue at-hand and not to hurt your loved one. A healthy and marriage-oriented style of conflict resolution strives for two winners through compromise and understanding. If your actions are not conducive to resolving the issue at hand, then you are not fighting fair.

Today’s Couple Time Task

Spend your time today establishing the ground rules for future fights. Of course, you know each other better than anyone, so you should know what behaviors and actions should be off-limits to make your disagreements productive. Just don’t fight over it!

If you’re not sure where to start, I’d suggest you follow the same simple rules that my wife and I have found successful over the years. The best part is that they make an easy-to-remember acronym: FIGHTS!
Face Each Other. Look into each other’s eyes when you have a disagreement. Not only does this help to diffuse your anger, it keeps you both engaged in the conversation and avoids hit-and-run tactics.

Ignore Distractions. Focus only on solving the problem at hand and avoid raising side issues.

Guard Your Tongue. Avoid ridiculing and name-calling. Once name-calling starts, the discussion degrades to defensiveness.

Hold the History. “You always”, “why can’t you ever”, and “you never” are examples of history. And history doesn’t belong in your arguments.

Touch. Hold hands. We are more willing to be reasonable and caring than to win at all costs when we hold hands.

Stay in There. Finish the fight, and don’t run off or go to bed with unresolved anger. The issue will just fester.

Finally, you must be open to compromise. You can walk hand-in-hand without always seeing eye-to-eye.

If you and your spouse take these rules to heart during a calm time, you can set healthy ground rules for conflict resolution that will serve you well in your marriage.

When my wife and I argue and come to realize that we’re out of bounds and not following the “fighting fair guidelines,” one of us often says “we’re not fighting fair” and we look at each other and laugh. Then we get back to actually working to resolve the real issue.

Today’s Tips

It can feel awkward and a bit silly to talk about fighting at a time when you’re not angry. However, this is one of the most productive discussions you can have for your marriage.
For more information on healthy conflict resolution skills and negative patterns you need to avoid at all costs, please take a minute to read a post called “What’s the Secret to a Happy Marriage?” (http://www.engagedmarriage.com/communication/whats-the-secret-to-a-happy-marriage)
Day 5: A Honey-Do List That Matters

When you know someone for a long time and you feel close enough to pledge the rest of your life to them, you can start to expect that they can read your mind. After all, you finish each other’s sentences, you generally seem to be on the same wavelength in your thinking, and you are connected enough to actually make it to Day 5 of this challenge.

Likewise, it’s really easy to fall into patterns in your daily life that don’t require you to think a whole lot about what your spouse might need from you. Besides, if your communication is good, then shouldn’t your spouse just tell you when they need something?

Well yes, but things are rarely that simple, are they?

Today’s Lesson

We can talk to our spouse about anything. We discuss finances, career issues, romance, sex and a host of other important issues… or at least we will as part of this challenge.

So why is it so easy to let the little things that we want our spouse to do for us go unsaid while they fester inside us?

I can tell you from much experience that I really can’t read my wife’s mind, as much as I’d like to have that superpower (I think). However, if she takes the time to tell me that she would really appreciate it if I could do something specific, I jump at the chance to show her how much I care.

Now, I realize that sometimes it’s great to have our spouse just do something without being asked. I think we can all relate to the age-old discussion of the husband pleading, “How was I supposed to know you wanted me to do that?” with the wife’s quick response, “You should just know.”
Well, today’s your chance to share some specific things that you’d love for your spouse to do more often (or at all). That way, you’ll have a list to look back at whenever you’d like to make your husband or wife’s day with a special act of service.

**Today’s Couple Time Task**

For today’s 15 minutes, take turns telling each other little things that you’d like your husband or wife to do more often. Write down what your spouse says so you don’t forget.

Don’t be bashful but also don’t be resentful or accusatory with your sharing. This should be a fun exchange, and hopefully you’ll both have a few “aha” moments where you discover something new (or long forgotten) that your spouse enjoys.

If you have a hard time coming up with your “honey-do list that matters,” try using these ideas to get you going:

- Help me with specific household chores (the classic)
- Send me flowers for no reason
- Take the kids out of the house so I can have some “me” time
- Surprise me in the morning with sex
- Make me breakfast in bed
- Gas the car up before you bring it home
- Have dinner ready when I arrive home
- Give the kids baths while I put my feet up and relax for a few minutes
- Wear something sexy to bed
- Encourage me to have a girl’s night out or some time with the guys
- Plan our next date night so we don’t have to argue about what we want to do
- Surprise me in the evening with sex
Again, it’s important that you use this as an opportunity to talk about what you’d enjoy in the future. This is not about the past…that’s called nagging!

And don’t get defensive if you feel like you are already doing something that gets brought up. If your spouse is mentioning it, then chances are you could be doing a better job with it.

When my wife started sharing with me the little things that she’d enjoy, I was quite surprised by some of the items. They seemed like no big deal to me, and that was part of the problem. I didn’t even know some of the tasks existed, yet she’d been taking care of them for our entire marriage!

Likewise, she didn’t realize how frustrated some things made me on a regular basis. Now, when she takes the time to fill up the car with gas, I don’t have to worry about being late the next morning because I had to stop at the gas station on the way to an important meeting. That full fuel gauge makes me smile.

The little things really can make a big difference in your day.

**Today’s Tips**

- Keep this going in the future, so you always have a great list of things that will make your spouse happy.
- If you ever think, “I wish she’d…” speak up and get it added to her list.
- Randomly pick things off of your list and do them at unexpected times…talk about romantic!
- As you gain some experience, try to branch out and come up with your own original ideas to try without being asked. Yes, your superpowers may develop over time.
Day 6: I Love You Enough to Apologize…and Forgive.

How many times each day do you say “I’m sorry” to those you encounter?

It’s probably more than you realize:

✦ “Oh, I’m sorry. Let me move that.” to the lady trying to get by your shopping cart at the grocery store.
✦ “Sorry I forgot you needed that report today.” to a co-worker.
✦ “I’m sorry you fell down, sweetie. Let me kiss your boo-boo.” to your crying toddler.

We throw around “I’m sorry” very casually, and we rarely give it a second thought.

Now, when is the last time you gave a heartfelt apology and received real forgiveness from the one you harmed?

This is what reconciliation is all about, and today’s task will let us experience the power of this process.

Today’s Lesson

We all hurt the ones we love.

In some cases, this can be an overt action that results in deeply broken trust. However, in most cases, it’s an ongoing and seemingly innocent string of actions that causes pain for the one we love the most.

You may think that you have nothing to apologize for and that your spouse hasn’t done a thing to require your forgiveness. Well, I am only aware of one perfect person, and I don’t think He was married.

To help you examine your conscience a bit and recognize where you may be hurting your spouse without even realizing it, let’s
look at the two major areas where women and men, respectively, most often fall short: control and irresponsibility.

For most women, issues around control create many of their hurtful actions. While there are certainly exceptions, women often exert the most control in a marriage, especially in areas like household management and child-rearing.

Whether you realize it or not, correcting your husband’s parenting skills in front of the children or forgoing his opinions on household matters can be quite harmful and hurtful.

Now these two examples may not apply in your marriage, so let’s talk for a moment about the biggest area of feminine control in most cases: Sex! In most relationships, it’s the woman who decides if and when a couple will have sex.

Is it right to hold a “gatekeeper” attitude toward one of God’s greatest gifts in your marriage?

Well, there’s a reason that most women have taken this approach in their relationships, and it’s because men tend to be irresponsible. Again, I bet you can find some great examples of this in your household.

There are probably household duties that would go uncompleted if it was up to the husband. Does your wife seem controlling about preparing meals for your children…or does she have to take control because you’re not responsible enough to feed them properly?

Does your wife control the social calendar in your house and tell you what you’ll be doing with your time? Well, do you know whose birthday party is this weekend and are you going to go buy a suitable gift for him? And yes, when a woman bears sole responsibility for family planning (i.e., birth control) or there’s no effort made to create an intimate environment in your marriage, then her tendency to be controlling of your sex life is going to take hold.
These patterns of control and irresponsibility go hand-in-hand, and of course these roles are reversed all the time. Men control and women are irresponsible, too.

The point here is not to focus on your spouse’s shortcomings. It’s to open your eyes to recognize areas in your relationship where you have come up short and been hurtful with your actions...or your inactions.

I’m sure you can think of at least a few.

**Today’s Couple Time Task**

You’ve had a chance to hear a few examples of areas where we often come up short in our roles as husbands and wives. Now, take a moment to think of three specific things you’ve done to harm your spouse since you first got married.

The husband should look the wife in the eye and share each of the three items you’d like to apologize for along with the reason why you are sorry. Explain to her what you intend to do better moving forward to avoid hurting her further. End your apology with the question, “Will you forgive me?”

Assuming she is ready to forgive, the wife should respond with, “I forgive you for...” and repeat back the three items. Then simply repeat this process with the wife’s apology and the husband’s forgiveness.

This process has the potential be quite powerful provided you take it seriously and apologize sincerely.

My wife and I completed a similar exercise on a marriage retreat a little while back. When I first heard the instructions, I rolled my eyes and thought that this was a bit silly. I have never cheated on my wife or done anything seriously wrong, so I figured it was a waste of time for us.
Well, I’ll just tell you that this lesson wouldn’t be included here if my mind wasn’t changed during the exchange that followed. We shared some emotional dialogue, and our marriage has been improved as a result.

I hope you find a similar experience through the power of reconciliation.

**Today’s Tips**

- ✓ Remember, this exercise is about you focusing on what you’ve done wrong. Do not criticize your spouse and start an argument.
- ✓ With the above in mind, feel free to ask your spouse about areas where you may have hurt them without realizing it.
- ✓ In other words, don’t criticize your spouse unless they ask.
- ✓ If you have deep-seated anger, hurt or resentment due to a major breach of trust, please seek the guidance of a professional counselor.
- ✓ Use today’s time as an opportunity to find ways you can be a better spouse moving forward!
Day 7: We’re Outta Here!

Well, you’ve arrived at the end of your first week of this challenge! Are you feeling closer to your spouse and finding it easier to enjoy quality conversations together?

For many of you, it’s Saturday, which means that today’s task gets to break the “15-minute” rule and require some extra Couple Time together. I think you can handle this one, though!

Today’s Lesson

How often do you and your spouse enjoy date nights?

For many of us, it’s really easy to let these times slip from being a priority, especially when kids (and babysitters) become part of the equation. In later lessons, you’ll discover some fantastic ways to enjoy a date night (or day) at home.

However, for Day 7, I’d really encourage you to get out of the house and enjoy an evening together. This is your time to celebrate the completion of your first week toward a more Engaged Marriage.

It’s also time to put into practice a simple, but really powerful, idea I learned from my friends Tony and Alisa DiLorenzo in their wonderful book Stripped Down: 13 Keys to Unlocking Intimacy in Your Marriage.

This “rule” is called Take the Lead. It simply means that one spouse has to take the lead in planning the date. One spouse decides where you will eat, what you will do for entertainment and perhaps even what you’ll both wear for your night out.

I don’t know about you, but my wife and I have wasted so much time over the years by being indecisive about what we want to eat for dinner or what we’ll do on those precious nights out of the house.
“I don’t know, what do you want to do? I don’t know what do you want to do?” Before you know it, you’ve wasted an hour that could have been spent enjoying each other’s company.

**Today’s Couple Time Task**

Today’s task is simple: get out of the house this evening and enjoy a date night together. Talk about your experience over the past week and what you hope to gain for your marriage by sticking to your 15 minutes together each day over the final three weeks.

And for this date, the husband must Take the Lead and do all of the planning for your night out. This certainly doesn’t need to be anything elaborate or take the whole evening. A simple dinner at a nearby restaurant would be great.

Gentlemen, this evening’s in your hands. Show that bride of yours that you still know how to show her a good time!

**Today’s Tips**

I hope you find Take the Lead as helpful as we have and decide to make it a regular part of your date nights.

If you just can’t get out of the house tonight, don’t sweat it. Make some time for each other to talk and share a dessert after the kids go bed. The husband can go buy the dessert.

If you are looking for an awesome read and useful information on improving the intimacy in your relationship, I highly recommend you pick up a copy of the book *Stripped Down* (they even have an audio version).