

FROM BREAKDOWN TO BREAKTHROUGH (COUNSELING, 4 OF 4)

<https://fiercemarriage.com/from-breakdown-to-breakthrough-counseling-4-of-4>

[00:00:00]

Ryan: Have you ever reached that point in your relationship, in your marriage where you feel like communication just grinds to a halt, and it freezes over and you can't figure out how to get past it? Sometimes are more severe than others. I feel like we had one of those recently.

Selena: Kind of go there, huh? *[both chuckles]* Just kidding.

Ryan: What happened? I just know that it happened somewhere in the recent past. What was going on? I can't remember.

Selena: I don't know. We'll figure it out by the time we're through.

Ryan: That's how important it was. *[both laughs]* That's how important it was. So yeah, sometimes when you get locked up, we call it a kind of a communication log jam or communication cold snap is another way we've referred to it, it's just kind of like you can't move forward and you need something to change either inside of you or outside of you or some external force, namely, the Holy Spirit needs to act upon you to change and soften your hearts. But you don't always know. Sometimes we can have the wherewithal to pray for that and ask for that.

Selena: Right. Right. Yeah.

Ryan: So anyway, this episode is talking about that phenomenon within marriage. We're going to talk to how counseling can actually really help in those areas. So we'll see you on the other side.

[00:01:14] <Intro>

Selena: Welcome to the Fierce Marriage podcast where we believe that marriage takes a fierce tenacity that never gives up and refuses to give in.

Ryan: Here, we'll share openly and honestly about all things marriage—

Selena: Sex—

Ryan: Communication—

Selena: Finances—

Ryan: Priorities—

Selena: Purpose—

Ryan: And everything in between.

Selena: Laugh, ponder, and join in our candid, gospel-centered conversations. This is Fierce Marriage.

[00:01:48] <podcast begins>

Selena: This is part four of four parts of counseling, *[both chuckles]* discussing different aspects about counseling. We kind of started off with why a couple might need counseling, the value of that. Last week we talked about codependency and how a counselor can speak into that situation. This week we're talking about the times in your marriage where you just can't communicate well. And there's different types of "cold", quote-unquote, that we'll talk about. But first—

Ryan: I feel like communication is one of those things that a lot of times the dysfunction that we experience in marriage is a symptom of a deep communication issue. I can't remember. I think it's called "We Can Work It Out" is a book. It's all about communication. And it might be specifically toward businesses, but it introduces this concept of a shared meaning pool. And really I love that because it illustrates what communication is.

So when we share words, it's the medium through which we are trying to convey ideas, feelings, emotions, all that stuff with fidelity to another individual. What happens is a lot of times, those signals can be muddled because we're not dipping into the same shared meaning pool. There's all kinds of intonation, there's all kinds of implications, we read into things, we—

Selena: If we're trying to communicate something that feels attacking to your spouse, that can bring about a lot of insecurity. So then it's just kind of tainted and how you present your information.

Ryan: And that's why you hear things like, "I got triggered when he said this," or "when she said this." Because you're reading into a meaning that wasn't necessarily...it might have been intended, but it wasn't necessarily intended. So that's verbal communication.

Then there's other kind of nonverbal communication. Obviously, there's body language, tone, that lots of verbal, but it's not a word that you're saying. It's

how you're saying something. There's timing. There's all these different...if it's appropriate or not. But then there's a deeper intimacy around that that isn't verbal. So physical intimacy, spiritual intimacy. Are we sharing the same meaning pool in terms of our purpose, our desire for one another? Okay.

All of these things are functions in a way of communication, verbal and non. So to have this conversation is not just "here's five tips to have better conversations with each other." No, this is really how do you clear the airwaves and clean up the signals so you can actually get at each other's heart?

Selena: Because, friends, it's been 17 years of marriage and I feel like we're getting worse at communicating sometimes. *[both laughs]*

Ryan: Speak for yourself.

Selena: Well, I'm like, "Shouldn't we just know this about each other?" Like shouldn't I know the meaning that you're intending here? But I don't. And then we get mad, and then he's the one that's always wrong. So I am just trying to bring him on board most of the time.

Ryan: Surely. Surely.

Selena: No, but communication is such a difficult thing no matter how much unity I think you have [00:05:00] in your marriage or you think you have. It feels just like a herd of cats all the time *[chuckling]* trying to like...I'm trying to go this way and I'm trying to tell you these things, but something's wandering off, and I don't know where it's going. And that's not what I said. But that's what you're hearing. So I think we're excited to talk about the different cold that you might be experiencing in your marriage.

Ryan: I like that analogy, which I'll explain in a sec. But just to reiterate, this is actually part four of four...

Selena: Four of four.

Ryan: ...where we're talking specifically about counseling. Like Selena said early on, we explore this idea, does every couple or can every couple benefit from counseling? The answer was yes.

Selena: Yes. You don't have to be in a crisis.

Ryan: You don't have to be in a crisis. This is one of the reasons why is you may not even realize that your signals are muddled, and all of a sudden, you're seeing through new lenses. It's like someone takes your glasses, if you wear glasses,

and cleans them. You didn't realize how dirty they were until you see clearly for the first time in years. "Wow, I've been missing out." So counseling has that effect.

Then we talked about anxiety and stress because those are very common. But in particular, because of the season that we're in as a world *[both laughs]* with the pandemic world.

Selena: As the world.

Ryan: As the world with the pandemic and obviously everything that's happening around the elections and the - what else? The social unrest I'll say.

Selena: Civil unrest.

Ryan: Civil unrest. There's a lot of anxiety around that. And people working from home with kids at home now during school and a lot of places. So we talked to that. Then last week we talked through codependency, which that was very elucidating for me in terms of understanding exactly what that is and how to identify it and how to see the gospel work the codependent badness out of us, *[Selena laughs]* and have a better version of interdependence is what the Bible gives us.

So today's kind of we're putting a bow on this conversation around what we I think really communication is as much as I... I was going to say it's like a chiropractor. They always used to say, I don't know...I'm not a fan of chiropractors. But they would say—

Selena: I am. *[chuckles]*

Ryan: Selena is a fan. And they are like, "Your body will heal itself if you just get the spine working right." Right?

Selena: And herein lies our communication issues. *[both laughs]* Not sharing the same meaning.

Ryan: Yeah. So, anyway, I'll keep using the airwaves analogy. We're clearing the airwaves. I'll keep using that. That's it. So anyway, today is in partnership with faithfulcounseling.com. I will tell you more about it at the end. But we partner with them specifically because they meet this very tangible need, given the fact that not everyone's comfortable with going out and the world isn't completely opened up again. So it's a very quick, easy way to get counseling if you need it. Go to faithfulcounseling.com/fmp and that'll give you 10% off your first month. But we'll tell you more about that at the end. All right.

So, Selena, you had said that there are varying degrees of cold.

Selena: Nice.

Ryan: Yeah, varying degrees. Oh, I just caught that. Oh, wow.

Selena: So yeah, we're going to talk about a little bit upfront about how counseling can maybe help you. We're going to set the stage of identifying cold in your marriage, cold communication, because there are different types of cold, like varying degrees. We have cold snaps, which we define as a sudden brief spell of cold weather in your marriage. Things get kind of icy, there's a little bitterness, maybe a hurt happens. There's—

Ryan: An analogy, if you will. I'm going to use an example from our own lives.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: Sunday morning, we...our church is not gathering full-time yet. And we've been doing home church with some friends that are nearby. They were out of town and so we said, "Listen, I'm going to lead our family in church." Now you remember where I'm going with this? *[chuckles]*

Selena: I don't recall you saying that until before I prompted and I was like, "What are we doing?"

Ryan: I didn't lead us very clearly.

Selena: We felt lost a little bit.

Ryan: And then I just was like, "Fine, I'll do it." And I did it. *[Selena laughing]* And then Selena had input—

Selena: It did not go very well.

Ryan: It like it wasn't the way Selena wanted it.

Selena: Not necessarily.

Ryan: It's when you model for your children home church, and then where end up fighting each other *[Selena laughing]* and tell them to go to their room so you can fight. *[laughs]* That's what happened. So that kind of was I would say a communication cold snap where we just...I remember I felt so frustrated. So

frustrated, angry, because I wasn't able to communicate what I was...Selena wasn't letting me communicate what I wanted to communicate. *[laughs]*

Selena: You were not hearing the words that were coming out of my mouth. *[both chuckles]*

Ryan: "You don't understand the words coming out of my mouth." *[both laughs]* And we were fighting. I don't know how we pulled out of it. How did we pull out of that? But it didn't last long is what I'm trying to say, is it felt really icy.

Selena: It always feels wrong. *[chuckles]*

Ryan: There was a cold snap. And then usually one of us just goes, "I don't want to make this a long thing. I'm sorry. [00:10:00] I don't want to turn this into a multi-day fight where we're civil, but we're not actually reconciled."

Selena: Right.

Ryan: That was just an example of maybe a quicker one. A longer cold snap, I would compare it to as opposed to, so maybe it's a few day thing. Go ahead.

Selena: I think that would take us to our next winter type season. The cold snap is a bit more consistent. It's a bit longer. You might see just some underlying tension in your communication. It kind of feels more hit than miss. And maybe there's an outside stressor, right? There's some external something happening with parents or whoever. There's just some, some anxiety that might be building up taking up more mental and heart space.

It's kind of a season. And I think that's what identifies more of this winter type season. It's longer, but you also see kind of an end in sight of like, "Okay, we've got a lot of external factors playing into where we're at right now. We're not communicating well. We're kind of identifying and seeing that but it's just taking longer." *[chuckles]*

Ryan: So here's the kicker is you can be going through a season together, and it's a tough season and you know that. And it's winter in the sense that it's hard. But if you're going through it together, your communication and your closeness can still be on point.

Selena: True. I guess I'm saying if you're not going through it together. So that's a good clarifying.

Ryan: Another example. Sorry, I jumped in. I'll give us—

- Selena:** He's really good examples. I'm not.
- Ryan:** This happens if we are not on the same page sexually. *[both chuckles]* I'm just going to say it. Sometimes I'll be putting out the vibe, and I'm putting it down and she's not picking it up. If I don't communicate through that—
- Selena:** Well, you don't always put it down.
- Ryan:** Oh, it's so obvious. *[Selena laughs]* It is so obvious.
- Selena:** Okay.
- Ryan:** I put on the Barry White music in the kitchen.
- Selena:** Oh, no.
- Ryan:** Anyway.
- Selena:** Should I have to know though?
- Ryan:** No. The signals are obvious. Tune your antenna a little bit. *[both laughing]* What was I going to say? Oh, yeah. So I'll be putting up the vibe, put it down, you're not picking it up. And if I don't communicate through that, then I can get really frustrated and kind of flustered by that, and then I'm hurt and then bitter. And depending on how long it takes, the dysfunction to clear my system, or your system...
- Selena:** That's accurate.
- Ryan:** ...it could be days. I know you might be thinking about that passage, just like, "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." I don't think that applies in this particular case. That's more of a vitriol sort of vengeful anger is what he's talking about in that passage. And that's a heart issue. With this, it's like we're just are experiencing a constipation of communication, if you will. *[both chuckles]* So it's like we just have to work it out as family and as a married couple. Man, I'm off the rails. *[Selena laughs]* I got to real this in.
- The point I'm trying to make is it can be a longer season, if you let it be. Actually, "Selena, put yourself together. *[both laughing]*"
- Selena:** I just can't.
- Ryan:** I'm trying to be a professional podcaster here and you're ruining my podcast.

- Selena:** Formal talking. I'm just giggling over here. Go ahead.
- Ryan:** Where I really see it in some couples and I know we're joking, but unfortunately, there's a lot of couples that will find something will happen in their lives, like maybe there's a death of a loved one that's not dealt with in a healthy way. Or there's kind of an ongoing low-grade lack of intimacy, whether it's because of a hard season, you've got young kids, a lot of young kids, or you've got a hard job...
- Selena:** Or no job. Just a financial stress.
- Ryan:** ...and there's just low grade. And what it does is it kind of begins to freeze things over, over time. And it's a slow onset. So that tends to...because it takes almost as much time to undo something that's taken all that time to happen to you. So that can be more of a seasonal thing. And so you find yourself out in the cold. If you have been on the cold for a prolonged period of time, you can kind of withstand it for a few hours.
- Selena:** Especially if you're busy, right?
- Ryan:** Right.
- Selena:** If you're kind of ignoring it and distracting yourself away from it.
- Ryan:** And then as the day wears on, maybe the sun's going down a little bit and you're not as active, while all sudden your core is starting to get cold and you're starting to shiver. That's what it starts to feel like. And it's going to take some other force externally acting upon you or you need to move out from inside from the cold if that makes sense. Like go inside, sit next to a fire. If you want to take the analogy even further, that fire could be sitting around God's Word. It could be around gathering around the truth that you know are warming truths of who God is, the peace-giving truth to, the Holy Spirit fruit-bearing truth [00:15:00] in our lives. And that can kind of break those types of cold snaps.
- But the causes are varying is I'm trying to say. For us, they tend to be around being misunderstood over prolonged periods of time. For others, it could be more circumstantial. But I think the important thing is identifying those and knowing that you're not fighting against each other in that, but you need to fight for each other in that.
- Selena:** And I think fighting for each other on these first two levels is just being in community with others as well, and being transparent. Letting them know,

"Hey, we're just kind of going through a hard time right now. Could you pray with us? Could you check in with us?" Those kinds of things.

This last third part of the coldness possibly you might be experiencing in your marriage is one that requires more than just your Christian church community. And we'd call this the arctic tundra, where you're essentially just roommates.

Ryan: And you're existing...

Selena: Existing together.

Ryan: ...in frozen over. Everything is just completely locked down and it feels like there's no way forward.

Selena: Yeah, there's really little to no meaningful communication sort of as needed. You might feel like there's no communication, I guess, no meaningful risk is happening. Nobody's exposing themselves, their hearts, or what they're dealing with. And they don't know how. Maybe it's so frozen there's just no life that's able to exist.

Ryan: Do you think about, again, the analogy arctic tundra, there's no life, there's no foliage, there's no food, there's no sustenance. The land itself will not sustain you. You are basically surviving on what you have stored up. So that's only going to last for a cert... you're doomed really. You're doomed unless something changes. And that's I think the call here is recognizing what you're in and not ignoring that. Because if you deny it, it's just going to get worse and worse and worse until you're on life support. And then it's going to take even a greater miracle.

Now we have a God who works miracles daily in lives of marriages and the lives of people around the world. It's amazing to hear the testimonies of how God has worked to crack the ice in instances like these. So don't lose hope. But just know that the first step is really identifying it. Sometimes you can get yourself out of, now granted, the deeper the freeze, the harder it be. The deeper the freeze, the harder it is to get out of it. But there are some really tangible tools you can do.

A lot of times for us, just speaking very quickly, candidly, we'll kind of get out and do something fun that's outside of our norm really does help to begin rekindling our friendship. That's either a date or taking the kid somewhere that's outside, get some fresh air instead of kind of navel-gazing.

Selena: This is just trying, making the attempts to kind of start a fire. I don't know if these are great, because I imagine like, what is one of the great lakes that freezes over? Is it like Michigan or something?

Ryan: True.

Selena: It freezes over. And I imagine these things being like a tiny campfire trying to thaw Lake Michigan. So I don't know if these would be—

Ryan: Again, this is not for that type of freeze.

Selena: Okay, that's what we're talking about.

Ryan: I'm backtracking a little just to give people some tangible things.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: Because if you are in a deep freeze, then I think that's what we're going to talk about the rest of it, but for the less deep freezes, getting out doing something fun can help. Laughing together is a really great way to rekindle that fire, rekindle the heat in your relationship. When I say heat, just your connection, the friendship, the affection for one another. If you listen to this podcast for any period of time, you know we're big fans of *The Office*. That has been a big part of our marriage and lots of you, you would say the same. It's so great for cultivating friendship. That's just kind of the tip of the humor iceberg for us. So it's this deep well of relationship that we are depositing into every time we're laughing together and we can make each other laugh inopportune times later when it's needed.

Then finally, I say this carefully because we never want people to feel manipulated, obligated, or anything like that. But sometimes, you guys, sometimes you just need to take a leap of faith, a step of faith into the arms of your spouse physically. I mean intimately. And sometimes there's too much baggage to do that, there's too much pain to do that. I'm not saying that...

Selena: That's the answer in that moment, yeah.

Ryan: ...to be manipulative. We've had that in our marriage plenty of times where we've been just misfiring consistently and we just realized we kind of just need to clear the air.

Selena: The only way forward is to hag it out the married people style. *[Ryan chuckles]*
That's the only way forward

Ryan: And love each other kind of sacrificially. It is kind of a wedding the appetite is what it does. It ends up making you realize, "Oh, wow, love is good. Now I want to partake more of love with my spouse." And that's what we're talking about. [00:20:00]

Selena: Those are, like Ryan said, just reiterate, those are things that you can apply to kind of the cold snaps, or maybe the wintery type seasons that you might be facing some underlying miscommunication or disconnect. But for this arctic tundra season, you may be finding yourself in... again, you are somewhere that you will need someone mean, namely a counselor to come in and help you communicate and connect with your spouse.

Only truly a counselor and or a pastor with a counseling sort of background can really help you walk through identifying the cold that you're in, and give you some habits to help you engage with your spouse more clearly. And maybe even humbly and more...I don't know. I don't know what another word is for not humbly. But I just because I think we go in with like our defenses up guns blazing, like five layers back, right?

Ryan: Yeah.

Selena: And so how do we lay those down? Even a good, well-intending friend doesn't always have the answers. This is why we value counseling in marriage and why we think that it has its place.

Ryan: Yeah. I think there's varying tiers of counseling I just want to speak to real quickly. Because granted, there's the obvious one, which is getting going to a counselor, which is essentially that's what we're talking about here is the value of going to a doctor of the mind, if you will. And seeing that not as a substitute for God's Word, but really as a common grace, something that God has given us our art to be self-aware in these ways, to be able to look at our minds and think about our own minds in these ways. That's grace of God. And so to have somebody who is Bible-believing, who can bolster the truths of God's Word, or rather confirm what's already true in God's Word, and help you kind of sift through some of the emotional things.

The Bible has everything we need for life and godliness, right? It's not a psychology textbook. But it does speak to things in a way that's fruitful psychologically. Does that make sense?

Selena: Hmm.

Ryan: So that's the big obvious one. You had mentioned Christian community, friends, pastors. I don't want to gloss over those because a pastor has a job to

play. And this is not a job that they've claimed, it's a job that God ordained to shepherd the flock. They're under...what's the word? Christ is our—

Selena: Head.

Ryan: Yeah, He's the head. He's the, I don't know, the pastor in chief, if you will.

Selena: Sure. He's our Shepherd. And these are under shepherds who are all kind of working on behalf of the capital Shepherd, that is Christ, to shepherd the flock. So if you go to a church that is faithful to biblical vision of church governance, which would mean that you've got a plurality of elders, and they meet the qualifications of eldership, meaning that they have the character and the qualifications, and in some cases, the skill to shepherd well, you should be able to go to them and say, "I need help in this." And they should be able to an extent walk you through that.

Now their help maybe, "Let's pray. I'll check in on you." Let's also find somebody who knows kind of how to work through this stuff. And that person could be a counselor. What's beautiful is a lot of churches have a fund for stuff like this. Or they have in-house counseling, or they have a way of kind of sponsoring you to go to a counselor for a season. So I just don't want to gloss over the explicitly Christian community.

Selena: It's good.

Ryan: Nowadays we tend to be so individualistic. "I'm just going to go figure it out. If I'm going to go to a counselor, I'm just going to go to a counselor and I'm going to figure it out." And then I'll just show up on Sunday, "Hey, Bill, how you doing?" When in reality that's not how we're called to live in Christian community. Does that make sense?

Selena: It's good.

Ryan: Okay.

Selena: Okay.

Ryan: Assuming you've gone through those steps, or you've you already know and you're known within Christian community, you say, "I want to talk to a counselor," I think it's helpful to maybe, I don't know, place in front of our fair listeners a roadmap or maybe a buffet of options that the counselor might put before them that might help them kind of pass through this. So let's talk through them. We got - what? Four of them?

- Selena:** I think five of them.
- Ryan:** Okay.
- Selena:** Yeah. Yeah. So the first one is simple, but talk. *[chuckles]* I mean, it sounds simple, but if you're not talking in your marriage, that could be a really big thing. It's one of the hardest things obviously. As you can see, communication does often require talking, speaking using words and also actively engaging your minds in the discussion. I think a counselor [00:25:00] will help you learn how to even articulate your own thoughts in a loving way and how to filter through your thoughts...
- Ryan:** That's the key.
- Selena:** ...and use mindfulness. That's one of the tools that I'm reading through and working through is mindfulness.
- Ryan:** We got to be careful with that because that can go too far into the other kind of self-help.
- Selena:** Right. Right. Right.
- Ryan:** And that's not what we're referring to.
- Selena:** No, sorry.
- Ryan:** But there's the sense of being aware of your own emotions and how they're affecting how you're communicating. That's what you are talking about.
- Selena:** Yes, yes. And not letting them run away, but really working on that self-control. I think most people don't struggle with talking when you want to communicate something, but true wisdom is found when you speak what you mean in ways that give life.
- Ryan:** I want to read Proverbs 12:18. I love this. "There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." So a counselor, I think by the biblical definition of it, is going to have wisdom. They're going to be filled with the Holy Spirit, they're going to be looking to God's Word as the authority, they're going to look into the person of Christ as the example, and they are going to be hashing through things with wisdom.
- One of the things I love about counselors is they're very slow to prescribe behavior. Instead, they will ask you questions that will help get to...Selena said talk. I know, that's very obvious. But they'll be asking questions, facilitating

conversations to bring you around. They can't tell you always why you miss the blind spot. You have to come around to seeing it. And the counselor has the tools and the techniques to get you to that place.

Selena: Because not only are they trying to help you walk this path you're on, but they're also trying to get to know you as well. Like they need to understand your perspective on situations in your marriage and your spouse. So it requires *[chuckles]* talking, which is why, yes, they have the tools to begin those conversations with you and for you to be able to have with your spouse more effectively.

Ryan: Well, they draw it out of you. Because if you're in a frozen-over marriage, you're kind of used to going on the same kind of worn paths that you've been on. You could also look at it like you're on a hamster wheel, just kind of you're getting really tired but you're going nowhere. So they're the ones that will say, "Well, why do you feel that way?" or "Why did you say it that way?" Or "You're saying this, but I'm hearing this. What are you...?" So they can kind of pull it out of you and get you to talk. Because when you hear us say talk, you're like, "Duh, obvious." But a counselor will help you talk with more fidelity, with more clarity.

Selena: Well, I think they'll help you create those...what did you call them? The pools?

Ryan: The shared meaning pools.

Selena: Shared meaning pools. So, when you say this, it sounds like you mean this. So I could be talking about X, but what my spouse might be hearing is Y. So let's talk about the Y, as in the letter Y. Like example Y. Because the X is just like a symptom of what Y actually is. So we can always do that on our own in our head.

Ryan: We have to see the value in that. And then being part of the conversation, because if we're honest with ourselves, them not being a part of it, and us just left on our own is the reason we're in this problem in the first place. *[both chuckles]*

Selena: It's true.

Ryan: So we have to see the value of having someone else speak into it. Which is actually very similar to the second kind of way a counselor will help you. It's, again, very obvious but with listening. So they will act as kind of an arbitrator between you.

Here's an example. This wasn't with our counselor, but we actually spoke with some friends and we were having a prolonged fight or an unresolved argument. We were being civil, but there was a low-grade descent happening. And we sat down and they just started asking us questions and we were all of a sudden listening with better ears, bigger ears, and speaking with better filters, because they were they're kind of showing us a mirror of "this is actually what you look like when you talk to your wife this way. This is actually what you look like or sound like when you talk to your husband this way." So they will help you stop, listen, not interrupt. That's key.

Selena: I'm bad at that. *[both chuckles]* As much as y'all complain about Ryan interrupting on the podcast, I'm really bad at interrupting in real life.

Ryan: She'll ask you a question and then immediately talk over.

Selena: Because I have a verbal process on something. *[chuckles]*

Ryan: That's true. You're very verbal. Yes. And I am not verbal at all.

Selena: Whatever. *[Ryan chuckles]* You are so verbal. *[chuckles]* He likes to think that he's not verbal, but just get him talking, people, and his eyes go to the side and he starts thinking. *[Ryan laughs]* Just looks up kind of to the side, tilt his head, and he's thinking and moan things over. [00:30:00]

Ryan: See, but I'm processing in the brain. You just said it. So [inaudible]

Selena: No, defend your [inaudible]

Ryan: I'm right.

Selena: No. *[chuckles]* So listen, Proverbs 17:27-28. "Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent."

Ryan: Oh, wow. That's the restraining. That is, whoever restrains his words. How often in your marriage, listener, has your dysfunction been as the result of somebody being unrestrained with their tongue. Right? We can say very hurtful things. We can call each other things that we don't actually mean, can threaten things that we don't actually want to threaten.

Selena: I think another part of listening is not just listening and thinking of your rebuttal. Right?

- Ryan:** Absolutely.
- Selena:** Because I do that. I'm like, "Oh, there's a word. I'm going to think about how I'm going to rebuttal that." And I don't hear anything else that you're saying. I mean, I do. But if I make a loud fuss about that one term that he used, then he's going to forget everything else he said. He doesn't, though. So part of listening and being actively engaged is hearing what he's saying. And if you are hearing what he's saying, your spouse is saying, then you can ask questions. Because you probably 9 times out of 10, I'd say 10 out of 10, you're going to have questions because you don't truly understand. We just skip the "I don't understand. I'm just going to assume you're saying this."
- Ryan:** Yeah. So, well, because emotions are high and pride is there and selfishness is there, and you just want to be right, and all that kind of stuff.
- Selena:** Or you are right. *[both chuckles]*
- Ryan:** Would you just...like everybody gets it, right? You're better than me. There's no question here. *[both chuckles]*
- Selena:** Not today.
- Ryan:** This is why I think having them there is very helpful because they will help you listen and actually hear the intended meaning. Because a lot of times we will listen through our own filters. One example I love—this actually comes from our book "Fierce Marriage"—and the reason why I put it in there is I love this example is it's almost like communication is a traffic light. The traffic lights are a means of communication. Everybody understands that if it's red, you don't go. If it's green, you're good to go.
- So if someone assumes the other thing, if someone says, "Oh, red means stop," and the other person says, "Green means stop," you get a complete gridlock. There's not clear communication. The same for obviously, if both people think each color means go, you're going to get a collision. And that's going to result in pain and death and all these sorts of things. A counselor is that arbiter. They're the ones that say—
- Selena:** Green means go. *[chuckles]*
- Ryan:** They mean this. That this is what they actually mean. "They don't mean stop. Now they mean go now." So they are the one that—
- Selena:** Interpreters.

- Ryan:** Yes, thank you. Ironically, I'm having a hard time articulating the idea through all that.
- Selena:** It's okay. I'm listening and trying to help you.
- Ryan:** Are you, though? I'm just kidding. *[chuckles]*
- Selena:** I just think of Pam and Jim when they go to counseling, and they are...What are they giving? I appreciate the...my something. I can't even think of right now.
- Ryan:** I don't know. That's when the whole show started to take a turn for the worst.
- Selena:** I know. You can't attack Jim and Pam, right?
- Ryan:** They're kind of the worst though.
- Selena:** They kind of are, though, too. Yeah.
- Ryan:** None of the rules apply to them and they just think they're the bee's knees. They're mean to everyone.
- Selena:** Their kindness is mean to everyone. *[both chuckles]* Anyway, listening to each other, talking to each other, actively engaging, actively listening is going to lead you to this third one of seeking understanding. You're seeking to understand. When you listen, and you're engaged, you're going to, again, ask questions. Try to even put yourself in your spouse's shoes before you even think of your battle. And I say that to myself a thousand times because I'm the first one to not do that.
- Ryan:** The first step of understanding is seeking to empathize and seeking to understand, like you just said. That has to be there.
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** You have to care about what their experience is like and you have to invest. The beginning of empathy is actually caring enough about them to say, "I need to understand how you are feeling and what your experience is like."
- Selena:** How do we even get empathy if we don't feel empathy? I mean, empathy would be defined as a feeling, I would think on some levels, right?
- Ryan:** Yeah.

Selena: So how do I start to feel empathy for someone that I just feel like we're possibly even less than roommates? Like we're just together because that's just where we're at. My answer, and I probably didn't say well, but I think it would begin with [00:35:01] prayer and it would begin with a lot of scripture reading. Maybe not on empathy, but just scripture reading about who Christ is, starting with the Gospels and understanding the Holy Spirit can work out empathy inside of you. And Scripture is life, and it is God-breathed. And so why wouldn't it begin to show me how I am lacking in this instance?

Ryan: That's spot on. We don't empathize with others because we don't think we have any real common ground to empathize on. And scripture and the Gospel is the great equalizer. It's like the DMV. It doesn't matter who you are.

Selena: You got to go. *[both chuckles]*

Ryan: You still got to stand in line. I always think of Matthew 18 when it comes to this. The parable of the unforgiving servant, and how one servant is forgiven like billions of dollars of debt, and he braves the king and the king says, "All right, you're free to go. I will hold your debts against you no more." And then that servant then turns around and goes to his buddy who wasn't 20 bucks and starts choking him out because he hasn't paid his debt. That King looked at that wicked servant and said, "I just forgive this massive debt to you and you can't even forgive your brother? Your whole family is getting out and going to go to jail. You got to work your debt off."

What that tells us is that we are all kind of on equal footing in terms of our forgiveness and our need for forgiveness in Christ. And if we see ourselves rightly in the massive debt that we have been forgiven, our massive chasm between us and this perfect God, that is the gospel, then I can approach my wife and say, "How can I hold your sin against you? Even if you're sinning against me, how can I hold it against you when Christ hasn't held my sin against me?" That leads me to empathize with you. Let me now instead of just bashing you, or getting upset—

Selena: Or ignoring.

Ryan: Or ignoring. ...I can actually see with compassion because I have experienced the love of God in Christ. So honestly, you guys, not empathizing with your spouse, if I'm going to speak really candidly, is a big red flag.

Selena: It's foolish.

Ryan: It's foolish.

Selena: It says that in the Bible. A fool takes no pleasure and understanding but only in expressing his opinion. So proverbs 18:2 in case you need it.

Ryan: I mean, we camp out here all for the rest of the episode, but I guess we'll have to move on. But if you're not empathizing, and you're just cold to your spouse, that is not just a marriage problem, that's a gospel problem. If you're cold to them because of a hurt, and they're not repentant to you, that's another issue. And you can still warm up without being trusting until there's trust rebuilt. And that takes help. And that takes counseling, which we're talking about. But the point is, if we hold the moral high ground against another person and it's a barrier to our empathy, that is a gospel problem. That is a red flag that says we need to run to the feet of Christ, we need to be humbled before Him, we need to see Him for who He is, see ourselves for who we are, so then we can begin learning to empathize and love the way Christ has loved us.

Selena: So good. So good.

Ryan: Okay. Again, a counselor will help us talk in really unique ways, also helping us listen, which then will lead us to greater empathy and a deeper understanding of one another. And then from there, this is the part that I feel like really gets exciting is a counselor will give you tangible ways to step forward into healing and to step through a process that could bring about reconciliation and deep in this communication.

Selena: Not just any tools, but tools that match up for where you're at and what you're dealing with. I think there's a lot of things we can try on our own, right? But without a counselor guiding us and saying, "Here's the nail, here's a hammer, use this tool for this situation and try this and see how it works for you." That's the only way that we can really begin to see how counseling is valuable. But also, I think respect just the process that it is and allowing the Lord to work on our hearts and take the right steps.

Because maybe we have been spinning our wheels, we've been on that hamster wheel for quite a while. So taking steps that are new feel unsure. And that's okay. We have to be okay with kind of the ambiguity and the assurance and just keep stepping forward, trusting God, using the tools that we're given, and discerning through them and continuing to say, "I'm not going to quit. I know my legs are not familiar with this ground, but we're going to trust and we're going to act."

Ryan: I love that. I love that. So we're acting in trust. You said this. Trusting the process. To me, in that trusting the process, what do you have to do if we're going to trust the process? You have to rest and you have to relax. That's the fifth one is it will help you rest and realize that okay, "God is at work." That's

what biblical counseling is. [00:40:00] That's why the biblical part is so important because, without it, there's no rest. Without the deep rest of the Holy Spirit and the work of Christ on the cross, this part is a lot more elusive. We might find spots of rest, but we won't have deep abiding rest in Christ.

So when we know that we can trust the process, that if we're following God's Word toward reconciliation, confession of sin, repentance of sin, understanding, communication, being slow to speak, being quick to listen, being slow to anger, this is all part of the process. So a biblical counselor will give you action steps that are based on these sorts of processes, that are deeply interwoven into the fabric of mankind, humanity for relationship. And so resting in that.

There's Philippians 3:12 is just a verse that's about kind of not ever arriving. I love it. So there's rest in this knowing that the Holy Spirit's always at work in our heart. So here goes. "Not that I have already obtained it or I have already become perfect, but I press on, so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold up by Christ Jesus." So it's basically you're clinging to Christ, knowing that on this side of glory it's never going to be whole. There's always going to be sin kind of marring our experience.

Selena: Well, I would also argue real quick too that there is tension in the good. When you are working through...I think Rachel Jankovic said this in one of her books. But when you're working through things of the Lord, you're working through counseling, you're working through...we can have rest ultimately in that, but there also will be this tension of doing good work that just takes time and energy and focus. There's a lot happening with all the other things in your life, but we can still rest in the ultimate, but also be at peace knowing that, "Okay, there's this tension here, I'm growing, and that's okay, and this is good. And I can rest in this process that we're trying to make progress in and bring heat to the arctic tundra."

Ryan: I had a really clear instance of that. I woke up at 3 a.m. I was wrapped around the axle of my own mind. I was thinking about some things. I was feeling anxious. You know, you can kind of feel it coming on and you're like, "Oh, no, what is this thing?" I know what it was. There's a few different things we're working on that they were uncertain. They're still uncertain, to be honest and it gives me reason to not rest.

And I just felt the Holy Spirit, by His grace, three o'clock in the morning, lying in bed, he said, "You don't have to worry about this stuff in this way." And that wasn't this relegation of responsibility. It wasn't this he just automatically poof everything went away. He said, "You don't need to be bound up like this." Yet, you have to be the one walking through it. Like Selena said, you get to walk

through that process. "But you know, you get to lean into me in that and you get to trust me with the big outcomes. I'm the one who changes hearts, not you. I'm the one who makes fruitfulness happen, not you. You just do the faithful thing and just take one step after the other."

Guys, I've climbed a couple of mountains in my lifetime. When you hit a whiteout, you can't see two steps in front of you. You can even sometimes see your own hand in front of you. All you can do is wait it out and trust or you can take one step forward, one step forward, and you're exhausted and you feel blind. But you can rest knowing that the path is stable and solid. Well, ideally for climbing a mountain, that's the case. In Christ we know it's the path is [inaudible].

Selena: Yeah, so good.

Ryan: The trusting thing, I love that because it goes, talk, listen, empathize, understand, act, and then rest, trust in the process. And then this, to me is the biggest indication of trust. And this is just praying through it all. Prayer is such an exercise in trust and in faith. When we don't pray, it's an expression of our own fake autonomy. We think we can do it without God's help. When we pray, it's a response to our need and our desire to commune with the God of the universe.

Selena: So good.

Ryan: So pray through it all.

Selena: Pray through it all.

Ryan: Hopefully, it's been helpful. I mean, we talked through the different degrees of coldness all the way down to the arctic tundra, and how counseling could be a really tangible solution to help you break that cold snap. So I'd be remiss if I didn't mention this resource again, you guys. I think we mentioned it last week, but we actually started taking counseling. We couldn't do the session this week because of scheduling conflict.

Selena: You stay started taking counseling almost like it's a lesson. *[both laughs]*

Ryan: We started counseling.

Selena: We started counseling. Sorry. I was like, "Taking counseling lesson?" *[chuckles]*

Ryan: We couldn't do another session because of a scheduling conflict. But just in the session that we have done, which we're going to keep are this quote-

unquote, "experiment" [00:45:00] going for many months, I think. We just learned so much. This is a timely partnership for us. We've been wanting to do this series for a number of months. And it just—

Selena: If you listen to any of the other podcast episodes of this series, you'll hear us say many times over that it took about a year for us to come to the table with Faithful Counseling. I mean, they asked us about a year ago, we were like, "Aah, we don't do ads." And they're like, "Well, what about a partnership?" Like, "Okay." There was a lot of prayers and thought and consideration because—

Ryan: We didn't think it was valuable. Now, here's how it works. I want to make sure that it's really clear. If you are thinking about doing this, you go to faithfulcounseling.com/fmp. They'll give you 10% off. You don't have to pay anything upfront. You sign up, you fill out a form, and it will basically ask you things about what you believe.

Now, you need to be really clear that you want biblical counseling as you walk through that. And then they'll start seeing kind of the nature of the issues you have or that you want to address, things like depression, stress, anxiety, marriage counseling, obviously, is an option, crises of faith, having problems sleeping. Maybe I should talk to them about that, because I wake up at three, pretty much on the clock every night. Anger, family of origin stuff, family conflicts, self-esteem, grief, trauma, all that kind of stuff. So as you go through the questionnaire, you can indicate things you want to talk about. And then they'll do this is really cool. They match you with a counselor that specializes based on what—

Selena: And it's very user friendly. I scheduled, canceled, rescheduled, canceled, and then rescheduled again for our next counseling session. But it was because we had things conflicting and times and all that. It literally took me 10 minutes. I didn't have to text; I didn't have to call. I just did it online. They even have an app and you can—

Ryan: Pick your time slot. You don't have to go back and forth.

Selena: Yeah. You can even text and chat, or just do a phone call if you don't want to do video. It's very user friendly. It doesn't take a lot. That's I think one of the better features of it.

Ryan: And it's affordable. If you think about normal counseling, I think it's probably, I don't know, probably three or four times the cost of this on a monthly basis. So I encourage you to check it out. And a lot of times churches will help sponsor as well if finances are a problem. Like I said, it is a very, I think

fortuitous - what's the word? It's a providential connection, timely connection. So go to faithfulcounseling.com/fmp. I can't speak highly enough of our experience so far. We hope you have a good experience there as well if you decide to do that.

That said, let's pray for some couples. All right. We'll pray and then we'll call it an episode. Lord, I thank you for just the gift it is to have your Word as our foundation of truth. But not only the written Word, but we have the word in Christ Himself given to us and the Holy Spirit here to counsel us and to give us wisdom and discernment as we seek understanding in these issues. I pray for the husbands and wives who are feeling that communication and their intimacy in terms of just feeling close to one another is suffering because they've had a cold snap or they've had a cold season, or they're maybe living in a tundra right now and they're realizing, we need help.

I pray, God, that you would meet them there. I pray that you would minister to them, that you would lead them out of that cold place, out of that dark place into a place of warmth and flourishing and life and fruitfulness. I pray that as they begin that path, that you would give them hope, that you would equip them with peace and hope and joy in you that is otherworldly alongside them in that journey, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Selena: Amen.

Ryan: Thank you for joining us, ladies and gentlemen for the Fierce Marriage Podcast. This episode is—

Selena: In the can.

Ryan: As usual, we'll see you in about seven days. Until then—

Selena: Stay fierce.

[00:49:05] <outro>

Ryan: Thank you for listening to the Fierce Marriage podcast. For more resources for your marriage, please visit FierceMarriage.com, or you can find us with our handle @Fiercemarriage on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Thank you so much for listening. We hope this has blessed you. Take care.

PODCAST NOTES

- **[00:25:46]**
 - Scripture references:
 - Proverbs 12:18
 - Proverbs 17:27-28
 - Philippians 3:12
 - Counselling Partner Recommendation:
 - faithfulcounseling.com/fmp

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