

Communication in Marriage – Part I

Open, honest, “in-to-me-see” communication that connects your hearts together is key to a successful lasting marriage.

- True Communication lets the other person know how you feel, what you are thinking, and who you really are. Nothing is hidden (present or past) from the other person
- True communication happens when you both have the same image on both of your hearts.
- If you can keep a dialogue of healthy communication going with your spouse, you can keep the marriage alive and fulfilling for both of you. It needs to be enjoyable and not a "have to." It may seem like work to a man, but he needs to commit to do it too!
- Effective, healthy communication happens when both people understand each other. It goes beyond just agreement to a deeper level of knowing each other’s unique perspective and experience.
- By understanding each other’s heart on an issue, you can build a stronger connection.
- The only way you can build a heart-to-heart connection with someone is to communicate on a heart level about your feelings and needs.
- A marriage only brings as much satisfaction to each other as the two mouths in it.
 - Your marriage is never better than your mouth.
 - Your intimacy is never better than your communication.
- Hurts, offenses, or negative actions from our spouse can cause us to withdraw and close our spirit. We form walls that block communication and prevent us from finding meaningful solutions to our differences.
- We soon become isolated from our spouse and emotionally disconnected. We become numb and strangers in the same house. Intimacy shuts down.

Three Types of Communication

- 1) **Pro-active** – You address issues when they are still fresh and before hearts have become hardened, opinions set, and defenses go up. Feelings and emotions are at a lower level, the truth can be shared without offense, and positive outcomes can be the result.
- 2) **Re-active** – Both sides are reacting out of the hurts, misunderstandings, strong emotions, set positions, etc. There is no room for compromise or open discussion of the truth without either or both sides getting upset.
- 3) **Radio-active** - The issue can never be mentioned without strong emotions and feelings and both side moving into their corner to defend their opposing positions.

The Power of Positive Communication

- We hear through our deepest need (men – honor and respect women – security)
- Need to speak to a man in a way that he hears honor and respect in your words and tone of voice
- A man wants to know that he is a good man - Say things like:
 - ✓ “I believe in you”
 - ✓ “You’re the best!”
- Men are tender on the inside and are emotionally modest. If the man feels judged, disrespected, not honored, or not appreciated, he cannot hear you. He will shut you out!
- A woman keeps the man calm when she protects what he shares taking every word as sacred between the two of them.

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- Women are strong on the outside and able to share their emotions with others.
- A woman hears through her deepest need for security
- The husband needs to put her needs first even to his own hurt. She needs to know her man is **tuned in** and **cares about what she feels**. “**I care**” is big to her!

Five Standards in Communication

- 1) **Caring** – comes through your body language and countenance – expressed through feedback to make sure you have heard them and understand.
- 2) **Praise** – **Ps. 100:4** The gates of our heart will open to hear when we receive positive affirmation from our spouse. Without praise first, our heart will stay closed. Without praise you won't influence another person's heart. Praise keeps the negatives away and focuses on the other person's strengths. When praise leaves, criticism comes in.
- 3) **Truth** – **Prov. 3:3 Eph. 4:15**
Mercy without Truth is like a cheerleader without a team
Truth without Mercy is surgery without any anesthesia.
Truth without Mercy is mean
Mercy without Truth is meaningless!
Our words and actions need to create an atmosphere of truth – Need to give each other time to share the truth that is on their heart. Without sharing our hurts there can be no intimacy.
- 4) **Faith** – We need to have a gentle and quiet spirit where we share our hearts and allow the Father to be the enforcer and not us. This is the only way that we can stay in peace. We become the bully when we try to be the enforcer. (nag, browbeat, accuse, put down, ridicule, etc. the other person)
- 5) **Surrender** – We allow our mouth to be used by Father for His glory and lift and encourage.

Women also use conversation to become involved in their husband's life.

- They ask many questions because they want to connect with what their husband has been doing during the time that they were apart or about what he plans to do.
- By asking questions, a woman can begin to get a mental picture of what their husband has been doing or what he is going to do.
- Women want to feel like they are a part of their husband's life and communication helps them feel that connection.

Women need open, honest, patient, emotional conversation

- **They need to feel secure physically, financially, and emotionally.**
- Women need to share their heart without fear of being rejected. When you reject her needs you reject her.
- Women connect on an emotional and feelings level.
- Non-verbal and facial expressions are important. A woman looks at the face and eyes to see what the other person is feeling.
- *Conversation helps a woman get in touch with her feminine side after being in a masculine world all day.*

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- By talking a woman can get all the things out of her head so she can realize what she is dealing with. If a man will stay quiet long enough, the woman will answer her own question or see what she needs to do. The result, she often solves her own problems!
- Through conversation women identify with their husband's world and his activities when they are apart (10,000 questions!). It gives her a way to feel a part of his world.

Men's Need for open/Honest/Transparent Conversations

- For men, talking is more about gaining knowledge or understanding concepts.
- The woman's role is to show her husband the areas where he is unChrist-like. This needs to be shared in love. The man is usually blind to his spiritual immaturity.
- The woman is to help the husband improve his relationship with God and others.
- The woman cannot remain silent acting like everything is OK when she knows it is not. This only cements the problems and prevents the husband from seeing the truth.
- Most men do not like to have their shortcomings and bad habits exposed. (**John 3:19-21**).
- The wife must overcome the fear of rejection or how her husband will react.
- The husband must let the wife know that you value and trust her input (spiritual maturity) – especially when she points out your offenses.
- The man must take responsibility for his actions and offenses.
- The husband needs to keep his heart open to what his wife is saying and not react.

The Art of Listening (Partially from Alexa Fisher.com)

- The most important gift that you can give your spouse is your undivided attention.
- All our devices have stolen away our ability to listen and distracted our hearts.
- You can only listen to one thing at a time. You are where your heart is and you can't be anywhere else!
- It requires listening with your heart. You need to hear with more than just your physical ears and the words that are spoken. Good communication is heart to heart. What is going on the inside is the most important part of the conversation.
- Instead of waiting for gaps to throw in our own life-focused story, we need to pause and really take in what the other person is saying. We need to ask questions.
- When you ask a question rather than focusing on yourself, you are showing interest in them. Those questions can open up amazing conversations about their wonderful stories.
- As you put away all the distractions, ask questions and really listen, you are building trust. And in that trust you can just BE!
- The most important part of listening is the gift of BEING. You can relax in the moment and enjoy what is in front of you!

Active Listening Skills

- Pink and Blue Conversations – **Stop and Decode first!** Men and women speak and hear differently. **Father made us pink and blue and we need to be sensitive to the differences.**
 - They may use the same words, but mean something different. (ex. "I have nothing to wear." To a man it means nothing clean to wear, but to a woman it means nothing new to wear!)
 - Women speak more about and from the relational perspective. Women think about people, relationships and feelings and they expect men to think that way too.

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- Men tend to be more factual, logical, intellectual, and less interested in the details or relational aspects. They expect their conversations with women to be the same as with other men.
- It is important to validate the other person's emotions and feelings. Don't interrupt – let them finish what they have to say first.
- You must be sensitive to the needs of the person speaking, what may have happened to them, and how they feel.
- Listen in a supportive way. "I can tell how that really hurt you." I can see why you might get angry about that."
- Focus on what is being said. Ask yourself why they are saying this to you.
- ***Create an atmosphere where both spouses feel safe to share their feelings and express emotions without any negative reactions.*** A man must be careful not to invalidate a woman's feelings or emotions.
- ***Practice active listening*** – ask questions if you don't understand something – repeat back what you thought the other person said.
- Respect the other person's opinions, even if you don't agree with them. **1 Pet. 3:7, Eph. 5:33**

Preparing a man to listen

- ***Pick the right time to talk*** – avoid going into his cave (a quiet place where he disconnects from life's demands!), times of high emotions, after difficult situations, or when you don't have his complete attention (he is working on something, playing with the kids, or watching TV)
- Make an appointment to talk – take walks, go to a park, go to a restaurant
- Prepare him for what you want to talk about – explain why you need to talk, what the problem is, or what you really need from him. ***Without knowing what you want him to do, a man will instinctively try to fix the problem, find a solution, or answer the question.*** He feels the need to do something. Or he may take the blame or feel frustrated that he can't help.
- By letting him know what response you are looking for from him, he will be able to react and listen in a more positive way. You may just tell him that all you want him to do is listen to you.
- Make sure that you have his attention – make eye contact, pause until he turns his head and looks at you – sit face to face.

How men can listen without getting upset

- A man must duck and dodge – avoid becoming frustrated, angry, hurt, or feel like you are being blamed, criticized misunderstood, rejected, mistreated, or unappreciated by what your wife says.
- He must *defend himself without retaliating, blame shifting, or finding fault with what she is saying.* She is just sharing how she feels and will very quickly get over those feelings after she has had a chance to express them.

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- He must resist the temptation to defend himself through intimidation, threatening, raising his voice, or arguing.
- He also must not withdraw from the conversation in an attempt to protect himself or her from his own aggressive behavior.
- He needs to keep from feeling guilt or condemnation, like it is an attack on his character, or it's criticism
- He needs to side step those negative reactions and realize that she just needs to talk and have him listen.

Communication is:

58% non-verbal (body, face, and eyes) 38% tone of voice 7% actual words

However, Words are still powerful

- Death and life are in the power of the tongue! **Prov. 18:20-22**
- **Word are the seeds we sow.** – You can't get positive results if you are sowing negative seeds (words)!
- You reap what you sow, and you reap more than you sow. **Luke 6:38**
- You may think that it was a pebble, but your spouse may think it was boulder!
- You can speak blessing or curses
- Can build bridges or walls
- Let the other person know how you feel or what you think
- Words are a creative force which create:
 - 1) atmosphere in a home
 - 2) pictures in your mind and subconscious
 - 3) encourage or discourage
 - 4) bring shame or honor
 - 5) defile or build up
 - 6) bring bondage or freedom

Worksheet Handout for Communication in Marriage Part I

Communication is critical to having a fulfilling, meaningful, beautiful love affair that will last through all the years of your marriage. It requires continued changes and adjustments as your marriage moves through its different stages and complexities. The deepest levels of intimacy and love are only achieved through open, honest, and transparent communication. And you can let that start right now by making the commitment to always keep the lines of communication open regardless of what the issues or situations are that you are going through. Begin now to create a safe environment where anything can be brought up for discussion without the fear of rejection, retaliation, sarcasm, or being ignored or devalued for what you share.

Before the next time we meet, discuss together the following areas and topics about your communication with each other. Be sure to validate and affirm your love and commitment to each other before you start! Then enjoy getting to know each other a little bit better!

The Power of Positive Conversation

1. Sit several feet apart and look into each other's eyes. Make a facial expression of how excited or please you are to be with the other person. Look away and then use other nonverbal ways to communicate your pleasure towards each other. Do this several times and then talk about how that made you feel.
2. Sit facing each other with your knees touching.. Just look into each other's eyes for three minutes and be aware of the feelings you experience as you gaze into their eyes. Then share how that made you feel or any other thoughts you might have had during that time.
3. Sit several feet apart, close your eyes, and focus within to see Jesus being with you. Once you sense His presence, ask Jesus to tell you what He sees when he looks at your future spouse. After a period of time, open your eyes and share with each other what Jesus said to you about them.
4. Sit close to each other and hold each other's hands. Look into their eyes and say several things of what you appreciate most about them. Once both of you have shared appreciation, talk about how it impacted your heart what the other person said.
5. Tell some joy stories about memories from special times when you have been together.
 - Include some details about the time so that it will paint an image in both of your hearts
 - Share all of the emotions and feelings you might have had
 - Use tone of voice and body language to help convey your emotions, and
 - Share how it makes you feel just talking about the special time again.The person not talking can listen with their heart and add more to the story after the other person is finished sharing.

6. Together make a list of emotion and feeling words from low intensity to high intensity that you might use to convey: (It's OK if you need help from the internet!)

Happy

- glad - elated

Sad or Hopeless Despair

- unhappy - depressed

Fear

- perturbed - terrified

Shame

- bashful - defamed

7. Think of a short story about yourself and tell it to the other person without using words. Get frequent feedback from the other person to make sure they are tracking along with your story!

Creating a Safe Place to Talk

1. It's not automatic to want to talk about some of your most secret or innermost feelings and thoughts with someone else, even your future spouse. On separate pieces of paper, list any fears or concerns you might have about sharing your past, your innermost thoughts, feelings, addictions, unhealthy habits, etc. with each other. Share what you wrote and then reaffirm your willingness to listen and validate each other's fears or concerns. Be sure to bring your heavenly Father into the discussion and ask for guidance on what, when, and how you might share these difficult areas about yourself with each other.

2. A big part of whether we think the other person is a safe place to share all our thoughts and feelings is how they respond to ordinary situations in life. Each of you think about times in your own life (especially when you've been with each other!) when you may have:

- "lost it"
- got upset or angry at someone else
- responded to someone with negative emotions about what they did or didn't do
- became sarcastic or devalued someone else
- became defensive and tried to justify your own actions or position
- became manipulative or controlling with another person

These types of reactions can be indicators of past wounds or hurts in your own heart that may need to be healed. But they can also be patterns that begin to affect how safe the other person may feel about sharing everything with you. Share what you feel comfortable sharing about this and then pray for each other and ask your heavenly Father to help you get rid of these negative reactions in your life!