

Hold Your Horses!

1 of 1 | The Four Horsemen of the Marriage Apocalypse

SLIDE 1 Introduction

In God's reality you don't become a father unless you are married to a mother. So raising a child is more than just your relationship with the child. The child's training and his outlook on life have a lot to do with how a man treats the child's mother. Again, in God's reality, that's your wife.

Today I want to talk about four things that you can do to greatly help your children and their relationships with others, including their spouses. None of these things cost any money and in many ways will cost you no extra time. But they do require a lot of effort. Sometimes it's like holding back a team of wild horses. Why? Because holding your tongue often proves to be the hardest thing you will do in your life.

SLIDE 2 A Team of Wild Horses

Conversation is fundamental to building relationships. Your words reveal who you are and they also let others know how you feel about them. God's the same way. Through his Word he reveals who he is to us and how he feels about us.

Knowing this, our words ought to be used to strengthen the relationships around us by building trust, affection, and love. However there are four horses that work against us in this endeavor. If you start riding one of these then you are going to bring destruction to what you have worked so hard to build.

SLIDE 3 The Four Horses of Destruction

I get this illustration from the 6th chapter of the book of Revelation. There it describes four horses that are unleashed on the earth in judgment—a white horse, a fiery red horse, a black horse, and a pale horse. (verses 2, 4, 5, and 8 respectively)

These four horses, and those who ride upon them, come to conquer, make people kill each other, pass judgment on people, and ultimately bring total destruction.

What's of the greatest note about what I am sharing today is that words have the same power. Sometimes we feel we just have to say something. We want to vindicate

ourselves, point out the problems of others because they aggravate us, or just to make ourselves look better than the one we are harassing

Whatever the motivation, it is not good to resort to horseplay. The Bible tells us:

SLIDE 4 1st Peter 4:11 (NIV) *"If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen."*

Our marriages should reflect this attitude. God has given us the power of words to build others up, to serve them, and to encourage them in their lives as we glorify God through out marriages. We should not use this power to criticize, show contempt for who others are, to be defensive, or to stonewall our spouses into fearful submission.

So let's look at each of these apocalyptic horsemen and the words on which they ride:

SLIDE 5 1. Criticism

The dictionary definition of "criticism" means the expression of disapproval of someone or something based on perceived faults or mistakes. Even though you may try to share your disapproval without slighting a person, most people take criticism personally. That means they think less of themselves. On the other hand, some become defensive and retaliate. Neither of these responses are what you want in a marriage—or any relationship, for that matter.

A *complaint* or a *concern* usually starts with the word "I." Whereas a *criticism* begins with the word "you." As in, "you do this" or, "you do that." As Richard Dobbins states, "'I' messages inform; 'you' messages inflame." If we are tearing a person down with our words, we are trying to weaken them so we can overpower them. This is not good for our relationships. To grow together you both have to "win."

This is usually the first horse out of the stall when marriages start to struggle. At first the criticism starts behind a person's back, then ends up face to face. Often it starts

with teasing and sarcasm, but builds into outward accusations.

This only serves to release the second and more sinister horseman of contempt.

SLIDE 6 2. Contempt

When criticism becomes pervasive, a person begins to feel assaulted, rejected, and injured by the perpetrator. If they are unable to defend themselves they end up losing respect for the other person and everything they say. This leads to contempt.

When a person has contempt for what you say to them, then you no longer wound them, but you also no longer influence them for the better. Now it's like everything you say is divisive and rejected.

This is where conversations become more like mockery, sarcasm, and ridicule. This is the level where there are disdainful facial expressions, eye rolling, scoffing, and name calling. Contempt attacks the character of a person and is extremely hazardous for a marriage.

This releases the third apocalyptic horseman—defensiveness.

SLIDE 7 3. Defensiveness

When faced with a complaint or a critique most people become either attentive or defensive. If they are listening, you can continue cautiously addressing the issue. If they become defensive, you are engaged in a battle and you must cause injury to win the day. Remember, if you are good-hearted, you came to this point to help, not harm—to benefit the other person, not demand your own way.

Even though it may seemingly be received, if it brings about a sense of guilt in the other person, you have not gained anything, except them examining you more closely to point out similar behavior for which they can attack you in return. Also this is where most people under attack begin to shift the blame to the other person—redirecting the bombs to fall in their own territory.

With this horseman on the loose, there will be no victory for either side. It just becomes a long drawn-out process of tearing each other down until there is nothing left. Remember: The horsemen are loosed to bring destruction—not reconstruction.

There is nothing constructive about what they do in our relationships.

SLIDE 8 4. Stonewalling

So what happens when the final horseman rides out to battle? Nothing. There is no strength left to fight. The person with the upper hand at that time will witness the other person shutting down. They will no longer care who you are, what you say, or what you do.

At this point you will hear things like “I don’t want to talk about it right now.” The other person will just start dwelling by themselves. They simply won’t include you in their activities anymore. For their final protection they may even retreat out of your life—sometimes completely. Open communication shuts down and the other person becomes totally disengaged.

SLIDE 9 Corraling the Horses

To keep this barrage of escalating destruction from destroying everything you have worked for in your marriage your first step must be a cease fire. We must also recognize that much of the initial criticisms come from our own self-centeredness and pride.

Recovering from the unleashing of these four horsemen must be intentional and focused. Getting things under control again only comes by working together for improvement and it takes time. It didn’t happen overnight. You won’t retrain yourself for better communication skills in a moment either.

To keep the ensuing confrontations from building into altercations again, carefully choose words that build up the other person. Be sensitive to their raw feelings and provide a lot of encouragement through reassurance of your love and commitment to each other.

Although you need to remain focused on the issues you have, take breaks from the conversations to enjoy life and do things together. Don’t quit living until you work everything out. Growing together in your relationship is a lifelong process.

Above all, value the one to whom God has attached you. They are your lifetime

partner in everything you do. They can also be your greatest asset against all the other words that people hurl your way. It's okay to need their love and affection as you face the world and life's problems together.

It was God who said, *"It is not good for man to be alone."* (Genesis 2:18)

SLIDE 10 Altar Time

Today, I want each man to look at his spouse differently. I want you to see her hungry for your words. I want you to look at each word as either bringing life or causing death. I want you to choose your words so as to build her up and not tear her down.

Even if you don't feel you are responsible for her damage, you are more than responsible for her personal healing. Her independent spirit might be a result of simply not being able to depend on you for the words she needs to hear.

Twice the Scriptures give us this command:

SLIDE 11 *"Husbands love your wives."* – Ephesians 5:25 and Colossians 3:19

Less "fixing," more loving. So hold your horses.