# COVENANT MARRIAGE BLUEPRINT

*Mini-Course Workbook*

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# SESSION 4

## What Conflict Is Actually For

*Conflict is Information, Not the Enemy*

# What Conflict Is Actually For

*Conflict as Diagnostic, Not Enemy. Fill in each blank as you hear it in the session.*

Before this session: review your Cycle Debrief from Session 3 if you had the opportunity to use it. This session reframes conflict from failure to formation tool. It may surface some grief about past conflicts. That is appropriate. Let it.

### ✦ *The Managed Marriage*

One of the most important, and least discussed, failure modes in marriage is not conflict. It is _____ distance. Two people who have agreed, without saying so, to remain safe from each other.

The Song of Solomon describes two people _____ by one another, reaching, longing, sometimes losing each other and finding each other again.

*That desperation, in the context of covenant, is not a failure of composure. It is the evidence of love that has actually _____ someone.*

### ✦ *Conflict as Diagnostic*

Conflict is not the enemy of marriage. It is the _____. It shows you what is there.

Hebrews 4:12, The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged _____, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

*You cannot form what you cannot _____. The conflict that makes the blueprint visible is, paradoxically, the conflict that creates the conditions for growth.*

### ✦ *The Underlying Question*

Every conflict cycle has a surface and a depth. The surface is the presenting issue. The depth is the _____ that the presenting issue activated.

The Distance Keeper is not primarily distressed about the trip. He is distressed by the felt sense of having _____ the woman he loves.

*What are you actually _____ of right now? That question, asked with genuine curiosity, changes everything.*

### ✦ *The Cost of Being Known…and the Cost of Not Being Known*

Ezekiel 36:26, 'I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of _____ from your flesh and give you a heart of _____.'

The heart of flesh God promises is not a sentimental heart. It is a _____ heart-one that can feel, that can be reached, that can be moved by what actually matters rather than running the old program on autopilot.

The cost of that responsiveness is real. To be known is to be _____. To reach is to risk rejection.

The gospel reframes that calculus. The one who already knows everything-every fear, every wound, every defensive strategy-has not withdrawn. He has _____. And the covenant marriage is one of the primary arenas where that same movement is practiced, imperfectly and at cost, between two people who have promised to stay.

### ✦ *What Other-Centeredness Actually Requires*

Philippians 2:3–4, 'Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more _____ than yourselves.'

Paul is not describing a feeling. He is describing a _____, a fundamental shift in the direction the *self* faces. The mind of Christ, who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself, is not a spiritual aspiration. It is a discipleship agenda.

What this requires differs by blueprint. Fill in each move as it is described:

For the Closeness Seeker: restraining the _____ long enough to ask what the spouse needs.

For the Distance Keeper: offering _____ before it feels fully safe.

For the Mixed Signals blueprint: staying in the _____ when the instinct is to create distance.

For the Confidently Connected spouse: pouring out what has been freely _____.

### ✦ *Other-Centeredness by Pairing*

Fill in the counter-instinctual move for each pairing as it is covered.

**CLOSENESS SEEKER WITH DISTANCE KEEPER**

Closeness Seeker: pause the pursuit and _____ the need directly. Distance Keeper: turn around at the _____ door.

**TWO CLOSENESS SEEKERS**

Resist the escalation and ask the _____ question of yourself first, then your spouse.

**TWO DISTANCE KEEPERS**

Someone goes _____. A small _____: one true thing offered before it is fully processed.

**MIXED SIGNALS WITH ANY BLUEPRINT**

Name the _____ instead of enacting it. The partner's move: _____: being the same person every morning.

# Individual Reflection

Work through these questions privately before sharing with your spouse. Question 2 asks about managed distance; this may be more present in your marriage than conflict. Be honest. Questions 4 and 5 require specific examples. Do not answer in generalities.

**1** The session describes ‘managed distance,’ two people who have agreed, without saying so, to remain safe from each other. On a spectrum from ‘open conflict’ to ‘managed distance,’ where does your marriage currently sit? Where has it sat historically?

**2** Think of a conflict from the past year that left you feeling most unseen or misunderstood. Now set aside what the conflict was about. What were you actually afraid of in that moment? Name the fear underneath the content as specifically as you can.

**3** The session says the presenting problem and the actual problem are almost never the same thing. Name a recurring conflict in your marriage. What is the presenting issue? What do you believe is the actual fear underneath it for you? What might it be for your spouse?

**4** Philippians 2 describes the mind of Christ as a fundamental reorientation toward the other. In your most recent significant conflict, what would other-centeredness have looked like specifically, not in general, but in that specific moment? What would you have had to set aside to offer it?

**5** The session identifies the counter-instinctual move specific to your blueprint in conflict. Write out what that move looks like for you in concrete, behavioral terms. Not a principle, but a specific action or sentence you could actually use the next time the cycle starts.

# Couple Discussion

This session's content makes the couple discussion unusually significant: you are naming fears, not just describing behaviors. Give each other more time than usual. Do not rush past the underneath question. If either of you becomes activated during this conversation, use what you learned in Session 3: name the cycle, ask what fear just came online, and give it a moment before continuing.

**1** Share your answers to Individual Reflection question 1. where your marriage sits on the spectrum from open conflict to managed distance. Do you have the same perception of this, or different ones? What does the difference tell you?

**2** Share the fear underneath your most recent significant conflict, your answer to Individual Reflection question 2. This is a disclosure, not a discussion. Listen to your spouse's fear without explaining, defending, or fixing. After both have shared, simply say back what you heard.

**3** Together, name the most recurring conflict in your marriage. Each of you answers: what is the fear underneath that conflict for me? Then ask each other: did you know that was the fear I was carrying? What changes when you know it?

**4** Share your counter-instinctual move from Individual Reflection question 5. Be specific. Then ask your spouse: if I actually did that the next time our cycle started, what would it do for you? Would it help, and if so, how?

# Solo Attenders: The Underneath Question

*Naming the Fear Beneath the Pattern*

> *The Fear Inventory in this session is written in the first person. It was always meant to be done alone before it is shared. Complete it exactly as written, using whichever relationship is most active for you in place of "our marriage." The Underneath Question itself-what am I afraid of right now?-belongs to every relationship you will ever have.*

### Individual Reflection: Solo Version

**1.** The situation in my current relationships-family, friendship, dating, or community-that most reliably activates my blueprint is:

**2.** When that happens, the fear that comes online first, before I say or do anything, is:

**3.** That fear has been with me since before any of my current relationships. Its earliest traceable origin is:

**4.** When that fear is activated, what I most need from the other person in that moment, the specific thing that would actually help, is:

**5.** What I typically do instead of asking for that thing is:

**6.** The cost of that typical response, to the relationship, and to me, is:

### Peer Activity: Together Time Replacement

Pair up. This session's practice, asking yourself "What am I afraid of right now?" before you ask it of anyone else, is meant to be carried into the week ahead, not completed in the room.

Each person names one relationship, not necessarily romantic, where they will try asking themselves this question before their next moment of tension. Tell your peer partner what you are committing to, and agree on how you will check in: a text, a call, or simply catching up before a future session.

# Practice Exercise

*This exercise has two parts; one individual, one together. Part 1 is a writing exercise done separately. Part 2 introduces a new shared practice to carry forward into the rest of the course.*

### ✦ *Part 1. The Fear Inventory (Individual, 15 minutes)*

This exercise maps the fears that drive your blueprint in marriage, not in the abstract, but tied to specific situations. The more precisely you can name a fear, the more accessible it becomes to interrupt.

**MY FEAR INVENTORY**

**1** The situation in our marriage that most reliably activates my blueprint is:

**2** When that happens, the fear that comes online first, before I say or do anything, is:

**3** That fear has been with me since before this marriage. Its origin, the earliest version of it I can trace, is:

**4** When that fear is activated, what I most need from my spouse in that moment-the specific thing that would actually help-is:

**5** What I typically do instead of asking for that thing is:

**6** The cost of that typical response to my spouse is:

### ✦ *Part 2. The Underneath Question Practice (Together, ongoing)*

Beginning this week, introduce a new practice into any moment of tension or disconnection, not just full conflicts. The practice is a single question, asked with genuine curiosity:

*What am I afraid of right now?*

The sequence matters:

- When tension arises, pause and ask yourself: what fear just came online in me?
- Name it internally, even a rough approximation is useful.
- Then, when there is enough regulation, ask your spouse the same question with genuine curiosity.
- Receive the answer without fixing, defending, or explaining. Simply hear it.

**OUR COMMITMENT**

Write below: one specific situation, a recurring moment of tension or distance in your marriage, where you agree to try the Underneath Question practice before Session 5.

After you have tried it, debrief together using these three questions:

- What fear did you find when you asked yourself the question?
- What happened when you asked your spouse?
- What was different about the conversation because of it?

# Session Notes

*Use this space for anything from the session you want to capture: questions that came up, things that surprised you, or observations about yourself or your marriage that you want to return to.*

# Contact Wade

Scan the QR Code below and add me to your contacts.