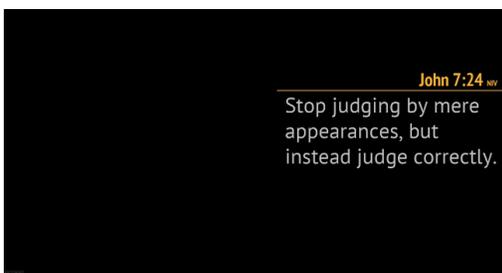


## Choosing to Not Make Assumptions



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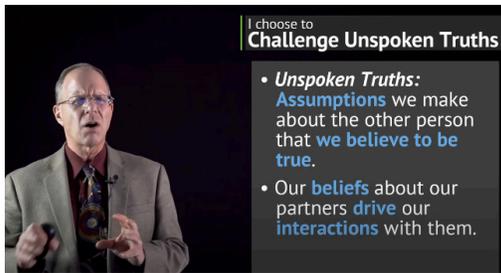


Welcome to lesson 3 in the series focusing on choosing to love your partner and choosing to make choices that lead to a marriage that is transformed for a lifetime. I want to focus on a couple of choices today that are both really relevant to assumptions. And what we're talking about is the idea that you may need to challenge some unspoken truths in your marriage and you may choose to not be able to take each other for granted anymore or settle in with the same patterns you've had for many, many years. The Bible verse we're going to focus on today is John 7:24; and what we're talking about is this idea of "stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly." And if I understand this correctly, judging correctly is based on the idea that we're not going to make assumptions, we're not going to take our own history and impose that, we're not going to guess about things. We're going to say, "What do I really believe God sees in this person?"

It's the Imago Dei concept, the idea that I see God and God's creation in every person. I worked in the prison system as a psychologist for many years, and one of the things that I saw was that it's difficult sometimes with people who are really broken to see the image of God within them when they're not behaving in ways that really show that. And we see that with our partners sometimes where it's hard to see God in how they're acting because we're frustrated or angry. And one of the reasons this happens is because of something that I have called unspoken truths. In the 10 Choices book part of what we're talking about is the idea that we want to be able to challenge unspoken truths. The reason I use that term is over the years I've realized that couples develop beliefs that they think are true, and we'll give you a couple examples in a minute, a little bit later on in the lesson.

But they become truths even though they're actually exactly what God was talking about in that Bible verse we just read. That means we're not supposed to make those kinds of assumptions. They're based on previous history or almost seeing the worst in



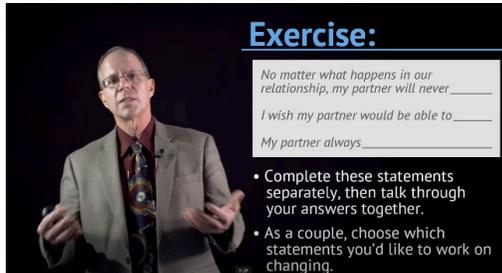


someone. It's so interesting to me how sometimes you're married to someone (I've been married thirty-four years), and yet you still somehow don't expect the best; or instead of giving them the benefit of the doubt, you sometimes will give somebody in line next to you in Chick-fil-A a better opportunity than you will a partner that you've lived with for twenty years. These beliefs drive what happens. That's why I kind of call them givens. If you think of the scientific idea of a given, that is just truth. With these things, once they're true and the statements become true, then everything else follows out of that.

So let me give you an example. Here's a statement, "He's lazy." It's one thing to say, "I wish you would work harder today on Saturday morning because I need you to help me with these tasks around the house." It's another to say, "You're just a lazy person." And that gets to really hurt at a heart level; and we'll talk later about some of the things John Gottman says about criticism and contempt in a later lesson where he talks some about praise versus criticism. But a statement like this, "No matter what I do, she'll never really love me," think of what those statements mean and what happens after the words leave your mouth. In an earlier lesson, we talked about the Niagara Falls analogy in seeing what's coming down the falls. If you say something like, "I don't care what he says, I know my husband. He'll always be a cheater," where is there any space for God to create a miracle and transform your marriage?

The 10 Choices Successful Couples Make book is about the idea that you can't live in the past. You have to look at what the option would be for God to create miracles and transform your marriage. Here are a few other statements. "I know she had a rough childhood, so it's not her fault if she gives up on us." "He says he works all those hours for us, but I think he's really just trying to prove something to himself." "She listens to her mom so much I think she trusts her more than me." "I think he likes the idea of marriage but not to the reality of being married to me." These are things that form the entire basis of how people interact with each other. So one of the exercises I'm going to ask you to do after this lesson is to engage in what I call an unspoken truth exercise.

If you decide you're interested in the book and you get the book, there's an entire quiz in there on the unspoken truths, but here's a few questions you could lay out, and you can create this for yourself and do this together. It's questions like, "No matter what happens in our relationship, my partner will never \_\_\_\_." We all know you're never supposed to use words like never or always, that



**Exercise:**

No matter what happens in our relationship, my partner will never \_\_\_\_

I wish my partner would be able to \_\_\_\_

My partner always \_\_\_\_

- Complete these statements separately, then talk through your answers together.
- As a couple, choose which statements you'd like to work on changing.

kind of stuff, right? But these are where some of the beliefs come from. “I wish my partner would be able to \_\_\_\_.” Sometimes it’s statements like, “Women are \_\_\_\_” or, “Men are \_\_\_\_” or, “Husbands are \_\_\_\_” or, “Wives are \_\_\_\_” or, “My partner always \_\_\_\_.” What I want you to do is write some of those—what we call sentence completions—out and then take your time to work through them, answer them separately, and then get together as a couple and try to see what happens when you look at your answers and figure out that there are some statements and assumptions you made that you’ve been making for a long time.

Here’s the second part, the hardest part of this exercise that I’d like you to engage in after this lesson. Now you have to choose as a couple which ones are you going to change? If there’s a statement that says, “I wish my partner would always be able to be on time,” do both of you agree that’s a problem when she says, “Be there at five,” and he shows up at 5:30, and that’s how it always works? Do you both want to agree, “I want to make that statement untrue. I want to change this unspoken truth”? If so, that means that person’s got to change to start being on time. Other statements may be just false. You’ve always believed them, but that was from ten years ago, and that’s not really the person you’re married to now. So the second part of the exercise is to look at those statements, look at your answers, and then see which ones you’ve decided as a couple you want to change.

The second part of this lesson for today focuses on taking people for granted and taking partners for granted. I’m a big fan of Eugene Peterson and some of the words that The Message offers. So in this Bible verse, I want you to use The Message version to take a look at this. And the reason I use it is because the words really match the lesson here that we’re talking about. Make sure you don’t take things for granted and go slack in working for the common good. Share what you have with others. God takes particular pleasure in acts of worship, a different kind of sacrifice that takes place in the kitchen and workplace and on the streets. Think about how that relates to our early message about selfishness versus selflessness, being unselfish, putting the other partner first. Help me understand why it is that we so often treat our partners worse than some stranger on the street. I have seen couples that will say horrible, horrible things in my office to each other, and then they’ll walk out in the waiting room and go out to their car and hold the door for somebody they don’t even know.

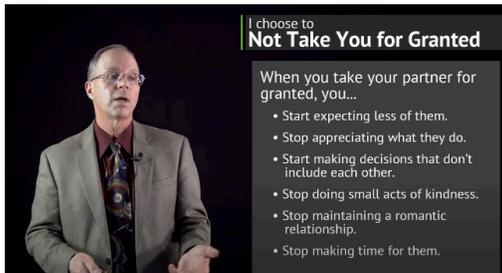


I choose to  
**Not Take You for Granted**



**Hebrews 13:16** MSG

Make sure you don’t take things for granted and go slack in working for the common good; share what you have with others. God takes particular pleasure in acts of worship—a different kind of “sacrifice”—that take place in kitchen and workplace and on the streets.



It makes no sense why we'll allow those kinds of things to happen in our relationships. So, for the last part of this lesson, I want to give you some guidance about some ways that I've learned, with the couples I've worked with over the years, about ways you take each other for granted and what happens. So here's some of the ways you actually do take each other for granted. One is you start expecting less. You stop appreciating and you stop noticing what your partner's doing. Another is that you make decisions that don't include each other. So you're just deciding, hey, I want to go play softball. You never think about the fact that if I go play softball, she's watching three kids. How did that happen? And am I just as willing when she says, "I want to go out with the girls for a night," are you just as willing to watch the three kids, or does she then have to have some major negotiation with you as a husband to make that happen?

Lack of kindness occurs where people stop doing the small things. Lack of romance occurs; the stuff you used to do when you were dating, that somehow isn't happening anymore. And then you have things where just time changes. Here's an exercise for you. Pull out your planner and look at your planner and see who's listed in there. Work is in there, church is in there, activities you have for fun are in there, some guy named Frank is in there, and the dog. Everybody gets in there, but where is your wife or your partner or your husband? Where are they in your schedule for the week? A lot of times, unfortunately, those things don't happen. And so one of the exercises that I have—that is the second exercise that I want you to do this week—is in addition to looking at your planner, I want you to consider including three meetings every week in your relationship.

And what these meetings involve is the idea that you would, first of all, schedule a weekly scheduled meeting. Most of the couples I work with do that on a Sunday night; and in the book, there's a lot more detail on that. So the 10 Choices book has a lot more information about that if you want to get into more detail. But basically you sit down that week on a Sunday night maybe, and you look at the week and say, "When are we going to be married this week?" That's the question I want you to ask. "When are we going to have a relationship?" Because for many couples, there's no time. Everything is so busy and so overwhelming. So what I want you to do is to say, "Okay, this week, do we need to cancel one of the three nights that we have scheduled so we can have time together? We have all these other couples we're giving time to and we're doing this for the church and this for work, and three



**Exercise:**

- Check your planner or calendar. Where is your spouse?
- Schedule these three meetings:
  1. Scheduling Meeting
  2. Check-In Meeting
  3. Date Meeting

soccer games and seven practices a week for the soccer games,” or whatever it is, and you have all this overscheduling.

Well, if you look at that, you don’t have to live life that way. Your schedule doesn’t have to stay the same. And if you stop on Sunday night to look at what the week holds, you can change that. Secondly, I want you to consider having a check-in meeting, and what this basically means is that at least once during the week, you’re just going to stop, sit down, and have coffee. Get together and say, “How are we doing? How’s the week going? Have you had things you wish you could have said to me that you haven’t been able to, because this is your opportunity. God’s going to give us space and time to say, ‘Wow, we said we were going to prioritize each other.’ What is there that you’d like me to know that you haven’t told me about?”

And more importantly, even if you don’t solve anything then, you don’t have to come up with solutions. Then you can say, “Hey, when do we want to get together to talk about this problem with how you’re handling the kids and how I’m handling the kids and try to be parents on the same page?” Does that make sense? Okay. And then lastly, what I want you to do is consider, I call it a date meeting. But I want to make sure you know I’m really not talking about the traditional date night. Think about dinner and a movie. You go out to dinner; you get the food ordered—that kind of stuff. You end up talking about the kids or whatever else. It’s not really romantic. Couple of times, sometimes it is, but generally you’re talking about what movie you’re going to go to. Then you’re in a hurry because you’ve got to get to the movie and you’re already late. You get in, you’ve got to get the popcorn, you’ve got to get the drinks—all kinds of stuff. Then you sit for two hours in silence. How is that relationship building?

I’m talking about going on a walk or watching the sunset or buying flowers together or just going and observing God’s grandeur. I live in Denver, Colorado, and all I’ve got to do is look to the left and look up in the mountains every day and go up there for a short while away, and I can say, “Oh yeah, I remember God’s splendor.” What are you going to do in that period to really enjoy each other’s company? If you schedule that schedule meeting early in the week, have a time to check in during the week, and have a time that’s just for you to have fun and enjoy each other’s company, I’m almost certain that your marriage will not look the same way

it was and that you will begin to grow closer and transform your marriage in the process.