

## RESPONDING TO THE GOTTMAN'S 4 HORSEMEN OF THE RELATIONSHIP APOCALYPSE

<https://fiercemarriage.com/responding-to-the-gottmans-4-horsemen-of-the-relationship-apocalypse>

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**Ryan:** So when you're dealing with marriage, you're dealing with relationships, you can't do so merely on empiricist terms, meaning that you can't just use science to say, here's what scientifically works for relationship and here's what doesn't, here's the data, here's the case study, therefore, here's our recommendation.

However, I do believe that there are times when making, I guess, measured observations, asking carefully crafted questions, and then observing with-

**Selena:** The results.

**Ryan:** ...the steady, kind of steady resolve, if you will, that that can shed light on maybe themes and areas of relationships that tend, in our culture, to be problematic for marriage. And that is exactly what we're going to look at today. There's the Gottman's, who you might know that name. Caveats. They are not Christian. By all measure that I can tell, they are godless. Their research reflects that. However, I want to talk through some of their research, namely the Four Horsemen of Relationships.

**Selena:** Yeah, it's probably their most popular article.

**Ryan:** Yeah, it's one of the most popular things. Oh, and I want to look at it from a biblical perspective and say, okay, they're using this word. What is a biblical concept for that? And then we can give some verses that illustrate maybe how to respond in light of those horsemen. So those horsemen don't have to be the apocalypse of your marriage. Right? So we're going to do that on the other side.

[00:01:31] <music>

**Ryan:** Selena, you're a big fan of horses.

**Selena:** Big fan.

**Ryan:** You should give us the various breeds of each one of these horsemen. They're not horses.

- Selena:** They're horsemen.
- Ryan:** They horsemen of the apocalypse. Upon what kinds of horses are these men mounted?
- Selena:** I don't know. Military horses, because they're apocalyptic. So they're going to have to do with war and conquest and hunger and things like that.
- Ryan:** I have an honest question. If you could have any kind of horse, what kind of horse would you have?
- Selena:** Oh goodness.
- Ryan:** And no strings attached.
- Selena:** Like prices? No.
- Ryan:** Any kind of horse. I don't know.
- Selena:** It's a hard question because there's lots of horses for lots of purposes, but I'd probably get a horse like the one on Brave. What's his name? The black horse.
- Ryan:** Angus.
- Selena:** Angus. Yes. Because the girls they love horses like that with the big feathers and like-
- Ryan:** So what kind of horse is that? Friesian.
- Selena:** No. Well, gypsy banners are black and white horses like that, but he's like all black with a little bit of white. So I don't know if he's... And gypsy banners are typically smaller. Boring.
- Ryan:** All right, nerd.
- Selena:** Yes. I know. I appreciate it, but I'd get him an Angus. I'd get our kids an Angus.
- Ryan:** We'll need to Google what kind of horse that was. Not that we could necessarily get it. But anyway, welcome to the show. My name is Ryan. This is my lovely wife, Selena. We're the Fredericks. Selena at one point was an equestrian photographer and also a horse person.
- Selena:** Rider? Equestrian?

**Ryan:** Yeah. That's why I asked because we don't currently have horses in our lives at all. But-

**Selena:** Maybe one day.

**Ryan:** Maybe one day. Maybe one day. Welcome to the Fierce Marriage podcast. By the way, I do want to say this. We had four or five new fellows joined the Fierce Fellowship in the last week.

**Selena:** Thank you, Lord.

**Ryan:** We can't tell you what that means to us. A few things. It means that the Lord is providing through His people to that. Two, that this content is getting out there. It's being used to help people. And three, there are people that are like-minded on mission, want to see God's vision for the family, for the household, specifically for marriage made great in our society. We want things to change for the better. And that means proclaiming the gospel in every area and being honest about what God says. And so we're doing it in marriage. So anyway, thank you for joining us.

If you want to join the fierce fellowship, that's what I was getting to. If you want to join the fierce fellowship, [fiercemarriage.com/partner](http://fiercemarriage.com/partner). You too could be one of the elite, one of the extraordinarily blessed and relationally endowed. You can take that to the bank or just show up in there and we'll show up, you show up and we'll talk. How's that sound?

So, Selena, I had this idea.

**Selena:** Ryan.

**Ryan:** Yes. That is my name. No, I had this idea that... we've heard about the Gottman's...We've heard about the horsemen. I think they bring some valuable things to the marriage conversation. The biggest thing I mentioned in the intro, my biggest problem with the Gottman's is that they are humanist and they are secular and they are, by all accounts, godless. Meaning that they rely almost exclusively on, I'll say exclusively, on empiricism and its value in providing insight into the marital situation.

**Selena:** Right. And we went through some of the antidotes just briefly before this and it was not really helpful. The goal is not the same as...

**Ryan:** So there's horsemen and then there's antidotes to the horsemen.

**Selena:** Sorry. Yes. The goal is just a positive relationship essentially, versus as Christians, our goal is not a positive relationship, right? It's so much more than that. It is a godly relationship that reflects and honors the Lord, that bears children, that is a part of eternity. I mean, we're not married in eternity.

**Ryan:** I'd say our highest goal is obedience to God, glorifying God. And it does all the things you're describing. And so they're not saying, hey, you want a good marriage, so you should obey God. They're saying, you want a good marriage, so here's some things that work. Here's some pragmatic things we've observed and here's all the data behind it.

So I don't want to throw out the baby with the bathwater. And so what I want to do is go through these horsemen and put them through a biblical filter and then test the validity against maybe even our own... because we've been doing this for over a decade.

**Selena:** Bring it on. Bring it on.

**Ryan:** So should we just say the four horsemen up front?

**Selena:** I think so. I think it's helpful for people to just hear them all and then they can kind of sift through it. Yeah.

**Ryan:** Go ahead. According to the Gottman's.

**Selena:** According to the Gottman's, the first apocalyptic horseman is criticism.

**Ryan:** We'll get into them. The second one is contempt. The third one is defensiveness. And the fourth one is stonewalling, which that's an interesting term to use because it's not intuitive necessarily.

**Selena:** No.

**Ryan:** But keep in mind, these are the horsemen of the marital apocalypse.

**Selena:** Or the relational apocalypse. They're not even talking about like marriage.

**Ryan:** Yeah. We're talking about marriage. If you're not married and you should be, get married. But these are specifically in light of communication. So they're going to have kind of communication themes within each one. Okay.

So the first one, criticism. According to the Gottman's, what do they mean by criticism? We're going to go through... by the way, there's an article that we're going through as we're reading this.

**Selena:** Do you want to say what they are saying and then what you would put the Christian word on that instead of criticism?

**Ryan:** They say criticism is not just a complaint. So they differentiate between a critique or a criticism and a complaint. And that a complaint is dealing with a specific occurrence of something whereas a criticism is like you're late because you're a late person.

**Selena:** Yes. And it's an attack on the character. It's a normal part of their vocabulary and their relational culture.

**Ryan:** Yeah. And so, go ahead.

**Selena:** It just says that if you guys are critical of each other and then your relationship is pretty much doomed to fail and that it can just become really pervasive and it just paves the way for the other deadlier horsemen to follow, which would lead into number two, but we'll just pause and stay here for a minute.

**Ryan:** Yeah. So I would say criticism is simply just a lack of grace in the relationship and a lack of maybe even charity and love. And of course, these are all symptoms of not being able to communicate well. It's okay if, you know, we're supposed to leave and you're late and I'm upset about you being late. It's okay to be upset about that. It's not necessarily okay to use that as an excuse to critique your character. Christians, we should be critiquing each other's character. That's called loving honestly. That's speaking truth in love and that's being a disciple of Christ saying, by the way, this is a theme in our lives. We're always late. I think we should maybe work on not being late. We're not the kind of people who are always late. We want to be reliable. We want to be faithful. That's all kinds of other things we can use to describe, as an example.

So I would say the criticism, yeah, if you have a marriage that is void of grace-

**Selena:** And your communication... That's where you see it I think the most is, well, I can't say that because if you're criticizing in your conversation, you're going to be criticizing in every area of your marriage. Critical, excuse me, would be a better word.

**Ryan:** So yeah. So what's the Christian antidote, right? Maybe we'll just talk about the Christian antidotes to these things. Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupting talk come from your mouths, but only that which is good for building up as it fits the occasion, that may give grace to those who hear."

**Selena:** And that applies to your spouse.

**Ryan:** You could use probably 1 Corinthians 13 for all of this, but one of the things that always comes to mind, especially in terms of being charitable in your marriage is that love hopes all things. And what I take that to mean, what I think it means is that you are expecting the each other. You don't just always say, yeah, classic, classic, screw up again. No. Or I have no grace in how you're... I'm receiving your communication. I just assume the worst always. Man, you're going to have a rough time. You're going to have a rough time.

**Selena:** Take it as an indicator. There's some things that you need to... some weeds, probably some deep, deep weeds, some things that you need to like kind of plow up out of your garden, the garden of your marriage, and some things that you need to sift through.

Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." We all know that harshness in conflict just escalates it. I've definitely found that a softer answer in any conversation, whether your kids or their emotions are rising up, but when you're married, you're going through conflict, trying to find the soft answer it's going to take humility, it's going to take the Spirit, the Holy Spirit urging you, encouraging you to take the higher path of the soft answer because it doesn't always feel right or justified.

But again, we're talking about extending grace. So if grace has been extended to us, we then are now capable. And in some instances, I think just commanded to extend grace to one another. It doesn't mean we can't grow.

**Ryan:** Right. So if you're a husband-

**Selena:** Grace is not a license for sin. We should know this. This is basic.

**Ryan:** If you're a husband and your wife comes to you with a loving criticism, you should take that to heart and you should sift through it. Is it wisdom? Is what she's saying true? Humility would say, okay, if it's true, you would then take that to the Lord. And if repentance is needed, then you would do that. And then you would ask the Holy Spirit to help you live differently. But if there's a continual need for grace, you're not responding... So our response to grace is repentance, should be repentance. And so that's grace shown to each other. That's grace that we've received from Christ. That's grace.

The faith that He gives us is we understand His grace and then we repent of our sin. So that's the other side of this. So in terms of antidote, if you have a graceless marriage or a marriage that is full of-

**Selena:** Criticism.

**Ryan:** Criticism. You're critical with each other, friend, you need to experience God's grace. You need to experience God's love. And you need to look at your spouse through God's eyes and see Him or her as someone made in His image, also deserving grace.

**Selena:** Yes.

**Ryan:** So that's number one. Criticism. So what's the second?

**Selena:** We call that a lack of grace, which would lead to contempt, which by all accounts, the Gottman's are saying, if you have contempt in your marriage or in your relationship, you're on the path to divorce is what they say. It's like the biggest killer of a relationship.

**Ryan:** Yeah. So the example that they give is... it's a couple's fighting says you're tired, cry me a river. I've been in with the kids all day, running around like mad to keep this house going. And all you do when you come home from work is flop down on that sofa, like a child and play those idiotic video games. I don't have time to deal with another kid. Could you be any more pathetic? Do you feel the contempt?

**Selena:** Right. Well, yeah. And it has to do with like, you know, scoffing, calling names, ridiculing, mocking, being sarcastic with them, disrespecting each other and how you're talking like there's... contempt is such an indicator... I don't know. Whenever we're out and I see a couple engaging even a little bit like this, you can tell they're on their best behavior because they're out and this is still happening. You're like, I don't even want to know how they talk to each other at home because this is deep and it's harsh. And it's really sad to be completely honest.

And as Christians, we cannot communicate to each other like this. I mean, to brothers and sisters in Christ, but first and foremost to our wife, husband, husband, wife. Contempt is an indicator of an unrepentant sin, I would say, because there's some root of anger, of bitterness, of frustration that hasn't been addressed.

**Ryan:** Or unforgiveness.

**Selena:** Or unforgiveness. Yeah.

**Ryan:** Yeah. If I had to put a biblical title on this one, I would call this sinning in your anger and or self-righteousness. Because what it is, is it's you in every regard feel that you have the moral high ground and you were dealing with a cretin,

somebody who is of lower moral status. Think about if you spoke to your spouse that way, could you be any more pathetic? I could not imagine you saying that to me or me saying that to you.

**Selena:** Right.

**Ryan:** What state of mind or heart do you have to be in to look at another human being and say something like that?

**Selena:** It's prideful. It's a self-righteous position. It's I am superior. Clearly you are not.

**Ryan:** I don't know how you can call yourself a Christian and talk like that.

**Selena:** I agree. I agree. Well, 1 Peter 3:8-9, "Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing." So having contempt for others, you are being self-righteous, you are actually cursing another person. You're not-

**Ryan:** And we're called to bless.

**Selena:** And we're called to bless. Yes.

**Ryan:** Again, not that we never say true things. We say true things. Like husband, if you're getting home and you're ignoring your family, you're plopping down on the couch playing video games, you need to be called out on that. That's not something an adult man should be doing to the detriment of His household. I'm not saying video games are inherently, I'm not saying that. What abouts in my ear? So you need to be able to say true things in a loving way.

Philippians 2:3, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." So-

**Selena:** If you're communicating with contempt, clearly you're not counting your spouse better than you. You're not even valuing them, I think even at an equal level, right? You're being self-righteous, you're being the superior you are. And then you're shoving that other person down without... I can't imagine saying that you love your spouse while treating them with contempt.

**Ryan:** Yeah. I can't imagine it.

**Selena:** I don't understand how it has to coincide.



- Ryan:** It happens and it's for these reasons because you're not loving biblically. You're not experiencing giving grace based on the grace you've received in Christ. You're not living in light of the gospel. If you are looking your spouse in the eye and letting your anger come out in this way, that's a serious thing that you need to work through. So what's the biblical antidote to this?
- Selena:** Self-righteousness and humility. No. I mean, we're not here to like criticize every marriage that deals with this. Because I think that at some level we do deal with some of these to some degree maybe.
- Ryan:** Which means the difference-
- Selena:** Well, but I think if you call yourself a Christian and you're dealing with things like contempt or self-righteousness and you haven't called it that, you need to identify and call it what it is. And then you need to turn and repent, right? We need to turn and be humbled and see our sin for what it is and the grace that's been extended to us.
- Ryan:** Yes. To me, functioning this way is the difference between saying, man, that was a really... I'll use the word stupid. You could probably use a different word here. You can say, man, you've acted really stupid. You could probably use a different word. But that said in the right way, I think is a maybe even a helpful critique or you acted foolish or whatever as opposed...
- Selena:** Maybe two boys. Maybe boys say that to each other. Boys. Men.
- Ryan:** Man, you are acting like such an idiot as opposed to you are an idiot. You are an idiot, right?
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** I'm describing your behavior because I know you, I hope all things I trust in that something is working in you. You're not just an idiot through and through. But did. You acted like an idiot? Let's acknowledge that.
- Selena:** Right.
- Ryan:** As opposed to attacking your very being. Great. That's the second horseman according to the Gottman's is contempt. I think it's better classified as self-righteousness or sinning and anger. All right, what's the third horseman?
- Selena:** So the third horseman is defensiveness. And I think it goes hand in hand with contempt because...

- Ryan:** [inaudible 00:19:52]
- Selena:** Well, yes, I know that's obvious, but they have an example here. It says, did you call Betty and Ralph to let them know that we're not coming tonight as you promised this morning? And the defensive response is just, I was just too darn busy today. As a matter of fact, you know, you just how busy my schedule was. So why didn't you just do it? They're so funny.
- Ryan:** As you promised this morning?
- Selena:** As you promised this morning. Just throw it more in your face. I mean, you can hear the contempt in the defensive answer, right? I don't know. I don't see the biggest difference. But it's a blame game. It's a reverse of a blame game, right? You're trying to not take the blame. You're upset with the person for not seeing your perspective. It's not admitting like... like if I was talking to you like that, you'd probably be like, are you okay? Who hurt you? You know, kind of thing. It's like, okay. I don't know. Defensiveness is just... there's lots of complaints and excuses is shifting the blame. It's not admitting your fault.
- Ryan:** They, I think what maybe we can emphasize here is you have this perpetual feeling of being unjustly accused, which I would say that you are feeling misunderstood. Like I really dislike feeling misunderstood by you. And when I feel misunderstood, I want to make myself understood, which comes out as defensiveness.
- Selena:** Sure. You-
- Ryan:** And so... I go ahead.
- Selena:** Oh, you called this insecurity, I think too.
- Ryan:** Yeah. Maybe.
- Selena:** Some of it can stem from that maybe, but I think it's going deeper than that. If it's a constant, we're constantly defensive with each other-
- Ryan:** My question is why are you perpetually defensive? Is it warranted, right, if you're being criticized all the time?
- Selena:** Yeah. You might get defensive.
- Ryan:** You might start to feel pretty darn defensive.
- Selena:** Right.

**Ryan:** But if it's an unwarranted defensiveness, like I'm always kind of guarded against you, that to me is a lack of trust. And that comes from insecurity. You don't feel secure. You don't feel secure in your marriage. You don't feel secure in yourself. And so I would root that all the way down to not seeing yourself as Christ sees you when He calls you a new creation, when He calls you His own, when He says, you are my sheep, you are adopted, brought into the family in the fold of God. Wow.

I can still know that embrace that, but still be defensive in my marriage because of our history or because of communication culture in the home.

**Selena:** Right. I think you have to build... it takes time, but I think you can build in your marriage... what's not defensiveness? Security, right? You can build humility. Build humility. You can build into your marriage by being humble, more of a safety, not feeling, but just security in each other, in your relationship, in the purpose that God has for you being together.

**Ryan:** Yeah. We talk about this in our books, *How a Husband Speaks*, *How a Wife Speaks*, of sharing meaning. And so confirming-

**Selena:** Having shared meaning.

**Ryan:** Yeah. Having shared meaning because words mean things. But when you communicate a lot of times there's signal and that's what you want to hear and what is meant to be communicated. And then there's noise. It's everything that clouds out and crowds out the thing that you're trying to communicate. And then there's the interpretation filter, right? Like, am I tuned into the right channel? Am I hearing it correctly? Am I parsing? So words have meaning and then we don't always... I'll use this example, which I love is, if you read in the biblical texts, in like a foreign text, I'll say, and there's a word "key" in there, or someone's maybe translating English into another language and they see, oh, the key, and they take key to mean a device that opens a lock. Well, a key could also be an island. A key could be a way to read a map on the bottom corner of the map. A key could be an important idea. A key could be a lot of things.

**Selena:** Right.

**Ryan:** And so when I say key, are you hearing the thing that I mean, not just the word that I said? And so to me, if there's a perpetual defensiveness, it means you're not listening and hearing and speaking with efficacy in your marriage. You don't have high definition communication. You have clouded communication. I look at James 1:19-20, it says, "Know this my beloved brothers. Let every

person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Here's the key. "The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."

**Selena:** And I think one way we can really be slow to anger is to ask questions and to not be defensive, right?

**Ryan:** That's the shared meaning piece. Sorry to interrupt. Ironically, we're talking about communication and I interrupted you. I hear you saying this. Is this what you mean to say?

**Selena:** I hear that you're saying these words, but to me, this is what I'm hearing. Am I correct? Like it just repeating back and kind of describing more of what you're saying or what you think you're saying.

**Ryan:** Even those will fall as to call out the subtext.

**Selena:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Ryan:** I get that you're frustrated that we're late, you're pretty irritated. Did you have a hard talk? You were on the phone for like an hour.

**Selena:** Yeah. Or is there more to this than I'm seeing right now? Because it feels like a pretty deep, deep dive here and we're all frustrated and angry. What's really going on here? I think those kinds of questions can be disarming and I think they can bring you back around to each other and actually get a productive conversation happening and get some resolve.

**Ryan:** And you gotta be head on a swivel in this, have your eyes open, and listen to one another. Because if you're always dismissing it as there's a root somewhere else, that can be very frustrating. So if you're frustrated because we're late and you're showing that frustration, communicating something and I say, nah, you're just hungry, you just need a sandwich.

**Selena:** It's like me with our toddler, like our 5-year-old and like, you're just hungry. But that feels super patronizing.

**Ryan:** Yeah, it starts to feel patronizing. And I could say to you, are you doing all right? Do you need to maybe eat something? And you can say, I'm fine. I'm just frustrated because we're late again. Okay. Okay.

**Selena:** Are you sure you don't want a banana? I'm just kidding.

**Ryan:** I'll bring a banana, but let's talk about how we can maybe not be late, you know, whatever the thing is.

**Selena:** For sure.

**Ryan:** So yeah, I would chalk this up to an insecurity that's rooted in being misunderstood.

**Selena:** Sure. Like a lack of shared meaning communication.

**Ryan:** Through foolish communication. And maybe a lack of transparency. So it's not one word, but that's how I would say biblically defensiveness. Now, what's the solution? Well, James said it, be slow to anger, be quick to listen, slow to speak. Why though? Because you understand that when you do things the fleshly way, anger, it will not produce the righteousness of God. Remember, we are not humanists. We don't think. We're not secularists. We are accountable to the living God creator of the universe. We want what He wants. And He wants from us faith and holiness. He wants us to live righteous lives. And that's what it means to obey Him is to align ourselves with what He says is right.

And so we don't want those things. So we're going to do what James is recommending. I'm going to, I'm going to close my mouth. I'm going to try to understand you and I'm going to do so because God has commanded trusting that it will bring forth good fruit.

**Selena:** Amen.

**Ryan:** Okay. The last one. Number four of the Gottman portion of the apocalypse is stonewalling. They say that stonewalling is the response to contempt. I'll just read it. It says, Stonewalling occurs when the listener withdraws from the interaction, shuts down, and simply stops responding to their partner. So they grow cold, they ice over. And it goes on, rather than confronting the issues with their partner, I don't like that, with their husband or wife, people who stonewall can make evasive maneuvers, such as tuning out, turning away, acting busy, or engaging in obsessive or distracting behaviors.

**Selena:** That's so funny because one of their antidotes was to do something that is soothing and distracting. What did they call it? Psychological soothing or something like that.

**Ryan:** Their antidotes are pretty bad.

**Selena:** Well, they're saying that that's what people do and they're saying not to do it, but then they're also saying to do it. So it's just funny.

- Ryan:** Friends, we're sparing you the antidotes because all their solutions are rooted in kind of a weird baseless morality. They're moralisms. Like you need to do the right behaviors to get the right results, but we're not going to point you to God or hope in any way.
- Selena:** Of course not.
- Ryan:** We're just going to tell you that you do the right things. Like put the money in, get the cheese out of the vending machine type of thing.
- Selena:** What vending machine do you go to that has cheese?
- Ryan:** Whole cheese machine.
- Selena:** I don't know why. Ryan likes cheese.
- Ryan:** I had a business idea.
- Selena:** Okay. Stonewalling typically response to the contempt that's happening. Again, I think if these are consistently happening in your marriage-
- Ryan:** I'm just wondering what kinds of cheeses I could put in the vending machine.
- Selena:** You're consistently going to get cheese to the vending machine. I don't want to get expensive cheese from a machine like that.
- Ryan:** Not yet. You don't.
- Selena:** You got to make a nice machine though. It's got to be carved nice and wood. It has to be a beautiful presentation.
- Ryan:** What? A vending machine?
- Selena:** I'm not gonna buy cheese from like a Coke machine. Gross.
- Ryan:** You want me to make it look like a cuckoo clock?
- Selena:** Yes. That's part of the experience.
- Ryan:** A cheese vending machine shaped like a cuckoo clock. With competitive prices and delicious cheeses. If this idea comes out in the next year, you'll know where it came from.

**Selena:** I'm going to stonewall you on this. No. Again, stonewalling. If you're consistently withdrawing from interaction, you're shutting down emotionally, you're refusing to engage, you just want to avoid the conflict, you're leaving the room. Clearly there's something wrong at a heart level. Most of these are heart level indicators, heart level issues that are being indicated through each of these different apocalyptic four horsemen.

So their end all be all is, you know, basically take a timeout and go figure out how to calm down and soothe yourself. And I'm like, okay, well sure, I guess. We probably might need a timeout if we're constantly getting to this, like, Hey, we're not getting anywhere in this conversation. You're not responding. Let's take a moment. But as Christians and as a married couple, we're taking a moment not to avoid one another, but a time to cool down our emotions so that we can think clearly, apply wisdom, a godly wisdom and figure out how to resolve the conflict that we're in, how to stop stonewalling each other. We're not afforded this luxury to just ignore one another.

**Ryan:** Yeah. I would call this, biblically speaking, stonewalling is letting the sun go down on your anger as a way of living. And you're not dealing with things in terms of truth or in terms of reconciliation. You're dealing with things in terms of what works and what kind of... it's not peacemaking, it's peacekeeping. Probably peacemakers.

**Selena:** Sometimes it takes a lot of work. And that means you deal with it. So go back an episode, we talked about pushing through the ambush. Stonewalling is like, I'm not going to push through the ambush. I'm just going to let the ambush happen. You have zero resilience, zero... And you know, there might be reasons. If criticism is a part of your marriage consistently and your conversation, you might feel like withdrawing is the only defense that you have. If I'm constantly criticizing you, how is that going to encourage you to step up? I mean, there's no other motivator besides God's word.

**Ryan:** See number one. Again, there's a reason why these are called the horsemen of the marital apocalypse is if these... so now step back a little bit. If we are observing a couple and I see these things, oh yeah, they're acting like children. They're acting like they have no maturity. They have maybe zero desire. They maybe lack even the basic knowledge of what it means to have a healthy relationship.

Forget about emotional intelligence and self-awareness. You're acting like children. So yeah, children are not ready to enter into covenantal... You could be adults by age, but you're children in terms of your maturity level.

**Selena:** Right. Right.

**Ryan:** And by the way, that's more and more the case that people aren't growing up in their maturity. They're-

**Selena:** For a lot of reasons.

**Ryan:** For a lot, a lot of reasons. So just high alert. Be aware of that. What's the biblical response to this? Let's go to Colossians 3:13. It says, "bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive." So yeah, when you withdraw and you ignore and you let the anger go undealt with, that's what letting the sun set on your anger means. You're not dealing with it and you're withholding true forgiveness, meaning that you're not actually repenting and dealing with it.

**Selena:** It's all that we talk about. It's all the underbrush that's just ready for a fire, just a small spark to set it ablaze. And if you're not dealing with what's underneath the forest of your marriage, all of that underbrush, and you're just letting it pile up, pile up, pile up because you're just stonewalling, you're ignoring them, you're letting the sun go down on your anger, you're just living in this place that you think you're kind of protecting yourself, but you're actually just creating more, more fuel for the flame.

**Ryan:** Yeah. And you're prolonging and maybe intensifying when it finally does go up in flames. So there you have it, friends, our response to the Gottman's, the four horsemen of relationships. Again, the caveat here is I don't trust the Gottman's. I don't. I think they have maybe some useful insights, but I would not trust them-

**Selena:** Not to lead our relationship, our marriage.

**Ryan:** ...to lead our relationship or any other Christian couple or any... because our whole mission is to point people to Christ because without Christ, we have no real hope. We might be able to distract ourselves. We might be able to survive for a minute. We might even have some joy because common grace is a thing. And He's given us more grace than we're even aware of. But we want to point you to Christ.

So in light of that, the gospel is this, the good news, it's done, it's finished. It's not good advice. It's something that Christ came and accomplished in time, in history, in His flesh. It happened. And what happened? He lived, He did miracles. He was crucified. He died on the cross, a sinner's death, even though He lived a perfect life, He was unjustly crucified, and then He was raised, He resurrected, and now He's ascended to the right hand of the Father where He



reigns today. And He will return. Now, where's the good news in that? Well, the good news is that He did all these things so that He might bear your sins on the cross so you don't have to. It's the truth.

**Selena:** It's all good news.

**Ryan:** Not just your sin from you when you repent of it and you give it to Him, but He also gives you His righteousness. He clothes you in His righteousness and you are now white as snow before God. And so when God looks at you, He doesn't just see you. He sees you, but you are in Christ, and in that you are righteous like Christ is righteous.

**Selena:** Amen.

**Ryan:** That's what it means to be a Christian is you understand that you placed your faith in Christ because He's the only one that can save you, and then you follow Him. To that end, we say, find a good friend and say, show me Jesus. Help me to walk with Him. Help me to repent and believe. Help me to understand the gospel.

**Selena:** Let's read the Bible together.

**Ryan:** Yeah. Let's read the Bible together. Go find a good church that preaches out of the Bible. If you don't have either of those things, we have a church finder and a few more helpful steps down the path on this website, [thenewsisgood.com](http://thenewsisgood.com).

Let's pray. Lord, thank you so much for your word that is always so illuminating and incisive. And it gives us wisdom to see truth. Amen. And thank you for the ability to think through some of these ideas and to walk through them and to understand your solutions, not just worldly solutions, not just pragmatic solutions that we put into place because they get good results, but things that are based on your truth, things that are based on your promises. So we might walk by faith and not by sight in Jesus name. Amen.

**Selena:** Amen.

**Ryan:** Thank you for joining us, friends. We hope this was a fruitful episode of the Fierce Marriage Podcast. If it was, we'd be honored if you'd consider partnering with us.

**Selena:** So we can get those cheese... what do you call them? Vending machines out there.

**Ryan:** I'm going to go write up a quick business plan for that. I mean, just think about it. Cheese can get expensive. The profit margins have to be decent.

**Selena:** Okay.

**Ryan:** We can even make our own cheeses.

**Selena:** We.

**Ryan:** If you want to get in on the ground level, you too can be one of the early adopters.

**Selena:** Oh my.

**Ryan:** Fierce cheeses. Anyway.

**Selena:** Fierce cheeses.

**Ryan:** Jesus cheeses.

**Selena:** He is off.

**Ryan:** It's already gone.

**Selena:** We're off. We're done.

**Ryan:** Anyway. The Fierce Fellowship is something I wanted to mention. If you want to partner with us, if this episode has helped you, if you are on mission with that, if you would say yes, throw your hat in the ring and say, we are on board with seeing marriages built, seeing culture reshaped, reformed around God's ideas of marriage and family, then please consider joining that. It's [fiercemarriage.com/partner](http://fiercemarriage.com/partner). We'd be honored. And yeah, we'd love to see you in there. I think that's it for this week.

So this episode of the Fierce Marriage Podcast is—

**Selena:** In the can.

**Ryan:** See you again, Lord willing, in about seven days. So until next time—

**Selena:** Stay Fierce.

**PODCAST NOTES**

- **Referenced scripture**
  - Ephesians 4:29
  - 1 Peter 3:8-9
  - Colossians 3:13
- **Recommended resource**
  - [thenewsisgood.com](https://thenewsisgood.com)

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