“Do This and Improve ANY Relationship”
Song of Solomon
Compass of Salinas/Marina
Life Group Discussions
March #1

Although this series focuses on marriage, the principles apply to any relationship. I hope you agree that spiritual growth depends on learning NEW things that REPLACE old behavior and pre-Christian ideas. The tricky part is that our sin nature resists this. And we can’t be lazy spiritually and accomplish this. We don’t hear much about laziness spiritually. It is a big reason people don’t get better. Notice when you read Paul that he says things like ‘work out your healing’. His vocab is passionate. Can’t be lazy, can we?

1. Consider the following:
   - The next step beyond love is to cherish.
     Many people never get this. They love a person and think that is enough, but it isn’t.
     Every parent, every child, every friend, every spouse wants to feel special to you. Yes they do.
     The next step beyond loving someone is making them feel cherished. It is missing in a lot of marriages and families.
     Haven’t you heard someone who is divorced say “I still love her but I don’t want to live with her anymore.” So a wife asks “Do you still love me?” He says “Of course.” He does not understand that she is saying, “I know you love me but I don’t feel cherished by you.”
     Cherishing is the next step beyond love.
     The Song of Solomon—which is actually love letters between a man and woman – this book in the Bible has helped me understand what it means to cherish. 1 Corinthians 13 is the great love chapter in the Bible and it says “Love is patient” (I Corinthians 13:4)
     The Song of Solomon says “How much better your love is than wine.” (4:10)
     Corinthians says: “Love is patient” (1 Corinthians 13:4)
     Solomon says: “How much better your love is than wine.” (4:10)
     1 Corinthians 13 says “Love does not rejoice at wrongdoings” (I Corinthians 13:6)
     She says of Solomon: “His mouth is sweet and he is altogether desirable” (5:16)
     You can feel the passion, the excitement in the Song of Solomon.
     The best marriages have both 1 Corinthians 13 and the passion and joy of the Song of Solomon.
     Dave Wilson is a pastor. He asked the men in his church, “How many of you think your wife loves you?” Every hand went up. Then he asked, “How many of you would say your wife likes you?” No one raised their hand. Every husband knew he was loved but none felt cherished.
     And that is why the absolute best thing we can do to improve any relationship is to do what the music today said - - find ways to show we that we CHERISH our relationship with the other person.
     • Underline the most important sentence and tell us what its implication is with a spouse or with a parent or sibling.

     • What do you think it means to ‘cherish’ someone? How do you show that? Remember, the men knew their wife loved them, but they did not feel cherished. So what sort of things were missing?

     • What would you guess is the #1 reason in a marriage that spouses stop cherishing?
2. Consider this:
   **How can we do that?**
   1st, a person feels cherished when you make deposits in their Love Bank. Everything you do is either a deposit or a deduct emotionally. Most people don’t get this.
   Steven Covey in his book *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* calls it an emotional bank account. He says you make deposits and withdrawals according to how you make the other person feel.
   If you are self-aware, that has already happened to you this morning. People made deposits or got deducts in your Love Bank. Men get into trouble because they do not understand that women keep score differently than men because little things mean as much as big things.
   The next morning you go to your sink to shave and on the mirror is this.

   ![Image of a gas gauge](image)

   “You will reap what you sow”. (Galatians 6:7)
   This will explain why she won’t talk to you for 3 days and serves you spam for dinner.
   You are reaping what you sow in her LOVE BANK!!!
   So it might be a very good thing for couples to talk about their gauges, but also to think about what the gauge of a parent or someone else in the family is showing. Improving any relationship starts with a look at the gauge.
   • What is the point of the Love Bank illustration?

   • Women and men do score differently. Haven’t you heard “Little things mean as much to a woman as big things”? It’s true. But here is the big point: **Not everything makes a deposit, and the things that make a deposit with a man are not what makes a deposit with a woman.**
   So….
   o Name the 3 things that make deposits with a husband.

   o Name the 3 things that make a deposit with your wife?

   o Name the 3 things that made a deposit with one of your children

   o Name the 3 things that made a deposit with your parents.

   • Part of cherishing a person is knowing the answers to those questions and intentionally doing those things. Honestly rate yourself in each category on a scale of 1-10.
• Meditate: Let God speak. What 1 thing could you do that would improve your rating?

3. Think about this:

You can’t win an argument. Why? Because if you lose, you lose. If you win logically, you still lose. Why? Because of how you made the other person feel which means big deducts in the Love Bank.

Think about how they feel. You shot holes in their thinking. You deflated their opinion. You feel triumphant. But how do they feel? Beaten up. Inferior. Resentful. You can’t win an argument. The real danger is that an argument can become heated, and hurtful words are said.

In Shakespeare’s play Hamlet one of the most famous lines is when Hamlet, angry at his mother, says “I will speak daggers to her heart but use none.”

When we are trying to win an argument, that is what happens. Dostoevsky said that words are only puffs of air. But he is wrong. Words can be daggers that make wounds of the heart that never really heal.

So David in Psalm 139 writes about what he calls “mouth sins.” He says, “I will guard my mouth that I might not sin with my tongue.” Mouth sins.

Mouth sins never make the other person feel cherished. I wonder if any of us struggle with mouth sins?

• Underline the most important sentence and say why you agree or disagree.

• What does David mean by ‘mouth sins’? Name at least 2 mouth sins.

• If you find yourself in an argument, what should you do? The answer is not to give up communicating.

The issue is how to prevent an argument from wounding and yet make your point. These verses are a hint. Please summarize in your own words each of the following:

  o James 1:19

  o Proverbs 10:19

  o “When you talk you are repeating what you already know; when you listen you might learn something new!”

  o Listening helps us stand in the other person’s shoes and see things from their angle. It can turn an argument into closeness.

4. What do you think of this?

3rd, nothing makes a bigger deposit or says “I cherish you” better than listening.
Most communication is “Dialogues of the deaf.” People not actually listening but only thinking of what they will say next. Conversations of the deaf. Cherishing someone is working at really listening so that we can stand in their shoes.

What’s it like to work where they do? What’s it like to have their worries? Listening is a form of cherishing because it says I want to know what it’s like to be you.

This is just huge. Freud called “listening a cure.” He meant that people often simply need to be listened to and understood, to have someone to listen and understand what it’s like to be them. It’s the ministry of listening.

Our children need us to listen and not hurry them up or cut them off. One of the worst things we can do is say we are too busy to listen to them. It communicates to a 4 year old that their ideas matter and that they are important.

And it may be that one of your parents needs you to listen to them, without criticism or giving advice, but just listen and stand in their shoes and feel what it’s like to be them. You would be amazed at what that would do for your relationship. Just make up your mind to listen without criticism. So you understand what it is like to be them at their age.

It makes enormous deposits. People don’t need our brilliant advice as much as our ears. To cherish is the next step beyond love, and that means to listen more and talk less. The quieter we become the more we can hear and understand.

• Underline the most important or challenging sentence and say why.

• That quote said listening is a form of cherishing. Why? Is that true or not?

5. What is the biggest thing this study made you think about? How do you plan to ‘do’ it, apply it?

Memory verse:
Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger (James 1:19)
1. Please read Proverbs 18:21 and write in your own words what it says about relationships.

2. Consider this
   
   There is a proven way to predict if a marriage will be happy or unhappy and end in divorce. It was developed by Dr. John Gottman who is considered the world’s most insightful marriage counselor. He has interviewed and followed thousands of marriages over the last 40 years. He interviews a couple for 15 minutes, and then with 94% accuracy can predict happiness or divorce. 94% of the time he is right.
   
   How does he do it? He looks for what he calls “The 4 horsemen of the Apocalypse or the End of Time.”
   
   In 5 weeks I’m beginning a series on the Book of Revelation and what it says about the end of time. I’ll be speaking about these 4 horsemen that the Bible says will signal the end of time is coming.
   
   Gottman applies that to relationships. His 4 horsemen are 4 behaviors that almost always indicate the end of a marriage is coming. They are:
   - Constant criticism
   - Contempt
   - Stonewalling – tuning out a person
   - Defensiveness – “You’re the problem, not me.” No admitting
   
   There are many reasons marriages become unhappy but at the top of the list is constant criticism.
   
   • Why do you think criticism is so damaging to any relationship?
   - (Personal and private so be honest with yourself) Since Christmas, on a scale of 1-10 how critical have you been with people: children, spouse, people at church, at work? Does criticizing work for you?

3. What does Philippians 4:8 say about criticism?
   
   • We can’t be lazy and do that. It takes effort to bend our mind away from negativity. What do you think? How could it help tame the habit of criticizing?

4. What do you think about this:
   
   The Bible says the sins of the parents will be passed on to the 3rd and 4th generation. That means when we marry, our parents move in with us - - even if they are dead!
That is sooo true. We do marriage and parenting like we saw our parents do it. Unless there has been an intervention to wake us up – and that is what I call Bible study – it is an intervention and so is biblical preaching – unless there has been an intervention in our heart and mind, we will think that how our parents behaved is normal and repeat their behaviors.

That is why in a very deep sense we often pay for the sins of our parents or his or her parents in our marriage.

Often in counseling I will ask them to tell me about their parents, and they realize that they are repeating the same attitudes and behaviors – their parents moved in even if they are dead.

Have you ever thought about how sometimes you mirror your parents? It’s worth thinking about.

It is very very hard to convince a person who grew up in a family where there was constant criticism that it is a loser’s game. They think it is normal because it was normal in their family.

And the 1st horseman of the end has galloped into their home. Constant criticism will close a person’s heart to you.

People are like sea urchins in the ocean. They are gorgeous in shallow water, but sometimes people will take a stick and poke them. They close up to protect themselves. Criticism pokes a child’s heart or your mate’s heart. Their heart closes up to you to protect themselves.

My guess is that some hearts here this morning have closed. Criticism is a loser’s game.

• What do I mean that you can pay for the sins of your spouse’s parents? That is why it is so important to be in a Bible study and be in worship where we can hear things that ‘wake us up’.

• Maybe you realize that your ex or your spouse is a lot like one of their parents and you are paying for that parent’s sins. Is that true for anyone in your group? If so, what can you do?

• What else in that quote stands out to you? How can you apply it in your relationships?

5. Consider this:

The good news is that there are better ways than criticism.

1st, chose to stand in their shoes and feel what they feel. It’s called empathy. Empathy is standing in their shoes. It is seeing things from their point of view. It’s hearing what we say to them what our tone of voice communicates to them. It’s understanding what they hear when we talk. That takes work. But love is work.

I am convinced that the single most important skill and choice in any relationship, even a supervisor with an employee, is empathy.

Here is what empathy gets you:

- You stop feeling the need to criticize
- Nagging disappears
- Conflict is shortened
- You become close emotionally

I absolutely love Joyce Meyer’s book Help Me! I’m Married! My favorite part is her description of all the faults her husband had and how she had to criticize him to improve him. Then she wrote this:
“But God said to me, ‘Dave is not the problem.’ I couldn’t believe it. I had this long list of how he needed to change and improve. Then God said it again, ‘Dave is not the problem.’ And then God showed me what it was like to live with me. I saw that I was a nag, critical, and hard to get along with. I cried for 3 days.!”

She finally stood in his shoes and realized what it was like to live with her constant criticism.

We criticize because we want to change a person. We want to improve them. Usually that means we want them to be like us, have our wants and our way of thinking.

We are trying to change a zebra into a horse! But a zebra’s stripes aren’t wrong; God gave them stripes for good reasons.

The stripes actually confuse a lion chasing them and protect them. There are other good reasons zebras are different than horses.

- Underline the most important sentence and say why it matters?

- What is the point of the zebra example? How does it apply to relationships with a child, with a spouse?

- Personal and private so be honest. Meditate on this a few minutes. Describe what it is like to live with you. Think about your assets but also your defects, your sins in attitude and behavior, especially your mouth. Are you fun? Critical. Got a temper? A mouth? Are you encouraging or critical? Etc.

- Think of Jesus’ Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Name one way that would change you at home and at work.

6. Think about this:

2ndly, instead of criticizing, ask in a positive way what you need.

Susie is so good at doing this with me. She flies under my male defensive radar. Here is an example. She comes into my study at home and surveys all the books and papers piled high on the floor and that my desk is overflowing with more books and papers. She could say “Is this room a pigpen or a junk yard? Mike you need to stop living like a homeless person and clean this up. It’s an embarrassment to me.”

She would be right in her criticism, but what do you think it would get her?

Instead she says, “Can I help you clean up. Would you like that?”

And so what do I say, “No. This is my filing system. I like the way it is. I know where everything is.”

At least she avoided a fight.

Maybe you wish your wife would spend more time with you. You could accuse her of bad things. Or you could say “I miss you. Could I help you in some way so that we have more time together. Could I help you with the children that would free you up. And maybe we could have a date Thursday night like we use to?”

Ask for what you need in a positive way. It will get you farther than criticism.

When I was visiting family last year in Phoenix, I read a story in the Arizona Republic about Terry Mickel who was late for class at the University of Arizona and he was speeding down the highway. A highway patrolman pulled him over but when Terry explained that he
was late for a big class and that was why he was speeding and that he was sorry, the patrolman took pity on him and let him off with a warning. The patrolman simply said “Slow down and drive safe” and he started to walk back to his patrol car.

But Terry couldn’t resist criticizing him. He called out the window “Excuse me officer. You mean slow down and drive safely. Safe is an adjective. The correct word is an adverb to modify the verb - - safely not safe.”

The officer walked back and wrote him a $145 speeding ticket.

No one likes to be criticized even if they’re wrong. In a marriage I would say it this way: If you want honey, stop kicking the beehive.

- Please underline the most important sentence and say why.

- How does it apply to life; what difference could it make?

Pray

Memory: The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit. (Proverbs 18:21)
“How To Turn Conflict Into Closeness”
James 1:19-26
Compass of Salinas/Marina
Life Group Discussions
March #3

1. Please read James 1:19-26 several times. Write at least one insight from those verses that could turn an argument into closeness and tell us how it could help.

- Give the biggest reason in your opinion why people have a hard time living the verse you chose.

2. Consider the following:

The key verse is James 1 verse 19. It says: “Be slow to speak, quick to listen, and slow to anger.” (James 1:19)

That single simple verse in the Bible will turn conflict into closeness. It is contrary to our natural impulses. It is contrary to how we naturally react to conflict. But that is exactly why James 1 verse 19 will improve ANY relationship. So what does it say to do?

1st, 3 seconds determines if this conflict will draw you closer or push you apart. 3 seconds. Tick. Tick. Tick. 3 seconds is how much time we have to choose to go with a destructive impulse or against our natural impulse. The impulse to yell. To spew out crude profanity, to attack, to slam doors and walk out.

Closeness depends on which impulses we obey and which we make obey God’s Word. In conflict what are your impulses? Do you usually steamroll verbally. Do you verbally dominate the other. Is your goal to get your way or prove the other wrong? That is exactly why most people are quick to speak.

But the Bible says “Be slow to speak.” Why?

Because of the 3 second rule in how to have a good argument. The 3 second rule says before you speak, think about the effect of what you are about to say will have on the other person. The 3 second rule gives us time to challenge our destructive impulses. Be slow to speak. (James 1:19) Give yourself 3 seconds to taste your words before you say things you can’t take back.

Words can be a form of verbal stoning. Hasn’t anyone here been verbally stoned by someone, maybe even last week?

Our words do things to people. Job says to his friends: “How long will you crush me with your words? (Job 19:2)

James in verse 26 says “If you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.” (James 1:26)

It turns out that God measures spirituality by our mouth. Many Christians do not have a Christian tongue. I’m sorry to say that but it is a fact. Their tongue is unconverted to Jesus especially in an argument. They may have gone to church on Sunday but on Monday in an argument their mouth turns pagan.

Be slow to speak. Give yourself 3 seconds to taste your words before you let them fly because once said, words are like toothpaste. They are hard to put back in the tube.

Only God gives us credit for angry words we do not speak.

- Underline the most important sentence and say why you think so.
• Why is the 3 second rule so difficult for most of us to follow?

• What specific advice would you give that we do to keep the 3 second rule and fulfill James 1:26?

• Which of these quotes do you like best? Tell us why.
  “Sometimes saying nothing is the best answer because silence can never be misquoted.”
  “Never trust your mouth when you are angry.”
  “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all. And DON’T write it on Facebook either!”
  “Keeping your mouth shut often can save you from apologizing later.”

3. Read this slowly:
   2ndly James says “Be quick to listen” (James 1:19) You don’t build closeness by winning arguments.
   It is the 3 second rule again. You have 3 seconds to decide - - “Do I want to win an argument, do I want to prove my opinion is right and theirs is wrong? Do I want to get my way or do I want to end up closer after everything is said?
   You don’t build a closer relationship by winning arguments. Listening is usually not our first impulse in conflict is it?
   Kate Murphy has written a fascinating book that pleads for us ‘to be quick to listen.” The title is You’re Not Listening: What You Are Missing And Why It Matters!
   She rightly says that HEARING is passive whereas LISTENING is active. Love is work, and its main work is listening.
   She interviews counselors, FBI agents, and doctors to try to understand why most of us are bad at listening. She says most people tell her they are very good listeners but interrupt and cut her off or keep looking at their iPhone.
   She concludes that technology has made us poor listeners because we want things said in sound bites. The speed of technology has groomed us to be impatient, which is a problem because listening is a form of waiting.
   That’s why people hurry up their children or each other by interrupting, or finishing their sentence, or tapping their fingers. In an era when speed is everything, listening is rare.
   So what? What do we miss? Well, for starters we miss intimacy, closeness – because that depends on understanding what it is like to be the other person.
   Listening is a form of honoring the other - - their feelings, their wounds, their opinions. Listening communicates that all those things are important because the other person is important to you.
   Listening communicates respect. Interrupting or dominating the other person verbally communicates disrespect and is unbelievably dishonoring.
   The quieter you become the more you understand, and the more you understand the more understanding you are and the closer you become.
   Most people do not listen to understand. They are only waiting for their turn to talk and win the argument.
Conversations with the deaf. Does anyone know what that’s like?

- Underline the most important sentence and say why.

- “Conversations with the deaf.” What does that mean?

- Those conversations drive a wedge between people. One of the best ways to turn conflict into closeness is to listen and ask questions that show you really care and are interested in what they think. This is ACTIVE LISTENING. Is that true? Why do you think that kind of listening can actually build a friendship and closeness even with a child or someone at work?

- On a scale of 1 to 10, how good a listener are you?
  Think of ONE discipline you might begin to help you be a better listener. For example, asking questions rather than waiting for a chance to break in.

4. Beware of the dump truck game. Consider this:

   **Have you ever played the dump truck game?**
   It’s when you are angry and you back up your truck full of dirt you have collected over time on a person – all their mistakes and wrong things done – you back up your truck and dump on the other person.
   It’s getting historical in conflicts. Historical….ventilating all the grievances and grudges you have on file against them. It’s throwing up the past in their face in order to win an argument.
   Legions of couples do this. It does not build closeness. 10 years ago you…. 18 years ago you said…. 3 years ago you cheated on me and on and on.
   The dump truck game. Anyone played it?
   Next time stop for 3 seconds and ask yourself—will this game bring us closer together?

   *Be slow to speak, quick to listen, slow to anger.* (James 1:19)

- In your own words, explain what the dump truck game is.

- What is the problem with that game in a relationship or even at work if you are a supervisor?

- Maybe at work or in your family there is someone who loves this game: What is your best advice to the rest of us about what to do?

Pray for each other.

Memory verse: **“Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.”** (James 1:26)
1. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-4 carefully. List 4 things the Bible says love does not do.

2. Consider the follow details about a narcissist:

   The hardest relationship in the world is with a narcissist. The hardest marriage in the world is with a narcissist. The hardest boss or supervisor to ever have is with a narcissist. You will never be good enough for them. So how can you survive?

   The 2nd reason I’m doing this message is because when I announced this series and gave the title of this sermon, a huge number of people called the office and asked what Sunday this sermon would be delivered. They wanted to be here. Evidently there are a lot of narcissists out there and they are doing a lot of damage and people are having trouble surviving!

   “Survive” is the right word in the title because a narcissist is emotionally abusive. Most of us think of narcissism as merely being selfish. But it is much more serious than that.

   Narcissism is emotionally abusive and damaging to people.

   The 3rd reason for this message is that narcissism is a sin in the Bible. It’s a sin because it REJECTS God’s commandments about love. 1 Corinthians 13 verse 4 says; “Love is not rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not easily angered or resentful. It does not punish or seek revenge.”

   A narcissistic person disobey that verse. He or she does all those things God forbids. A narcissist is always, always a REBEL against God. God’s rules don’t apply to them.

   You have never met a happy narcissist. They are never happy people and they don’t want you to be happy either.

   Let me describe a narcissist. Rarely are all these traits found in a single person, but if 3 or 4 of them apply, ESPECIALLY ANY OF THE FIRST 5, THEN that person is a narcissist.

#1 A narcissist is Controlling.

1 Corinthians says, “Love does not insist on its own way.”

But that is exactly what a narcissist does. They want their way, their opinions, their decisions to prevail and they are angry if anyone disagrees.

I LOVE THIS CARTOON

A narcissist is all about controlling people

#2 if you don’t cave and do what they want, if you dare to challenge them, then you can expect the 2nd characteristic of a narcissist which is.

   Punishment – you will pay

   Vindictive – they will get revenge

   Underline the sentences that are most alarming to you and say why. How would this behavior affect a marriage or a parent-child relationship? Spell that out remembering that a narcissist
never confesses or admits anything. They don’t see the problem. So spell out the effect they have in a marriage or family.

- “You have never met a happy narcissist”. They may smile, laugh, even be an extravert, but a narcissist destroys their own happiness. How? What about a narcissist’s behavior and attitudes squashes being happy?

- Name at least 3 ways a narcissist will try to control you. Think of one at work or in your extended family or even a parent.

3. Consider the following:
   The 3rd trait of narcissistic people is they will punish you in order to control you.
   A favorite punishment is to withdraw emotionally. They will go silent for a couple of days.
   They will become cold and distant. They know you hate this. It has worked before. You have caved so they will do it again.
   You are being manipulated and you have brought it on yourself because you have caved before.
   You know you are in a relationship with a narcissist if it is a rollercoaster.
   One day everything is good; it is an UP day. Then suddenly she or he is angry and punishing you and very cold to you.
   You are on a rollercoaster — it is a dead giveaway that you are dealing with a narcissist.
   You may wonder why a person doesn’t leave a narcissist. It is because a narcissist will give a little reward from time to time to keep a person hooked. A little sex, a little affection, a little affirmation. For a few days it’s nice and your hopes are up, but Hyde is coming. The narcissist is simply rewarding you to manipulate you and blind you with false hope.
   If your relationship is a rollercoaster, she or he is a narcissist.
   Remember Jekyll & Hyde the famous novel by Robert Louis Stevenson. The idea in the book is a person had 2 different personalities. One was a pleasant person and the other dangerous. He was a Jekyll sometimes and dangerous Hyde other times. That’s a narcissist.
   - Underline the most important sentence and explain why that behavior could actually control people.

4. Consider this carefully:
   The 4th trait of a narcissist is the truth enrages them. They refuse any form of accountability.
   If you are married to a narcissist or work for one, you will find yourself tiptoeing on eggshells. You never know what will offend them. You never know when Hyde will show up and the rollercoaster starts.
   In the home of a narcissist there is a lot of anger and rage because a narcissist is so often using anger to manipulate and to dominate.
The attitude of a narcissist is... How dare you say that. How dare you disagree with me. How dare you not do what I want.
Narcissistic people do not want to hear the truth. So you walk on eggshells to avoid their anger. That is a sure sign a narcissist is dominating and controlling you. There are topics forbidden and you have caved.
A narcissist will shift focus if you confront them.
If you protest something to a narcissist, if you ask for a change, they will accuse you of being a whiner, that you complain about everything and you're not grateful. They will do what is called - Shift focus from them to you.
Before you know it, you are defending yourself against being a complainer. You don’t realize it but - - You are slowly losing your personality and who you once were.
You are shrinking as a person because you are walking on eggshells and avoiding issues.
• List at least 2 things from that quote that a narcissist does.

• What does it means “they shift focus from them to you” in a confrontation?

• Do you know someone who does this? Describe what they do?
Now explain how to resist shifting focus? How do you stop them? Why is it so hard to be in a relationship with such a person?

• (Personal and private) Honestly, do you often shift focus with your spouse or someone who challenges you? It is an avoidance tactic, and it means we don’t change because we are always shifting focus off of us. Think about the last time you did this.... What was the issue you wanted to shift focus on?

5. Consider this quote:
   A narcissistic person lies. They avoid things by lying.
   They will lie to avoid accountability. They will lie to hide things from their spouse. They will lie to control their spouse’s opinion about someone they do not like. Even if you catch them lying, they will make excuses to prove their lies are true!
   They will convince you that you don’t trust them, that you are cynical. It’s your fault.
   IT IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO GET A NARCISSIST TO ADMIT ANYTHING.
   THIS IS a KEY; A narcissist always claims to be innocent and shifts the guilt to others.
   One of the most powerful ways they manipulate people is they play the victim.
   The narcissist making people feel sorry for them is amazing to watch. The narcissistic person can do something wrong and what do people do? They make excuses for them. It’s the most amazing thing to watch. They will make excuses and say the narcissistic person did something bad but it’s understandable because of this or that.
   A victim is very hard to confront or hold accountable. They get away with horrible things. So if a person at work or in your family has 3 or more of the traits that you see on the screen, you are in a relationship with a narcissist.
   Narcissistic Traits
   • They are controlling
   • They punish you for not caving to their will.
   • They resent confrontation and reject it
• They blame you for their behavior
• They lie
• They play the victim to get sympathy and to change the topic
• The rules don’t apply to them
• They reject being held accountable.
• They rage to intimidate
• They can be charming
• Periodically they will give you a reward to keep you hooked, but Hyde will be back!
• They punish you for not caving to what they want.

I want to say this to singles: if you are dating someone who displays these narcissistic traits, no matter how charming, no matter how good looking or beautiful, run. Hyde is coming. Don’t think after the wedding you can change them. You can’t.

• Underline what behavior makes a narcissist so difficult, and in fact short on real friends.

• They play the victim. Know anyone like that? It is a very powerful way to gather an army, to get control of compassionate/feelers. If compassion is one of your strengths, you are an easy target for a narcissist. In fact, they will wrap gossip up in their victim stories and turn you against someone. Describe why playing the victim is such a powerful way to control people.

6. So how can we survive a narcissist and avoid being their victim. Consider the following:
   1) Whatever it takes, find courage to draw boundary lines for behavior.
      It takes immense courage. A narcissist can rage, yell, threaten you, and be malevolently cruel... But find the courage to draw boundaries lines: no more raging, or lying, or making excuses. You must draw boundary lines because whatever you allow....will continue.
      This means we must not let the drama they create make us backdown. And creating drama is a favorite tactic of a narcissist, yelling, rage, growing cold to you. They hope you will cave – peace at any price. But you must not be manipulated by it because whatever you allow...will continue.
      Ask yourself. Is this how I want our family, marriage to be? If it isn’t, stop allowing it. Draw boundary lines.
   2) Stop taking the bait. Remember: Happy people never put other people in charge of their happiness.
      One of the most important ways to survive a narcissist is to choose to be happy even if they are not. It drives them crazy.
      Happiness is a choice. If they choose not to be happy, let them. You can’t force a person to be happy but you can choose not to put them in charge of YOUR happiness.
      I’m not saying what is easy. It will be very hard because a narcissist is a pro at making us feel guilty if we are happy and they are not. Don’t take the bait. Be happy even if they refuse to be.
      That’s called being independent, it is a key to surviving a narcissist.
      Stop being responsible for their happiness. It’s a trap. They have to make their own choices.
• Underline the most helpful or challenging sentence for you and say why.

• What does it mean “not to take the bait”? 
• Explain why not to take the bait is so hard for some of us.

• Have you ‘taken the bait’ lately? Why did you bite? Honestly, are you prone to taking the bait? If you are, realize you are ‘enabling’. You are making the person worse because they have found a way to control you and it’s like giving drugs to an addict!...They make us feel callous if we don’t take the bait, but realize you are being manipulated.

• “Happiness is a choice. If they choose to be unhappy, let them.” Why? If we are an enabler, we think it is our responsibility to make them happy. We are wrong. Why?
   It is a controlling tactic that actually makes a narcissist worse. They never learn that controlling people and getting their way is not the key to happiness.
   React to that. Why is it true? Why is it a challenge? Why must we believe this?

7. What was the most important thing you learned in this study and say how it applies to your relationships.

Pray for each other
In this series on relationships I tested with the congregation the need for various issues. The response to narcissism stunned me. It was unexpected. We received more calls at the office about this than anything in memory. Obviously people struggle with people who practice this social disorder. I did not have to define the word; everyone knew what it meant and had firsthand experience. That is sad. Those of us who are counselors know that narcissism wrecks relationships of all kinds. Worse, it is very damaging to people. Thus this sermon. I hope you dive deep in your thinking and discussions.

1. These opening paragraphs in the message are incredibly important to absorb so we know this behavior is not to be tolerated.

   **People of the Lie.** That’s the title of one of the best books about narcissism. It’s written by Scott Peck, the famous Harvard psychiatrist.

   He details with case studies how narcissistic people are people of the lie. Everyone sooner or later lies, but lying is what a narcissist does…and constantly. And they lie so brilliantly that even people close to them can’t tell. They are **People of The Lie.**

   Peck says that is why they are some of the most difficult people to counsel. They lie to blame-shift to refuse admitting any wrong, and because of that Peck says sometimes he has had to terminate counseling them. He says that he cannot help a person who lies and pretends INNOCENCE.

   PECK says they are PEOPLE OF THE LIE because narcissists are masters of deceit and acting.

   They lie to charm people. They can be very charming. They can make you feel special and important to them but in fact they are manipulating you and getting control of you. The charm will only last as long as you are their puppet.

   They will convince you they are innocent or a victim and then manipulate you to punish someone they are angry at.

   Peck says: The chief characteristic of narcissists is their will is **unsubmitted** to any **authority**—not to God’s Word or any **authority.** They refuse any form of authority. People of the lie. They are dangerous and very damaging to people and organizations because rules and morals do not apply to them.

   One of Aesop’s most famous fables is about the scorpion talking a frog into giving him a ride across a river. The scorpion could not swim and so he begged the frog to let him ride on his back. The frog said, “No. I’m afraid you will sting me.” The scorpion promised that he would not do that. But when they got close to the other side of the river the scorpion stung the frog. And the frog said, “You promised me. Why did you sting me?” The scorpion said, “I’m a scorpion and that’s what scorpions do.”

   The narcissist will damage you and they will cause drama and chaos and division because, like the scorpion, that’s what they do. It’s important to understand the characteristics of a narcissist because this is what makes them so damaging…..and SNEAKY.

   - Underline the most important or shocking sentence and say why.

   - Why did Peck title his book *People Of The Lie?*
• What, according to the Peck, is the chief characteristic of a narcissist?

• Tell us how that characteristic will affect how they react to Elder authority in the church? What might they do to authority?

• What is the point of Aesop’s fable and the narcissist?

2. Consider this:

This is very important: a narcissist is dedicated to creating an image of being a lovely, innocent, sinless person. They must convince people of this in order to manipulate them to be their defenders and soldiers if needed.

Most people think a narcissist is simply a self-centered person like the one on the screen kissing his reflection on the mirror.

The fact is a narcissist can be very unselfish in their time and money. Selfishness is not the key indicator. A narcissist is a much more complex person.

Let me show you their characteristics.

A Narcissist

- Controlling and manipulating by rage, threats, sex, lies.
- Cave to their will or be punished.
- Refusal to be accountable or hear criticisms.
- Refusal to hear correction.
- Excuses are their best friend.
- They love leadership roles as a stage for attention, power, praise and GLORY.
- Rules, policies, even God’s Word, do not apply to them. They are an exception.
- In the battle to never be wrong, they will try to destroy anyone who exposes them.
- Narcissists do not battle honestly. They employ deception and lies to ‘win’. They are People of the Lie.
- They blame-shift: you are the problem, not me.
- They are masterful actors.
- They are likely to have an affair because they want what they want.
- Their favorite acting role is playing a victim because it manipulates people to feel sorry for them and forget their behavior.
- They are pros at gossip that looks innocent but creates division.
- They will try to bully people with anger or threats.
- Narcissists are in an almost continual state of anger…even though hidden.
- They rarely admit anything; guilt is foreign to them
- Passive aggressiveness is a favorite tool because it looks innocent.

No wonder Peck called them dangerous and People of the Lie.

• Underline the trait that you think is most dangerous about a narcissist and say why?

3. Consider these Scriptures and sum up in a sentence how each verse challenges narcissism.

• Philippians 2:4-7
4. How do you protect yourself? Consider the following:
   1st, draw **boundary lines** and hold firm!
   This is so hard with a narcissist. They are rule breakers so they will resist. They will want you to defend your boundary lines. But you must say to the narcissist
   Learn to say “NO” without defending or explaining. “NO” is a complete sentence.
   Boundary lines communicate self-respect. They indicate how you want to be loved and respected. Boundary lines are how you communicate what you will not tolerate and what it means to love you.
   God did not create you to be controlled or abused by another person!!! Remember: The only person who will be upset about you setting boundary lines is the person who has taken advantage of you having none!
   If you do not set boundaries, then you are ENABLING them. You are letting them continue to be abusive. Keep saying to yourself this: What you allow…will continue. You will get what you tolerate.
   What I am trying to convince you of is this: Boundary lines are an effective form of confrontation because they communicate you will no longer tolerate what you have been tolerating.
   If a narcissist rages at you when you establish boundaries, don’t stand there and take the verbal beating. You are not their punching bag. Walk out of the room. Sleep in a different bedroom. They are manipulating you. Don’t cave and don’t argue because you will never win an argument with a narcissist.
   Whatever you put up with…you end up with. “No” is a complete sentence.
   Underline the most important section in your opinion and say why.

   - This is not easy to do with a narcissist. They will pout, punish you, yell, try to guilt you out. Keep remembering that giving in doesn’t heal them. It feeds their disorder and makes them worse. Stand form for their sakes and yours.
   So what is the hardest part of doing that for most people do you think?

5. Consider this:
   2nd Do yourself a favor and forgive the unforgivable.
   Forgiving is the hardest form of loving other people as Jesus has loved us. He said love one another as I have loved you. Well, that means forgiving the unforgivable as He has forgiven us.
   One of my favorite places in Israel to take people is a church built on the very spot where Jesus forgave Peter for betraying Him 3 times. That’s the significance of the stones shaped as hearts. Peter thought he had done the unforgivable. But Jesus forgave him of the unforgivable.
   It’s so very hard for me to describe what it’s like to stand where Peter and Jesus stood, to hear the Scripture read about how Jesus forgave Peter. We always meditate on Jesus’ forgiveness here and we take communion. And one of the things most all of us confess is that
there are people we have not yet forgiven. We take communion and confess this and I can tell you that people do not leave here the same as when they came.

Forgiving is very hard. It feels like a gyp. It feels like we are letting them get away with what they did.

But the Word of God says that forgiving someone is a gift you give to yourself!

Jesus told a story about a man who was forgiven of a great deal by the king. But that servant, who had been forgiven so much, refused to forgive another person of something very small compared to what he had been forgiven. Jesus ended the story by saying that the king gave that servant over to the torturer.

Torture. Mental torture as we rehearse what we refuse to forgive. And rehearse what they have done.

Forgiving is a way to move on without the baggage of anger. It’s a way to Detach. Detachment is unhooking emotionally. It’s taking back your emotions - - your peace and happiness.

We cannot detach if we refuse to let it go. If we refuse to forgive, we have fallen into their trap. They want you to be angry and unforgiving. They want drama. Why? Because whoever makes you angry controls you. You are chained to them by your anger. Forgive and break the chain.

• Forgive a narcissist? Are you kidding? They have damaged you, caused you emotional stress and worse! So what in that quote are some very good reasons to forgive them?

• That does not mean erase boundaries. It does not mean tolerate more of their behavior. If not, then what does it means to forgive a narcissist? How do you know if you have forgiven?

6. Finally, here is a big key to protecting yourself.

Protect yourself from a narcissist by counting your blessings in the morning and every night.

Don’t let a narcissist steal your joy. They are unhappy so they don’t want you to be happy. You need to be defiant by practicing thankfulness for all your blessings. People who feel blessed are those who count their blessings. It’s your best protection against a narcissist!

A relationship with a narcissist is a rollercoaster. You can’t change them but you can get off the rollercoaster by counting your blessings. Seriously. Your life is bigger than the things they do.

Happiness is a choice. Your happiness is your responsibility. Never make a narcissist responsible to make you happy! That is your responsibility! It is called being INDEPENDENT!

Unfortunately I cannot end this message without recognizing that sometimes a narcissist is so emotionally abusive and controlling that you realize a person can stay in your heart but not be allowed to stay in your life.

It happened in Susie’s and my extended family. One of the family members married an emotionally damaging person. He was every characteristic in spades. The only way she could protect herself and her child was to close the book.

And that’s a bit of a warning to any narcissist. There might come a day when the other says that they’ve had enough and they leave as a last step to protect themselves from abuse. ….It happens.

It’s a very good thing for all of us to ask. What’s it like to live with me?

• I am amazed at how many people forfeit their joy to the behavior of others and then blame the other person when in fact no one can TAKE YOUR JOY. We are responsible for our choices. So
underline the most important sentences in that quote for taking responsibility for your own joy and say why!

- What did you think about this quote: “Happiness is a choice. Your happiness is your responsibility. It’s called being independent!” React. Is that true or false. Say why.

- If it is true, what are one are 2 very big implications for us and our happiness?

- **Read Galatians 5:22.** The Bible is contrasting the fruit of the Holy Spirit to ‘the works of the flesh’, that is, natural man or woman who is not under the control of God’s Spirit.
  Christian atheists are like that – they believe in God but are not under the control of God’s Spirit. That verse says that joy is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean?

- According to that verse, if a Christian is not walking in joy despite people’s behavior, what does it mean?

7. What is the single biggest thing in the study that you feel the Holy Spirit nudging you on? Be as honest as you can. What will you do?

Pray for each other.
“Anger: The Biggest Enemy of Relationships”
Ephesians 4:26-30
Compass of Salinas/Marina
Life Group Discussions
April #3

1. Our discussion today is about anger. Let’s begin by looking at some relevant Scriptures in the Bible. Please read each of them and then in your own words summarize what each passage teaches us.
   - Ephesians 4:26-27
   - James 1:19-20
   - Proverbs 15:18
   - Proverbs 29:11

2. Consider the following quote from the message:
   Anger is the single biggest enemy of any relationship. It is the #1 reason for divorce and it can ruin a night of romance, can’t it?
   If I were asked “What is anger, I would say: Anger is punishing ourself for someone else’s behavior.
   That is why the Bible says don’t let the sun go down on your anger. Don’t punish yourself for someone else’s behavior.
   A night spent angry is a night wasted. And yet one of the hardest things for a marriage counselor to do is to get a person to admit they have an anger problem. Can you guess why?
   They aren’t yellers. They think if they don’t raise their voice, they don’t have an anger problem.
   Paul Tournier, the great Christian marriage counselor, said, “The angriest people are not yellers. They do not raise their voice. They are soft-spoken. Their anger is sneaky anger!”
   SNEAKY ANGER. Know anyone who has sneaky anger? They stab you in the back at work. If looks could kill, you’d be dead. You pass in the hallway at work and they hardly say “hello.”
   But they would deny they are angry. It’s really amazing how ANGRY people deny they are angry.
   Underline the most important sentence in that quote and say why.

   I defined anger as “Punishing ourself for someone else’s behavior”. Think about that. Why is that true? Explain.

   Most people think that you have an anger problem only if you’re a yeller. But a far more serious form of anger is “sneaky anger.” What is that…and why is it so dangerous?
3. Consider the following quote from Dr. Les Carter who is one of the most respected Christian psychiatrist specializing in anger. He writes:

   Dr. Les Carter is a Christian psychiatrist at the famous Minirth-Meyer Institute. He’s written a terrific book entitled Getting The Best Of Your Anger.

   He says there are many forms of anger besides yelling. So Carter devised a little test to see if we have other forms of anger besides yelling. As I read his questions, keep count with your fingers on your right hand.

   So let me read his questions and you count the number of times on your fingers when you answer yes. And by the way, please do not help the person next to you keep count. Keep your hands off their fingers!

   So here is the questionnaire.

   1) I’m a perfectionist: I like things done the right way which is my way. 2) I don’t like people to give me suggestions. 3) I notice when I don’t get credit for what I do. 4) I often have critical thoughts about people but it’s because I have high standards. 5) I am very competitive and don’t like to lose. 6) I hate criticism. 7) I sometimes talk behind a person’s back. 8) I’m pretty sensitive about how people treat me. 9) I tend to say what I think because I’m honest. 10) If I dislike someone I tend to avoid them and not speak to them. 11) I can be stubborn. 12) If people don’t do it my way, I’m upset. 13) I have to admit I’m rebellious against authority. I don’t like authority over me. 14) I don’t let people bother me because I just don’t care. 15) I often interrupt people when they’re speaking. 16) I don’t like to work in groups or committees. 17) I’m not a very good listener. If a person offends me, I treat them as invisible and drop them. 18) I treat people the way they deserve to be treated. 19) If I’m honest, I have to admit I get offended pretty frequently. 20) I’m angry that you’re giving me this test, and I refuse to take it on the basis of my 5th amendment rights.

   Some of you ran out of fingers and had to use your toes didn’t you.

   If you answered yes to 2 questions or less, you handle your anger very well. If you answered yes to 3 or more you should buy the tape and Carter’s book.

   One of the most interesting things Carter says is that 90% of us are skilled at hiding our anger.

   But not showing anger is not the same as being anger-free. Hiding anger is not a solution to anger. It simply lets the sun go down on our anger.

   • Please take his questionnaire and seriously. Underline whatever describes you at times. Then in your group share how you might overcome these “triggers” to your anger.

   • Carter says “Not showing anger is not the same as being anger-free.” A lot of people think that it is. In a few sentences say why Carter is right - - that it’s not the same as being anger-free.

4. So how do we tame our anger? Consider the following quote.

   1st, when you are angry remember that God gives credit for words you do not speak. When we are angry, pause before you speak. Anger is the most dangerous moment in a relationship to speak.

   Pause. God will give you credit for angry words you do not speak. Anger makes the mouth work faster than the Holy Spirit in us. So pause and give the Holy Spirit a few moments to catch up.

   People will say “I’m just an honest person. I say what I think.” So your wife asks you “Do you think my hips look big in this dress honey?” And honestly, you think they are pretty big. Will you say what you think?
I Corinthians 13 says “Love always protects”.
There is such a thing as Murderous Truth. Somethings are best left unsaid because it is murderous truth…it is hurtful.
Last week I read something I thought was profound: The wise wife makes her husband glad to come home and the wise husband makes his wife sad to see him leave for work in the morning.
We don’t do that with angry words, do we? That applies to friendships too. Becoming an angry person does not make anyone glad to see us.

• Underline the most important sentence in your opinion and say why.

• A lot of people do excuse their anger by claiming that they are just honest. I gave an example to expose how people who say that don’t always blurt out their “honest opinion.” But as you think about that, how would you answer a person who excuses their anger as simply “being honest about my feelings”?

5. Consider the following quote from the sermon:

2ndly, the Bible says anger is not a sin but get rid of it quickly before it becomes sin.
Ephesians 4 verse 26 says: Don’t give the devil a foot (Tupos) in the door.”
Let me ask you: When was the last time you invited the devil into your sleepover? I’m serious. When was the last time you invited the devil into your home for a sleepover?
I bet some of us did it this last week. A lot of people do it every week. They say “Come on in devil. You can have the guest bedroom. I’ve got a place for you at the dinner table too but you can have the guest bedroom for a sleepover tonight.”
Ephesians 4 warns us not to invite the devil for a sleepover. You see the word “foot” or “foothold” is the Greek word Tupos: room or a place.
Tupos literally means “a place or room”. When we have unresolved anger that we let the sun go down on, we’re giving the devil the guest bedroom in our life. We’re inviting the devil for a sleepover and believe me, the devil is a GAB. He is a non-stop talker shooting negativity into our brain.
Here’s what happens: We get in an argument with someone in our family and the devil starts shouting from the back bedroom “Don’t forget what he did 3 months ago. And don’t you remember what he did to you in 2008 on VACATION? And don’t forget what he did in 2013 AT CHRISTMAS……”
The devil has a very long memory. He never forgets anything. And he’s in the back bedroom shouting…helping to remember all the bad things someone has done and he gets you angrier and angrier because you let him have a sleepover in a spare room in your home.
If you want to overcome anger, you’ve got to start saying “No” to the devil shouting from the back bedroom. You’ve got to plug your ears and change your thoughts to other things that are positive. You cannot stay passive and expect to stop anger from ruining a relationship. You must say NO to some thoughts that pop into your head. Thought stop.
Remember Cain in Genesis 4 was angry at his brother Abel. The fact is Abel had done nothing wrong. It was Cain who had been disobedient to God.
No matter. Angry people often make things up to justify their anger. Always have healthy skepticism about what an angry person tells you.
God gives Cain a warning that is still valid today. God says “Sin is crouching at your door.”
Anger turns people into vigilantes. It is why good people do bad things. Wrong is not wrong anymore if it gets revenge. Anger turns good people into vigilantes.
James 1 verse 20 says “Anger does not work the righteousness of God.”

- Underline the most important or challenging sentence and say why.

- Read again Ephesians 4 verse 26. What does it mean when it says don’t give the devil a foot in the door? How would you know if you’ve allowed the devil a foot in the door of your heart?

6. In the quote was a suggestion that in order to tame anger we’ve got to “thought stop.” But my experience is that people think that’s too hard. They often have a look on their face that says “I can’t do that” and so they don’t…and they don’t tame their anger. Refuse to “thought stop” and you can count on Satan supplying you with more ammunition. So why do people resist “thought stopping” or pretend that it’s too hard and impossible?

7. Consider the following quote about a 3rd suggestion for taming our anger.

3rd, in an argument, choose to drop your end of the rope.

Years ago I was in the middle of my sermon one Sunday when a woman, whom no one had ever seen before, stood and shouted: “You are the devil. Your preaching is from the devil himself.” And walked out.

If anyone had been dozing in the sermon, that woke them up! I have never seen such a wide awake audience. Everyone was wondering what I would do.

What would you have done? Been angry or embarrassed, shouted back at her? Closed the sermon in tears and dismissed the people.

I simply dropped my end of the rope. I said nothing, let her leave, and continued on with the sermon. I don’t have to attend every argument I’m invited to. I can drop my end of the rope.

Anger is not compulsory. We have other choices. We can listen instead of argue. The more I listen, the more I understand. And the more I understand, the more understanding I am!

Life is all about choices, isn’t it? This week make a HEALING CHOICE when you feel angry.

- What is the most important sentence in that quote and why?

- In the sermon I said “I don’t have to attend every argument I’m invited do.” Explain what that means. What would it look like? (Remember that often the anger of another person who is attacking us gets us angry and that’s the importance of choosing not to attend every argument.)

Pray for each other

Memory verse: “Anger does not work the righteousness of God.” (James 1:20)