

Communications in Marriage – Part II

FIVE DEPTHS OF COMMUNICATION

To have the marriage Father intended, your communication needs to move from surface level communication to deeper, meaningful levels that enable you to enjoy a closeness and intimacy.

- *Cliché* – communication is reduced to essentials, greetings, requests, and formalities.
- *Reporting Facts* – conversation is very safe and unthreatening – talk about events and things "out there"
- *Expressing Own Ideas and Opinions* – person is starting to open up about themselves and what they think. – can carry note of disagreement, argument and potential rejection
- *Showing Feelings and Emotions* – much deeper level of feelings – can express fears, anger, hurt, compassion, etc. without fear of being rejected or attacked – **This level produces a closeness and intimacy that we all desire when our feelings are accepted by our spouse.**
- *Moments of Complete Union and Sharing Ourselves Without Reserve* – this level of relationship requires a deep level of trust and unconditional acceptance – place where relationships grow the sweetest and deepest – **not a constant state, but moments where either spouse or both can be open and vulnerable. Sharing spiritual things with each other draws you closer.**

THE NEED FOR UNDERSTANDING IN COMMUNICATION

- The first goal of conversation/communication is **understanding** and not agreement. A huge part of communication is connecting and understanding. Understanding will lead to deeper levels of intimacy, vulnerability, and develop trust in relationships. However, if you invalidate or disqualify one person's feelings, thoughts, or needs in some way, it becomes a relationship killer.
- Building a heart-to-heart connection with someone is to communicate by sharing your feelings and needs.
- Honor and mutual respect are important in communication so that each person feelings are protected too.
- Both people in a relationship have high value. They value what is inside them and take time and effort to understand feelings and needs. They find words to honestly express what is going on in them.
- When I value your feelings, you feel safe and I listen and respond. I invite you to go deeper and show me what it is you need. Then we move from understanding to decision-making and action. Understanding each other's needs takes place in real communication. Many of us have not been listened to so we don't know what we need or how to communicate it. You may simply ask your spouse, "What do you need? Tell me so I can help you." With that question we can feel cared for and loved, which gets rid of anxiety and helps as we look for what our heart needs. Communicators believe, "You matter and so do I."
- Understanding leads us to be able to make decisions and take action together.

TOPICAL VS RELATIONAL LEVEL COMMUNICATION

Topical Communication deals with the various topics or external issues of life. (where to live, how many children, vacation ideas, jobs, etc.)

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Relational Communication is the non-verbal "underlying messages we send to one another in the realm of identity regarding value." (Craig Hill *Two Fleas and No Dog*)

Relational Messages - Satan's self-destructing scheme for marriages

- ❖ Satan tries to keep us blind to certain levels of communication. You hurt and wound each other, but don't realize that you are doing it. (relational messages)
- ❖ When we receive their negative response and miss the relational message that we sent, we feel falsely accused by the other person and think that the problem is with them.
- ❖ We swear that we have done nothing wrong and we wait for the other person to repent.
- ❖ We then feel devalued, unloved, falsely accused, and unaccepted.
- ❖ We begin to believe the lie that the other person is wrong and my battle is with her/him.
- ❖ Since we think that we are not at fault here, we have no responsibilities in this and don't need to repent, ask forgiveness, or apologize.
- ❖ The relational messages begin to fly back and forth, and the war is on!

Most people, especially men, are completely blind to these relational messages being sent to their spouse even though they are the root to many arguments and usually damage the relationship.

- Remember, 93% of communication is non-verbal. "It's not what you said that hurt, but how you said it."
- **Or the relational message could come from what was not said**, but conveyed some implication of lack of trust, devaluing, not caring, or anger.
- The relational messages tell the women she is not loved or that the man feels no respect. They also have their identities damaged; "I'm a bad husband." "I'm not valuable to him."
- You can know that a relational message has been sent when your spouse lashes out in anger or withdraws for no apparent reason.
- In this situation, you must stop talking about the topical issues and start asking questions to find out the relational message and the feelings generated by it.
- **You must relinquish the fact that you were right**, take responsibility for the wounding, humble yourself, and ask forgiveness for hurting the other person.
- Convey a true message of love or respect until the walls are down.

Speaking the Truth In Love (Eph. 4:15)

Speaking – We need to speak to each other and express what is going on inside of us. If we keep quiet and stuff our feelings, we will only delay and intensify the problem. Silence communicates a lack of love and respect; the other person may feel uncared for because of a perceived lack of concern.

The Truth – We need to only focus on the facts and the TRUTH according to God's Word. We can hold back the truth to win an argument or prove a point. We can exaggerate something beyond known truth. Words like "**always**" and "**never**" usually **cause an angry response** from our spouse who can remember at least one time when that was not true! We can tell outright lies that break trust. We can also speak about something that we don't know for sure whether it is true or not.

Remember, trust is easily broken, but hard to restore.

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In Love – To speak in love is to say the truth in such a way that will not hurt your spouse.

However, we can speak the truth but do it in a cutting or hurtful way. We can also use the truth as a "weapon" against our spouse instead of helping your spouse understand what you are thinking.

Eight Ways Not to Talk to Each Other!

Aggressive Communication

- Aggressive communicators use loud voices, strong language, exaggerated body language, and facial expressions to try and control the conversation and get what they want.
- They are usually the biggest, loudest, and scariest people in the room.
- “I matter. You don’t!”
- Anxiety, stress, and fear are elevated in the recipients and the imbalance of power entirely eliminates intimacy. Relationship becomes a matter of survival. Neither side wins and communication is distorted or lost all together.

Passive/Aggressive – On the surface you say nothing is wrong, but inside you are hurting and thinking about ways to get even.

- You bottle up all of your feelings and emotions until you can’t take it any longer and unload on the other person.
- You get even later by denying things to the other person (sex, silent treatment, no touching, no food, no money)
- Passive/aggressive communicators manipulate control others through deceit, sarcastic innuendos, veiled threats, manipulative use of Scriptures, judgments, and withholding love.
- “You matter. No. Not really!”

Punishing Silence – withdraw from the relationship by not talking

- “cold war” – you ignore the other person’s existence
- You bottle up all of your feelings and emotions and never share them with the other person.
- *It is a form of controlling the other person.* You never talk about the difficult issues.

Unloading – Explosive anger Volcanos!

- This form of anger is very damaging to the relationship – may unload on your spouse for things that have happened to you at work or from other people
- Exploding is always wrong even if there may be some validity to your actions.

Criticism and Dishonor – The first step towards divorce

- Can be very damaging to the other person
- Never criticize your spouse in public or say negative things about them behind their back.
- ***Sarcasm (anger in humor form) builds a negative atmosphere in the marriage.***
- Sarcasm can be a form of blame shifting or trying to exalt yourself above your spouse. It will build contempt in the one subject to the sarcasm

Verbal Abuse – Threats, controlling statements, demeaning, intentionally damaging comments, intimidation, expressions of hatred

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- Comments that bring fear, condemnation, guilt, shame, low self-esteem, self-hatred, or depression to the other person.
- **It devalues the other person.**

Manipulation – use emotions, words, actions to control the other person

- *You use words that cause the other person to feel guilty, fearful, ashamed.*
- “Don’t “should” on me!”
- You use spiritual truths to make the other person obey you (“women must submit, “I’m the head of the house,” “ the Lord told me to...,” “I had a dream and you are to.....,” “ the Bible says that you should....”)

Dishonesty and Lying

- You are trying to avoid confrontations or trying to cover up sin.
- You are trying to make yourself look good or protect yourself (fig leaves).

Seven Ways to Have Good Conversations

Assertive – You matter and so do I!

- We validate and try to understand the thoughts, needs, and feelings of the other person.
- Both assertive communicators take great effort to try and find the words and express clearly and honestly what they want to share.
- They value what the other person is communicating from their heart.
- There is honor and mutual respect

Be honest and direct – don’t try to hide things

- ***Don’t expect your spouse to read your mind.*** “*If he loved me, he would know what I feel.*”
- Create an atmosphere where it is safe to share what you need to say without fear of being rejected, put down, mocked, or attacked.

Express honor and mutual respect

- This allows both people to feel protected.
- Respect requires you to set consistent boundaries around your conversations so that one person does not take advantage of the other person.

Be careful and gentle – be angry and sin not! **Eph. 4:26**

- Start out positive, loving, affirming, and willing to listen and work things out.
- ***Your conversation will never rise above the first three minutes*** (if it starts out loud and angry, it won’t get better!)
- Affirm your love and commitment before you start a heavy conversation
- You must be deliberate in your actions in order to change
- **Three levels of complaining:**
 - 1) ***pointing at yourself*** - Everyone should be allowed to *complain* from the perspective of yourself (“This is how I feel.”) – use the “I” word
 - 2) ***criticism*** – pointing at someone else (“You did this!”)
 - 3) ***contempt*** – slandering the other person (“You idiot! You stupid person! Don’t you have any brains?”) These last two are very damaging to a relationship.

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- Realize that what you thought was nothing may be very damaging to the other person.
- You may have thought that you were tossing them a pebble, but they received it as a boulder.
- ***Your words are very powerful both in positive and negative ways.*** A soft answer turns away wrath **Prov. 15:1**
- Need to **use the “I feel” approach** and not point your finger at the other person “you did this to me!”

Don't go to bed on your anger – don't allow Satan to get a foothold in your marriage

- Anger allows the accuser to work all night building the anger or discouragement that things will never be different.
- The anger pent up on the inside will kill your emotions and your love for each other.
- Today's anger is manageable, yesterday's anger is a bombshell!

Dialoguing

- Sometimes it is easier, especially for a man, to express their feelings in a letter than verbally.
- A man can take time to think about what he wants to say and how he feels when he sits down and writes out his feelings.
- You can write love letters about questions, about issues you need to deal with, and topics that are difficult to discuss without getting emotional or upset (“radio active” issues)
- The letters must involve more than just facts, but must focus on feelings and emotions.

Use Word pictures and stories

- **This is especially effective with men who are more visual in their thinking.**
- By creating a picture or story that portrays how you are feeling, it will help a man or a woman get in touch with those feelings.
- We can share **joy stories** too about pleasant or fun memories we have had with our spouse that will bring joy and peace and create an atmosphere for better communications.

We can also communicate our love for each other and stay relational even through difficult conversations or situations by expressing appreciation for each other, Father, or Jesus. Appreciation turns our “relational circuits” ON. When our relational circuits are on, we are aware of Father's presence; relationship becomes bigger than the problem; and we are open to listen and attune with the other person.

Worksheet Handout for Communication in Marriage Part II

Good Communication doesn't just happen. It requires effort and learning new skills. Sometimes we need to "unlearn" some of the bad examples that we may have experienced growing up with our parents or relatives. There will always be room for improvement throughout your life together, so we encourage you to read together the books that we have listed on our reference pages we gave you as well as other books or articles that you may encounter on your own. If you get stuck or experience difficulties of communicating with each other, please seek help by calling us or go to trained counselors that can help you have communication that will keep your love and marriage alive and vibrant!

Before the next time we meet, use the questions and activities below to enhance your skills in communicating with each other. Enjoy the rich fellowship with each other as you open your hearts and connect on a heart-to-heart level!

Tell Joy Stories With Each Other

1. Think of times in your own life that brings good feelings when you think about the memories. Keep them light and something you feel safe sharing with the other person. Share enough details so that the other person will get a picture of what is happening and be able to get involved emotionally with what you are sharing. Be sure to express your feelings and emotions as you share your story (including facial expressions and body language) and how it may have impacted your heart and body.
2. Think about times that you have had fun together or experienced something special in your relationship with each other. Share the specifics about what you can remember from the event or time together and share how that made you feel. Express appreciation for what the other person may have done to contribute to your good feelings. You can also do this exercise any time when you feel tired or the relationship seems to be on auto pilot, not sure what to do next, or there is some stress or tension in the relationship. It will help you refocus on what is good and positive about your relationship and rekindle the love and passion!
3. Tell something that was funny (may have been a little embarrassing at the time!) about what you have done or happened to you in your past. Share enough of the details that the other person gets an idea of what happened. Express all the feelings and emotions that you may have experienced at the time. Be sure to laugh together and be supportive or encouraging to each other if necessary! Realize that we all make mistakes and do some pretty foolish things sometimes in our life that really are funny when we look back on them now!

Express Appreciation

1. Each of you make a list of 10 special moments from your past that are memories of people, events, or things that you feel thankful for. Be specific with the details for each one. Give them each a one or two-word names. As you write each one, feel appreciation in your body. When the feelings fade, go on to the next memory. When you've completed all ten, you can share your list with each other and talk about them all or one at a time in the future. Keep your list and refer back to it during your quiet times.

During each quiet time, pick one appreciation memory from the list and express thanksgiving to Jesus or Father about His part in it. Be aware of how you feel and any emotions that come up as you express your appreciation.

2. Sit so that you are looking at each other and think about something that you are thankful about the person you are looking at. Express your appreciation for them or what they have done and share how that makes you feel. This exercise can be repeated as much as you like for the rest of your lives together!!

Dialoguing

1. Come up with questions that you would like to know but don't know right now about each other. Separate and write your answers making sure to include your feelings and emotions. Come back together and exchange answers. Read the other person's answer twice and take turns discussing what each of you wrote.

Some examples:

1. How does it make me feel when we pray together?
2. What is my biggest dream about our future together? How Does That Make Me Feel?
3. If we could go anywhere, where would that be? How Does That Make Me Feel?
4. What is the one thing that I like the most about you? How Does That Make Me Feel?
5. What are 5 things that you could do that would be romantic to me? How Does That Make Me Feel?