

# MARRIAGE IN MOTION

## Transcript: Module 2, Lesson 4

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### ZACH

Hey there. This is Module Two, Lesson Four and we've been talking about conflict for the last three lessons. In Lesson One we exposed you to the inevitable reality that your marriage will have both solvable and unsolvable problems.

In Lesson Two, we taught you the importance of exercising repair both before, during, and after an argument. And in Lesson Three, we emphasized the value of empathy and understanding in creating intimacy through conflict.

As always, I want to ask you a question up front: How has your view of conflict changed over the course of this module? What has stood out? What aha moments have you had? What questions do you still have?

If I were you, I'd have a ton of questions. You know why... because marriage is really, really hard. Really hard. Really hard. I love it but sometimes I hate it...but mostly I love it.

This module hasn't even attempted to be about giving you answers. It's been about giving you context. The exercises we asked you to do, were designed to give you a way to apply that context to your own situation. Remember, you've got to do the exercises, and see what's next as a result. Motion is the key!

### LAURA

We know that much of how you deal with conflict comes down to mindset, so I hope you gave yourself permission to think about your conflict in a new way. Because focusing too much on conflict resolution is a frustrating game.

Today, we want to address some of those questions you may still have. We know you have questions because we hear them from couples like you on a regular basis. In fact, we'll be introducing you to the voices of some of the couples who have been our clients and who have completed Marriage in Motion already. This lesson is about couples just like you learning to fight smarter, not harder. From them, you'll learn...

1. How you can prioritize regulation over resolution.
2. How you can find compromise in the midst of significant disagreement.
3. How you can decide to care less about winning and losing.
4. How you can discover conflict was about more than just the two of them.
5. How you can give up on "forgive and forget".
6. To become clear about your "next step".

If there's a throughline in all of these stories, it's this:

***Ultimately, conflict management is about curiosity, courage and compassion.***

Obviously we've changed the names of the couples represented here, and we've removed identifying information. That said, these are real stories connected to real people who have struggled well with conflict.

I hope you'll notice some themes that emerge. Curiosity. Courage. And compassion. At the end of the day, these themes, as well as maturity and perseverance, is what forms the foundation of a marriage in motion.

### **ZACH**

Ok...couple #1. We'll call them Jack & Diane. With regard to conflict, they learned prioritize regulation over resolution.

Jack and Diane are a very volatile couple. They argue a lot. I told them..."regulation is more important than resolution." Something in that moment clicked for them.

On the next session they described their experience of skydiving. Actual skydiving. Where they were falling...fast and loud toward the ground. They knew they had to "pull the ripcord" to survive. In the event that one partner wasn't able to pull the ripcord - maybe they froze during the fall - the other partner had to do it.

They seized this metaphor, knowing that in order to land safely - and not die - the number one rule of skydiving was to pull the ripcord. They knew that the second their conflict got out of control, they had to bail before it was too late.

They learned to "repair" early and often in order to keep from slamming into the ground. The cool thing about that is that, when you do pull the ripcord and you're drifting down toward the ground, the view is actually pretty spectacular...they had time to think out loud about their issue and ultimately bring it to a soft landing.

Another important thing about their skydiving metaphor. In the field where they were landing, there was a big barn. Throughout their training, they were told over and over again, "Don't look at the barn. If you look at the barn, you will hit the barn." This really stuck with them...and they realized it was the same with conflict. If you focus on the problem, you will hit the problem. But if you focus on the solution, you'll have a much greater chance of survival.

### **LAURA**

Couple #2: Jess & Nick... bonus points if you can figure out how we named our couples. Jess & Nick found compromise in the midst of significant disagreement.

Married with the best intentions of growing a family. He changed his mind about kids. It wasn't exactly a bait and switch, but it was pretty close. She felt betrayed by his reversal. He felt like he was doing her a favor by not inviting kids into a relationship with so much conflict. They went back and forth for weeks asking: could they survive this.

Here's the thing about compromise: Often we think it's about meeting in the middle. But I think it's

really about meeting in the moment. Jess & Nick were dealing with a very painful reality, but they stayed calm and present throughout their struggle.

In the end, they decided to do what they'd always planned: Their plan wasn't to have children, their plan was to create a family. They committed to staying present in the moment...not focusing too much on their version of the past, nor their hopes for the future.

Practically this was challenging, but philosophically they knew they were more committed to staying together than anything else.

## **ZACH**

Couple #3: Eric & Tami. I loved this couple. They were both super competitive, but they learned to care less about winning and losing.

Throughout their lives, they'd learned a lot about winning and losing. And, more importantly, they learned to how to win...and that experience informed a lot of the way they engaged conflict.

Stan Tatkin wrote a book called "Wired for Love" in which he argues that our brains are...wired for love. But he also asserts that our brains are for war. The work of a relationship is balancing that tension between love and war.

Eric and Tami lived in this tension until they finally realized that you're in a relationship where one wins and one loses...the relationship loses. They decided to focus on fighting less and playing more. They remained competitive, but they tried to focus more on "fun" of seeking a solution where both partners could win. Eric and Tami decided to focus more on prolonging the game, which allowed them to play.

Tatkin describes this as "seeking a fair deal that is good for me and good for you." This was really, really hard for them. It was a context shift...BUT THAT'S WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT. An intentional and active effort toward shifting your context. This will not reap immediate rewards, but over time, it's incredibly rewarding.

## **LAURA**

Our fourth couple, Carl & Ellie, discovered conflict was about more than just the two of them.

I remember this exact moment in my office when I felt like these guys were smarter and more relationally astute than I was. Look, I'm no genius, but my job is to help these two do what they did without me.

As we were discussing conflict they described the experience of having angels and devils on their shoulder. They even expanded the definition of "devil" to include Ghosts and Trolls. They got really serious about defining and rejecting those voices...in particular the negative voices.

This goes back to Module 1, and the notion of personal accountability and responsibility. More often than not, without even knowing it, we become subject to familiar but irrelevant stories, but Carl & Ellie realized that their job was to respect the past while protecting the future.

Carl & Ellie did a great job of this. They did a lot of good work around identifying their ghosts and trolls. The most common counseling word for this is "triggers" the people and events from our past that inform the way we respond to our present circumstances. I wish we could go deeper into the

role our past dramas and traumas play in our present relationships, but that probably deserves a course of it's own.

## **ZACH**

Finally, couple #5. Peter & Wendy.

I hate the cliché “forgive and forget”. I think it's dismissive and unrealistic. Thankfully, so do Peter & Wendy. The problem with this phrase is that forgiveness does not necessarily lead to forgetfulness. The reality is, that to forget past hurts is irresponsible. At the very least it creates a window of opportunity for repeated offense.

Peter & Wendy were Catholic...and they had a very clear understanding of the idea of “confession and repentance”. Confession is the act of naming your transgression. Repentance is the act of atoning for and changing your behavior.

Leveraging the wisdom of their faith, they realized that they needed to create a context for both: Naming their faults and failures with one another. Making a plan for change...a plan that was rooted in memory, not forgetfulness.

The deal with forgiveness is that it requires repentance... and repentance requires memory.

As a Gottman therapist, when I first get to know a couple, I listen to how they tell their story...sometimes they glorify their struggle. Sometimes they demonize their struggle.

When you can, like Peter & Wendy, glorify your struggle, with all its warts and twists and turns....that doesn't include forgetting. Indeed, it assumes that your struggles matter and that you can learn from one another...that's pretty incredible.

Give up on “forgive and forget”. Forgive and remember so that you can actually create change... movement.

## **ZACH**

I love these couples! So, with these couples as our instructors, here are some “next steps” for you to consider.

First, define what your “ripcord” is or could be. Also, decide to meet in the moment rather than the middle. Get clear about how to “enjoy the game”. Learn to identify and ignore your ghosts and trolls. And work on remembering and a re-telling in order to create healing.

That's a lot of stuff, so we've included illustrations and instructions on the activity sheet titled “Fight Smarter”. Your goal is to leverage the experience of these real couples to learn learn to fight smarter, not harder.

We know you can do it. And we want you to share your success story with us. Will you do us a favor? Will you leave a short comment about how you have managed conflict with curiosity, courage and compassion.

## **LAURA**

Not every conflict conversation will go according to plan, but my guess is that you have had at least one that you can be proud of. We want to hear how you managed to do conflict differently. Put your

success story in the comments or shoot us an email.

We know that conflict is often the hardest part of relationships and learning to navigate conflict differently can be just as difficult. But you are DOING IT! And it gets easier each time you exercise these new skills. I want you to take a moment to thank yourself for taking the time to work on you and your relationship. I'm a big fan of YOU and you should be too! See you in the next video.