



Faithful & True

The Recovery Report September 2016

Mark & Debbie Laaser
Founders of Faithful & True

Welcome to the September 2016 issue of *The Recovery Report*, the official newsletter of Faithful & True. We are one week away from our arrival at the 2016 AACC National Conference in Dallas, Texas and we are looking forward to seeing many of you who are therapists, counselors and pastors at this event.

Mark will be conducting a Pre-Con session with Dr. William Struthers on Thursday, 9/15, 8:30 am - 11:45 am "The Fight of His Life: Men, Porn, Sexual Addiction and Freedom".

Mark and Debbie Laaser will be presenting a workshop together on Friday, 9/16, 10-11:30, "A Journey from Surviving Sexual Addiction to Thriving: A Couples' Toolkit".

Please drop by and say hello at our **Booth #104** where we will have our books available, as well as our latest healing resource, THE COUPLES' TOOLKIT. The Couples' Toolkit contains 10 of the most effective and transformative exercises that we have used in counseling couples over the past 25 years. Until now, we have offered each of these counseling components individually in our online bookstore, and we are now proud to offer the entire collection together as The Couples' Toolkit.

The Feature Article in this month's newsletter, is an excerpt from The Couples' Toolkit, Healthy Communication Part I: How To Be A Safe Person. Each of the ten counseling exercises will continue to be available individually, or you can order the entire collection which is presented in a 3-ring binder in our bookstore at faithfulandtrue.com.

We will also have our new 4 DVD set, The Fight of Your Life, available in our booth at the AACC Conference. This is a 4 DVD presentation of Dr. Mark Laaser's Fight of Your Life Event which has been created as a powerful teaching series for Men's Purity Groups in local churches.



Healthy Communication

Part I: How To Be A SAFE PERSON

by
Mark Laaser, Ph.D. &
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FEATURE ARTICLE: How To Be A Safe Person

by Mark Laaser, Ph.D., & Debbie Laaser, MA, LMFT

One of the great desires of the couples we work with is to have meaningful and safe conversations with each other. When they first come in to us, most are feeling very distant from each other. Our healing goal is to help them achieve deeper levels of emotional and spiritual intimacy. This requires a lot of patience, education, and practice, practice, and more practice. In this two-part article, we want to lay out the principles of safe and intimate conversation. In Part I, we will cover the basics of how to be a safe person in conversation. In Part II, The Iceberg Conversation, we will outline the principles that we teach for deeper and more meaningful communication.

When couples first come to see us for counseling, there are always some issues that have driven them to do so. In most cases, the presenting issue is the infidelity of the husband. The main focus is the information about his past and the ways he has coped with his emotions for years by using sexual arousal and activity. We find that one of the good things about this time is that the husband is getting honest for probably the first time in his life. He is usually broken and humble and will usually try to do whatever he can to be honest with his wife. These early conversations are usually filled with rather dramatic questions and answers as both husband and wife are in a place of trying to survive this crisis. It is from this point that we will try to help them learn how to be clear, direct, honest and safe in their abilities to talk to each other.

It is often common for one or both of them to feel that the other person is not safe. Statements will be made rather generally, "He is just not safe, I can't talk to him." One partner may go on to describe certain behaviors that they interpret are not safe. Sessions like this can be frustrating as the focus of the conversation becomes blaming the other for the dysfunction in the relationship. The focus is on certain behavior or characteristics. The assumption for perhaps each partner is if the other person could change, the relationship would be fine. Blaming and defensiveness become the main elements of these conversations.

Dr. John Gottman, a therapist, has been studying couples and how they communicate for many years. He has observed and filmed thousands of couples in his career. He has come to believe that he can listen to a couple talk to each other for five minutes and predict with a great deal of certainty which couples are going to survive, and which are not going to make it.^[1] He has identified four characteristics of conversations that will “doom” the relationship, characteristics he calls “The Four Horsemen (of the Apocalypse).”

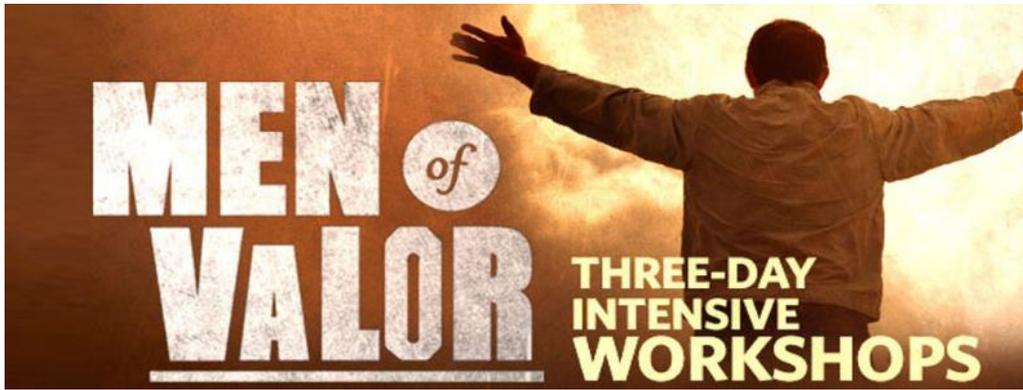
The first is **Blame**. One person is always pointing the finger at the other and criticizing some behavior, just like we were describing above. This can lead to the second horseman, **Defensiveness**. The person who is getting blamed defends his or her behavior. There are explanations, rationalizations, minimizations, and so forth to defend or justify why they are doing what they are doing. Often these conversations get into different memories or perceptions of history. Countless amounts of time may be spent back and forth in these conversations. The third horseman is **Contempt**. This means that the very character of the other person is being attacked. Statements like, “You are worthless,” and “You can never get anything right,” or “You are so stupid” are the hallmarks of contempt. One of the spouses is feeling superior and the other is feeling shame in these situations.

Finally, the fourth horseman is **Stonewalling**. This means one person simply shuts down and refuses to talk for long periods of time. This can be very direct, “I don’t want to talk about it.” Often we find that one person continually comes up with statements or behaviors of avoidance. They simply aren’t around or they find many other things to do to avoid any conversation with his or her spouse.

One of our main principles is that the couples who will do well are those in which the two individuals are able to own or accept his/her style. That is, how do you engage in the conversation? Do you blame? Do you get defensive? Do you make statements of contempt? Do you stonewall or avoid? In this we will have to help them determine if they are “safe.”

It is, of course, hard for both spouses to accept or own their part in the breakdown in safe conversations in the early days when one of them, in our cases the husband, has been the “Identified Problem or Patient (IP).” It may take a while for this dynamic to change as we gently encourage it to happen. There is no doubt that the couples who will thrive are the ones who mutually accept their own personal safety issues. When this happens they become companions in the journey of healing. And, moving from surviving to thriving is one of the great blessings of the healing journey.

^[1] John Gottman and Nan Silver, *The Seven Principles for Making a Marriage Work* (Harmony Books, New York) 1999, 2015.



WORKSHOPS UPDATE

Our next Men of Valor 3-Day Intensive Workshop is scheduled for **September 22-24, 2016** and we still have a few open spots available. You can register online at faithfulandtrue.com or by calling **952-746-3880**.

Our workshop schedule for the rest of 2016 is as follows:

October 13-15, 2016
November 17-19, 2016
December 8-10, 2016

The 2017 workshop dates are available on our website.

Our final Women's Journey 3-Day Intensive Workshop of 2016 will be held October 6-8, 2016 and there are still some open spots available. You can register online at faithfulandtrue.com or by calling 952-746-3880.

The **WOMEN'S JOURNEY 3-Day Intensive Workshops** will return in 2017 on the following dates:

February 2-4, 2017
June 1-3, 2017
October 5-7, 2017

Our 2017 **COUPLES' 3-Day Intensive Workshops** are scheduled for the following dates:

March 2-4, 2017
August 3-5, 2017
November 2-4, 2017

*For more information about any of our 3-Day Intensive Workshops, or to register, visit our website faithfulandtrue.com or call **952-746-3880**.

