
STOP THE DISRESPECT

*How to Recognize the Patterns, Set the Boundaries,
and Reclaim the Respect Your Marriage Deserves*

Lloyd D. Allen, MSc.

Marriage Educator, Therapist, and Family Coach

MrMarriage.com | lloydallen.org | Fixing Marriage Academy, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Chapter One — Recognizing Disrespect	6
Chapter Two — Setting Boundaries	10
Chapter Three — Communication Under Stress	14
Chapter Four — Rebuilding Respect & Trust	18
Chapter Five — Sustaining Change	22
Conclusion	26

INTRODUCTION

Disrespect is not always loud. It does not always announce itself with slammed doors or screamed words. Sometimes it arrives quietly – in a dismissive tone, a perfectly timed eye-roll, or a cutting remark disguised as humor. But make no mistake: wherever contempt lives, love slowly dies. What begins as small moments of impatience can grow into a pattern of contempt that quietly corrodes the very foundation of a marriage.

This ebook was written for the couple who knows something is wrong but cannot quite name it. It was written for the spouse who feels consistently minimized, overlooked, and talked down to – and for the partner who may not fully realize the damage their words and behaviors are causing. This is not a book about blame. It is a book about transformation.

Each of the five chapters integrates the biological, psychological, theological, and practical dimensions of healing. Real transformation requires all four. You cannot think your way out of a contempt pattern. You cannot spiritualize your way past wounds that need therapeutic attention. And you cannot apply techniques without the covenant commitment that makes

them worth practicing.

WHAT YOU WILL COVER

Chapter One — Recognizing Disrespect: Learn to identify contempt patterns, map the behavior-trigger-root cause cycle, and move from victim to strategic observer.

Chapter Two — Setting Boundaries: Discover how to establish non-negotiable standards, deliver them with calm authority, and enforce them with consistent follow-through.

Chapter Three — Communication Under Stress: Master the three-step Pause-Regulate-Speak protocol, understand nervous system flooding, and identify what must never be said.

Chapter Four — Rebuilding Respect and Trust: Move beyond apologies into the daily practice of changed behavior, specific affirmation, and genuine restoration.

Chapter Five — Sustaining Change: Build the daily practices, weekly rhythms, and external accountability structures that make transformation permanent over time.

A WORD BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Do not rush through this material. The couples who benefit most are the ones who slow down enough to make it personal. Read together where possible. Be honest where it is

uncomfortable. Stay committed when it becomes difficult.

Your marriage is worth every effort. Let us begin.

-Lloyd Allen

Marriage Educator, Therapist, and Family Coach

RECOGNIZING DISRESPECT

Understanding the Patterns, Triggers, and Root Causes

Disrespect rarely introduces itself. It creeps into a marriage through small moments of impatience, habitual sarcasm, and finally contempt that poisons every conversation. Before you can stop disrespect, you must be able to identify it with precision. Most couples living with chronic contempt have normalized behaviors that are quietly destroying their emotional connection — and they do not even realize it is happening.

KEY CONCEPTS

— The Disrespect Pattern Map.

Every act of disrespect follows a traceable pattern: a behavior, a trigger, and a root cause. The behavior is what you observe. The trigger is what activated it. The root cause is what lies beneath — a wound or fear never honestly addressed. Until you can map the full pattern, you will continue reacting to the surface while the actual problem goes completely untouched.

— Moving from Victim to Observer.

The most powerful shift available is moving from victim to strategic observer. A victim takes every contemptuous act personally and feels powerless. An observer watches the pattern clearly, identifies the trigger accurately, and responds from awareness rather than reactivity. This shift does not erase the pain — it removes the pain's power to control your response.

— Contempt as the Highest Form of Disrespect.

Dr. John Gottman's research identified contempt — mockery, eye-rolling, belittling, and dismissiveness — as the single greatest predictor of divorce. Contempt communicates: I see you as beneath me. It is not anger — it is a posture of superiority that, left unchallenged, will ultimately destroy any marriage.

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

When a spouse endures chronic contempt, the nervous system responds as though under physical threat. The amygdala floods the body with cortisol and adrenaline. Over time, this reshapes neural pathways, producing hypervigilance, emotional shutdown, and avoidance. The recipient experiences flooding — physiological overwhelm where rational communication becomes impossible. Healing requires neurological rewiring through consistently safe, respectful interactions sustained

over time.

THEOLOGICAL

Paul declared: Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers (Ephesians 4:29, NKJV). The Greek word corrupt is *sapros* – rotten, worthless, harmful. His standard is not merely the absence of harsh words – it is the active presence of edifying, grace-imparting speech. Every word in the home is a deposit or a withdrawal. Disrespect withdraws. Contempt empties. Honor deposits. Choose deposits – daily, deliberately, consistently.

EXAMPLE

Marcus and Diane had been married nine years. Diane dismissed her sharp remarks as honesty. Marcus told himself his silence was harmless. In therapy, the Disrespect Pattern Map revealed that Diane's cutting remarks appeared when she felt ignored – her trigger was invisibility. Marcus withdrew whenever he feared escalation. Neither had ever named these patterns. Once named, both could address the actual wound beneath the behavior rather than simply arguing about the surface.

-Lloyd Allen

Marriage Educator, Therapist, and Family Coach

SETTING BOUNDARIES

Learning to Establish and Enforce Non-Negotiable Standards

A marriage without boundaries is a marriage without protection. Boundaries are not walls designed to keep your spouse out — they are guardrails that keep the marriage safe. Many couples confuse boundaries with ultimatums. An ultimatum is a threat spoken in anger. A boundary is a standard established from values, communicated with calm authority, and enforced with consistent follow-through. Without boundaries, disrespect continues — because there is no consequence, and where there is no consequence, there is no deterrent.

KEY CONCEPTS

— **The Three-Component Boundary Formula.**

Effective boundaries follow a clear structure: When you [BEHAVIOR], I feel [IMPACT]. I will [CONSEQUENCE]. This removes accusation and replaces it with calm clarity. For example: When you speak to me with that tone, I feel dismissed. I will end the conversation until we can both speak with respect. The consequence is not a punishment — it is a

protective response designed to keep the marriage safe.

– Empty Threats vs. Real Boundaries.

An empty threat is spoken loudly and enforced never. A real boundary is spoken calmly and enforced consistently – regardless of your spouse's response. It does not require their agreement or approval. When you set a boundary without enforcing it, you communicate that the standard is negotiable. Consistent enforcement is not cruelty. It is the clearest act of love available to a spouse who values this marriage.

– Delivering Boundaries with Calm Authority.

The manner of delivery is as important as the boundary itself. A boundary screamed in conflict is received as an attack. A boundary delivered calmly is received as a serious personal standard. Practice your boundary statements before you need them. Know your words. Know your consequence. Know that you intend to enforce it. Calm authority communicates that this is not an emotional reaction – it is a values-based commitment.

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

Research in attachment theory shows that individuals raised in environments with inconsistent emotional boundaries struggle to establish healthy relational limits in adulthood. Anxious

attachment triggers fear of abandonment when boundaries are set. Avoidant attachment produces resistance to confrontation. Neurologically, enforcing a boundary initially triggers cortisol spikes in both partners. Over time, however, consistent enforcement creates earned security – a neurological state where safety is not merely hoped for but actually felt.

THEOLOGICAL

Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it (Proverbs 4:23). The Hebrew word guard is *natsar* – to watch over, to protect with vigilance. God instructs you to guard what is most precious. In marriage, guarding your heart includes establishing emotional and behavioral standards that protect both spouses from ongoing harm. First Corinthians 13 reminds us that love does not rejoice in wrongdoing. Allowing disrespect to continue unchallenged is not love – it is the abdication of the protective responsibility covenant marriage demands.

EXAMPLE

After seven years of absorbing her husband's verbal aggression, Sandra established a clear boundary: When you raise your voice at me, I feel unsafe. I will leave the room until we can speak with respect. The first time she enforced it, he escalated. The second time, he paused. By the fourth time, he stopped raising his voice

— not because he was forced to comply, but because Sandra had consistently demonstrated that the standard was real. Her calm authority changed the marriage more effectively than years of arguments ever had.

-Lloyd Allen

Marriage Educator, Therapist, and Family Coach

COMMUNICATION UNDER STRESS

Mastering What to Say and What Never to Say When Emotions Run High

Every couple has a breaking point – a moment in conflict when the conversation stops being productive and starts being destructive. What most couples do not understand is that this moment is not simply emotional. It is physiological. The body reaches neurological overwhelm long before the mind recognizes it. Understanding this reality – and having a practiced plan – is often the difference between couples who repair conflict effectively and couples who allow it to compound into chronic contempt.

KEY CONCEPTS

– Understanding Nervous System Flooding.

Flooding is the state in which your nervous system is so overwhelmed that rational, empathetic communication becomes physiologically impossible. Dr. Gottman found that when the heart rate exceeds 100 beats per minute during conflict, the brain's capacity for empathy and problem-solving is severely compromised. The most critical communication skill under stress is not choosing better words – it is

recognizing when you are no longer capable of using them wisely.

– The Three-Step Protocol: Pause, Regulate, Speak.

When flooding is detected – racing heart, clenched jaw, shallow breathing, the urge to attack or shut down – the protocol is clear. Pause: communicate that you need a break. Research shows at least twenty minutes is required for the nervous system to return to baseline. Regulate: breathe, pray, walk – do not rehearse your argument. Speak: return to the conversation from a regulated state, focused on your core needs.

– What Must Never Be Said.

Some phrases, once spoken, cannot be recalled. You always. You never. My family was right about you. Maybe we should just end this. These are not expressions of pain – they are weapons designed to wound and destabilize. Every couple must establish a shared list of prohibited phrases – statements categorically off the table regardless of how heated the conflict becomes. Name these in a calm moment. That single conversation changes the rules of engagement.

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

The prefrontal cortex – responsible for rational decision-making, empathy, and impulse control – is

significantly impaired during flooding. LeDoux's research confirms the amygdala's threat response overrides cortical function within milliseconds, producing reactive speech that bypasses conscious intention. Telling someone to calm down does not work – the flooded brain cannot comply. What works is strategic physiological regulation: deliberate breathing, light movement, grounding, and prayer – all of which activate the parasympathetic nervous system and gradually restore prefrontal function.

THEOLOGICAL

A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1). The Hebrew word soft is *rak* – tender, gentle, pliant. A soft answer is not a weak answer – it is a disciplined one. James adds the full framework: Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath (James 1:19). In marriage, these three instructions – listen first, speak deliberately, resist rage – form the biblical blueprint for communication under pressure. Disrespect thrives in heat. Honor operates in calm. The couple that masters this does not eliminate conflict – they stop letting conflict eliminate them.

EXAMPLE

David and Keisha had the same destructive argument every Thursday after financial discussions. In counseling, they

identified their individual flooding signs – David's jaw tightened, Keisha's voice rose – and agreed on a code word: Yellow. Either partner could call Yellow to initiate a thirty-minute pause. Within three weeks, their Thursday conversations ended in agreements rather than apologies. The pause did not eliminate the conflict. It created the conditions where conflict could actually be resolved.

-Lloyd Allen

Marriage Educator, Therapist, and Family Coach

REBUILDING RESPECT & TRUST

Moving from Hurt and Resentment Toward Genuine Restoration and Affirmation

Trust is not rebuilt with words. It is rebuilt with time, consistency, and changed behavior — demonstrated repeatedly, without expectation of immediate reward. Many couples believe that a sincere apology closes the account of past disrespect. It does not. An apology opens the conversation. Changed behavior is the only currency that actually rebuilds trust. The wounded spouse does not need to hear that things will be different. They need to see it, feel it, and experience it — consistently — before the nervous system begins to believe it.

KEY CONCEPTS

— **Why Apologies Alone Never Rebuild Trust.**

An apology acknowledges the past. Trust is rebuilt in the present. When a spouse says I am sorry without producing sustained behavioral change, the apology becomes a mechanism of emotional management rather than genuine repentance. Over time, the wounded partner learns to receive apologies with detachment — not because they are

unforgiving, but because they have heard the words without witnessing the transformation. Genuine restoration requires a decisive shift from language to lifestyle.

– What Changed Behavior Actually Looks Like.

Changed behavior is not dramatic. It is the daily accumulation of small, intentional choices that communicate: I see you. I value you. I am choosing you again today. It is pausing before responding. Replacing sarcasm with sincerity. Asking how your spouse is doing and waiting to hear the full answer. Choosing your spouse's emotional safety over your need to be right. Sustained over time, these small choices are the most powerful rebuilding force available.

– Affirmation as a Daily Rebuilding Practice.

Affirmation is not flattery – it is the intentional naming of what you genuinely observe and value in your spouse. Specific, honest, and timely. I noticed how patient you were with the children tonight. Specific affirmation reinforces new behavior in the partner being affirmed and trains the affirming partner to look for what is right rather than cataloging what is wrong. Research shows daily, specific affirmation accelerates trust restoration and increases emotional intimacy.

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

Research in interpersonal neurobiology (Dr. Daniel Siegel) demonstrates that trust is stored not merely as a cognitive belief but as a body-level felt sense. When trust has been violated through contempt, the nervous system encodes the partner as a threat rather than a refuge. Rebuilding requires corrective emotional experiences — repeated positive, safe interactions that gradually override the brain's encoded threat response. The timeline for neurological trust restoration is measured in months, not days. Patience and consistency are the active ingredients of healing.

THEOLOGICAL

They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness (Lamentations 3:23, KJV). The Hebrew word for mercies is *chesed* — covenant love that does not abandon even when wounded. God's model of restoration is not a one-time event. It is a daily renewal of mercy and faithfulness. For the couple rebuilding after contempt, the call is clear: approach each morning as a fresh opportunity. New patience. New gentleness. New intention. Not because the past is forgotten — but because the covenant is larger than any wound inflicted within it.

EXAMPLE

After eighteen months of contempt, Raymond and Tanya began a Mirror and Affirm practice — each morning, each partner

named one specific thing they genuinely appreciated about the other. Raymond found it nearly impossible at first. Tanya began consistently, without demanding reciprocity. Over weeks, Raymond's responses shifted from mechanical to genuine. By month four, both reported feeling safer with each other than they had in years. Daily affirmation had not erased the pain. It had built a new, visible layer of trust over it — one day at a time.

-Lloyd Allen

Marriage Educator, Therapist, and Family Coach

SUSTAINING CHANGE

Creating Habits and Accountability Systems That Prevent Regression

Transformation that is not sustained is not transformation – it is a season. Many couples make significant progress during a period of crisis, only to drift back into the same destructive patterns once the urgency fades. Sustaining change requires more than motivation. It requires structure. It requires accountability. It requires a conscious decision – renewed regularly and built into daily life – to consistently choose honor over the habits of contempt. Couples who last are not the ones with the most conviction. They are the ones with the most intentional systems.

KEY CONCEPTS

– **The 90-Day Framework.**

The brain requires approximately 90 days of consistent new behavior to form durable neural pathways. Days 1-30: Awareness and Commitment – the problem is understood, boundaries are set, tools are being practiced. Days 31-60: Consistency and Reinforcement – new behaviors are becoming more automatic, small wins are being celebrated.

Days 61-90: Integration and Habit Formation — new patterns feel increasingly natural, and both partners can tangibly feel the shift holding.

— The Three Pillars of Sustained Change.

Daily practice means using at least one intentional relational tool every day — a genuine affirmation, a check-in, shared prayer. Weekly rhythm means protected time each week — a marriage meeting, a date, a shared devotional. External accountability means identifying at least one trusted person or couple who can speak honestly into your marriage and help you stay on course when personal motivation fades — because it will.

— Recognizing Real Progress.

Progress is not always visible in moments of conflict — it is visible in the moments between them. Are conversations recovering faster? Are apologies coming sooner? Is humor returning? Is physical affection increasing? These micro-indicators are more reliable than dramatic breakthroughs. Learn to celebrate small wins. A week without a contemptuous remark is a win. A conversation that de-escalated before flooding is a win. Transformation is thousands of consistent decisions made faithfully over time.

BIOLOGICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL

Neuroscientist Wendy Wood's research reveals that sustainable behavioral change depends less on willpower and more on environmental design. When relational routines are structured to make the desired behavior easy and the undesired behavior inconvenient, change becomes self-sustaining. In marriage, building rituals of connection — consistent, low-effort daily practices — maintains emotional intimacy without requiring constant motivation. The couples who sustain transformation longest are those who have made honoring their spouse less of a daily decision and more of a deeply embedded default.

THEOLOGICAL

Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Galatians 6:9, NKJV). The Greek word for grow weary is *egkakeo* — to give in, to become fainthearted, to abandon the effort before the harvest. The promise is certain: the harvest is coming. Do not stop at day 45. Do not abandon the practice at day 67. Ellen G. White wrote: Every right principle, every truth learned, is a seed which will produce fruit after its kind. Press on. The reaping belongs to those who refuse to quit.

EXAMPLE

After completing the course, Marcus and Diane implemented one commitment: a thirty-minute marriage meeting every

Sunday evening. They reviewed the week's wins, named patterns they had observed, and set one shared relational intention for the coming week. Marcus missed two meetings in the first month. By month three, he was initiating them. By month six, their children noticed the difference – less tension, more warmth, more laughter. The meeting was a small thing. Practiced consistently, it became the scaffolding on which an entirely new marriage was built.

-Lloyd Allen

Marriage Educator, Therapist, and Family Coach

CONCLUSION

You have made it through five chapters. That alone means something. It means you have not given up. It means you still believe — even if that belief is fragile — that your marriage is worth the effort. Hold on to that. It is the seed from which everything else grows.

This ebook has walked you through the complete arc of transformation. You learned to recognize disrespect not as a vague feeling of being hurt, but as a traceable pattern with a behavior, a trigger, and a root cause. You were equipped to set boundaries — not threats, not ultimatums, but calm, values-based standards that protect both you and your spouse. You were given a protocol for communication under stress, so that conflict no longer has to become contempt. You were shown what genuine trust-rebuilding looks like — not in grand gestures but in the daily accumulation of small, intentional choices. And you were given a 90-day framework and three structural pillars to ensure that what you have built does not erode when motivation fades.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Return to these chapters. The tools in this ebook are not one-time reads — they are ongoing reference points. When the old patterns return, come back to Chapter One and map the pattern. When a boundary is violated, return to Chapter Two. When conflict escalates, activate the protocol in Chapter Three. When trust feels distant, practice affirmation from Chapter Four. When progress slows, recommit to the structure in Chapter Five.

Transformation is not a destination you arrive at. It is a direction you maintain — one day, one decision, one conversation at a time.

A FINAL WORD

The Hebrew word shalom is often translated as peace. But its full meaning is wholeness — a state in which nothing is broken and nothing is missing. That is what God has always intended for your marriage. Not the mere absence of contempt, but the active presence of covenant love. Safety. Honor. Mutual respect. A home where both spouses can exhale.

Galatians 6:9 says: Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Do not lose heart. The reaping belongs to the couple that refuses to quit.

Your marriage does not have to stay where it is. It can become what God always designed it to be.

-Lloyd Allen

Marriage Educator, Therapist, and Family Coach