

Marriage Communication

Communicate Or Disintegrate

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for building up according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.” Ephesians 4:29

COMMUNICATION. It is a wonderful thing when it happens!

The number one issue that couples bring to marriage counseling is that they have trouble communicating. Many couples are not aware of good communication skills and therefore are not effective communicators. Poor communication underlies common marital issues such as finances, parenting, romance and sexual intimacy, decision making as a couple, and in-law relationships.

Communication is vital to a mutually-satisfying marriage relationship

- **Marriage is an intimate relationship built on mutual understanding through communication.**

Husbands and wives demonstrate their love for each other through various means of communication that lead to understanding which is the primary goal of human communication. In order to truly understand another person you must be able to communicate with him or her. A husband and wife can know a great deal about each other without really knowing one another. That's where communication comes in.

- **Marriage communication is a lifelong process.**
- **Communication provides a pathway for people to know each other, to relate to one another, and to understand the true meaning of the other person's life.**

God Created Communication

Communication originated with our Creator. God is the Great Communicator. He began communicating with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2-3). The Lord communicated His love and will for our first parents as He walked with them and talked with them in the cool of the evening in Paradise.

God has communicated with man all throughout the Bible. The Word of God is a sacred book of truth where God connects and communicates with humans made after His

image. Through the fathers of our faith, the prophets, and through His written Word, God communicates with us.

God's greatest act of communication took place when He sent His only Son Jesus Christ to earth as Savior of the world. As we study the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) Jesus communicates the Fathers' love for His wayward children and shows the way to salvation through the sacrifice of His Son (John 3:16-17).

God communicates to His believing children through prayer, study of the Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Scriptural Communication

The book of Proverbs should be studied and meditated upon. Proverbs contains principles and truth concerning communication. The wisdom writer Solomon shares with us communication gems that will enrich our personal lives and our relationships with the people we love. Putting into practice the proverbs God has given us will sharpen our communication skills and enhance our marriage and family relationships.

"Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Proverbs 18:21

James 3:2-10: James has some powerful things to say about the tongue.

"Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." James 1:19

"He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him."
Proverbs 18:13

"It's a badge of honor to accept valid criticism." Proverbs 25:12

"The one who guards his mouth preserves his life." Proverbs 13:3
"The one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin."

"By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; and by knowledge the rooms re filled with all precious and pleasant riches."
Proverbs 24:3-4

From Genesis to Revelation, God's Word instructs us on how to and how not to communicate. The Bible teaches us about how to love our loved ones with the love of God. Scriptural communication addresses our attitudes and actions toward the people we value.

Genuine communication in a marriage and family is one of the most challenging and yet rewarding things we can accomplish. Learning to communicate with the purpose of understanding others requires concentrated effort, training through observation and instruction, emotional maturity and willingness to change and grow in how to establish and maintain healthy personal relationships.

COMMUNICATION TAKES EFFORT AND TIME

Effective communication does not come naturally. It demands effort and time.

To give your time requires personal sacrifice. Does your work deserve it? Does your spouse and family? Do you want to communicate your love to your mate? If so, give your spouse your time...undivided and focused on them. Take time for a quiet walk, or a scenic drive. Above all else, simply take time for each other. **If blood is the gift of life, then time is the gift of love.**

Communication specialists point out that when you talk with another person there are actually six messages that can come through.

1. WHAT YOU MEAN TO SAY.
2. WHAT YOU ACTUALLY SAY.
3. WHAT THE OTHER PERSON HEARS.
4. WHAT THE OTHER PERSON THINKS HE HEARS.
5. WHAT THE OTHER PERSON SAYS ABOUT WHAT YOU SAID.
6. WHAT YOU THINK THE OTHER PERSON SAID ABOUT WHAT YOU SAID.

Discouraging? Some what. **But it does illustrate why communication is often hard work.** EACH OF US WANTS THE OTHER PERSON NOT ONLY TO LISTEN, BUT TO UNDERSTAND WHAT WE MEAN.

The old proverb, "Say what you mean and mean what you say" is a worthy goal, but not always easy to achieve. Healthy relationships require nurturing to be successful. And communication is critical to the nurturing process .

FIVE LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION

Taken from John Powell's book "Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?"

_____ There are at least five recognized levels of communication. Most people seldom get beyond the third level of communicating with others. Level one and two require

transparency and a willingness to open up and take a risk of being emotionally vulnerable. Many people are reluctant to go there. They guard their heart, protect their feelings, and end up forfeiting the potential rewards of intimate, fulfilling communication.

5. CLICHÉ CONVERSATION

This type of talk is very safe. No personal sharing. Each person remains safely behind their screen.

- Where have you been?
- How was your day?
- How is your family?
- I like your suit.

4. REPORTING FACTS

This type of conversation makes us content to tell others what someone else has said, but we offer no personal commentary on these facts. We just report the facts like the five o'clock news.

- Our son made straight A's on his report card this semester
- It is going to cost \$300.00 to repair the furnace.

3. IDEAS OR JUDGMENT

Real communication begins here. The person is willing to step out of his solitary confinement and risk telling some of his ideas and decisions. Still cautious though, fearing he or she will not be accepted and need to retreat.

- Expression of values, beliefs, judgments and concepts.
- I was thinking..... What do you think about this?
- I have an idea that I would like to run by you.
- Why shouldn't I take a part time, we need the money.

2. FEELINGS/EMOTIONS

Now the person shares how he/she feels about facts, ideas and judgments. Emotions under these areas are revealed.

- I feel like.....
- I am feeling.....how do you feel about this?
- I feel really strong about this.
- I just can't take another long trip with the kids in that car we have. We have to get something bigger or I will go crazy!

1. OPEN COMMUNICATION

Absolute openness and honesty. The reward of healthy communication and understanding each other outweighs the risk of rejection and misunderstanding.

- Ability to talk about anything openly and without judgment.
- Permissive atmosphere to discuss anything and everything in a mutually edifying and encouraging manner.

COMMON REASONS FOR NOT COMMUNICATING

Taken from H. Norman Wright's book "Communication: Key to Your Marriage"

1. Some people do not have the ability to talk with another person. They have never learned how to share openly with someone else.

2. Some people are fearful of exposing what they feel or think. They do not want to run the risk of being rejected or hurt if someone else disagrees with them. This is a protective, defense mechanism.

3. Some people have the attitude that talking won't do any good, so why bother. They are unable to get through to the other person, so they stop trying.

4. Some people do not believe that they as a person have anything to offer. They don't think that their ideas are worthwhile. They have trouble accepting themselves because of low self-esteem.

5. Some people have not had healthy communication modeled for them. Their family of origin and/or previous experience in marriage relationships were negative.

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

When you mention communication, most people think about talking. If we talked, we communicated. Not always. Matter of fact, many people talk too much and listen too little. Their talkativeness gets in the way of understanding their mate.

Verbal expression is one form of communication. Our words convey our character. Who we are and what we feel is expressed through our words and conduct. Jesus said that what comes out of man's mouth (words) is what is in his heart (Matthew 12:33-37, Matthew 15:15:20).

Maybe we should be extra careful about what we say because our words reveal what is really in our heart.

We need to watch our words because a high percentage of our communication is through words. Here are a few suggestions about verbal communication.

1. Use words that people can understand. Keep words simple.
2. Use words that build up and encourage.
3. Rude, crude, profane words never win someone's heart.
4. Never use words that demean a person.
5. Let your words be few. Use less, not more words.
6. Stop talking. Pause between breaths. Listen before speaking again.
7. Don't try to overpower others with words fueled by strong feelings.
8. Share your words without raising your voice.
9. Choose your words carefully in sensitive situations.
10. Speak from your heart but use your head too!

If both husband and wife will watch their words, their words will help them communicate more efficiently and effectively.

ACTIVE LISTENING

"He that has knowledge spares his words; and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit." Proverbs 17:27

Someone with observation skills said that God must want us to listen twice as much as we speak because he gave us two ears and only one mouth! So true anatomically and for healthy relationships. Most of us talk much more than we listen. For most people, listening is not automatic. Listening skills have to be learned.

What You Convey By Active Listening

- I am interested in you as a person
- I think that what you believe is important.
- I respect your point of view; it is valid to you.
- I want to understand you better.
- I am not trying to change or evaluate you as a person.
- I think you are worth listening to.
- I want to know you better.
- I am the kind of person you can talk to.

- **TIMING** is important in the communication process. Ecclesiastes 3:7 states “*There is a time to be silent, a time to speak.*”

Roll’s Rule For Timing: Never try to communicate about something important when you are tired, worn out, burned out, frustrated or plain old cranky!

Active listening begins by setting aside all potential distractions (other people, cell phones, televisions, laptops etc.) and giving your focused, undivided attention to the one you are listening to. Eye contact demonstrates that you care about the person. Stay focused when your feelings attempt to distract you from the listening phase of your relationship.

If you work hard at listening, your mate will respect you because everybody likes to be heard. And you just might learn some things that will cause you to love your spouse even more!

- **THE GOAL OF ACTIVE LISTENING:** *I understand what you said as you said it.*

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Non-verbal communication (communicating without words) is a powerful component of communication. Non-verbal communication can reinforce or undermine our verbal communication.

We have all heard the phrase “If looks could kill”. A look can convey something that words could never accomplish! Most husbands know that “look” a wife can give, and wives know how effective it can be! Husbands are not without their looks either.

Body language and facial expression are forms of very powerful communication. A look, a gesture, an expression can set the tone for whether communication takes place or not. Facial expressions communicate feelings without a word being uttered. A sad or glad expression convey two totally different feelings.

Body language can communicate interest or disinterest, being open or closed, approval or disapproval, acceptance or rejection, focused or distracted, caring or non-caring, etc.

Ineffective Non-Verbal Communication

1. Pouting
2. Silent treatment
3. Huff and puff
4. Rolling of the eyes
5. Snicker or smirk
6. Leave the room
7. Throw arms in the air

Effective Non-Verbal Communication

1. Eye contact
2. Open posture.
3. Sitting up straight.
4. Warm, welcoming countenance
5. A handshake or hug
6. Turn off technology
7. Hand your mate a Kleenex

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

There is power in the pen (word processors too!). Written words convey thoughts, ideas and feelings. *Writing something down takes how we think and feel from our mind and hearts to the place where real life is lived...our relationships.*

Writing down how we think or feel helps us to express some things that we may have trouble expressing verbally. Written communication often paves the way for verbal

communication. A note or letter often softens the rough edges of communication challenges.

Writing how we feel about the people we love can act as a relief valve, a freeing experience of releasing pent up emotions. It is amazing how writing our emotions down and looking at them on a piece of paper confronts us with how we really feel about our mate. Writing things down also provides a place for us to return from time to time to review and reflect on our love for our spouse.

Taking the time to write something to the person we love makes them feel very special. If you don't think so, ask Hallmark how they have made their money!

Wise Tips For Written Communication

- Write to let your mate know how you feel about them and how important they are to you.
- Always write positively, even when dealing with a negative feeling.
- Strive to build up and not tear down with your pen. Build your mates self-esteem and give them some love, acceptance and approval strokes.
- Let your words flow, freely expressing how you feel.
- Romantic notes, appreciation cards and love letters are always “in” in a healthy, mutually satisfying marriage relationship.
- Men listen up! It is manly to write about how you feel about your wife. So MAN-UP and write your mate a note once in a while. She will love you for it.
- Women... believe it or not, men like love notes, cards and letters too. Go ahead, be a girl, put a sizzling note in his lunch, and see what that does!

COMMUNICATE THROUGH TOUCH

Physical touch is important in life. Everyone needs and loves to be touched.

In the ebb and flow of life, needs and emotions change, requiring continued sensitivity by both mates. You cannot please your mate physically without risk, without first learning and being sensitive to his/her needs.

We all need touched from time to time in various ways. The phrase “out of touch” is loaded with lack of communication on many levels.

KEEP IN TOUCH, LITERALLY! When you were dating, touching was automatic as pleasing one another. In fact, it was a part of the expression of romance. **For many married couples, touching is a forgotten avenue of communicating worth, value, delight and belonging.**

➤ **Roll's Rule For Touching: Touch genuinely, gently, and generously.**

Touching communicates “I want to be close to you”, “I want you to know I am here for you”, “I want you to know that you are not alone”, “I want to give you a little bit of pleasure”, and “I want you to know that I love you by touching you.”

Revisit and enjoy the delights of touching one another as you did when you were dating: hold hands, embrace, stroll arm in arm, be playful etc. Share with one another where you like to be touched. Nonsexual body touching can be a small but important way to communicate.

Physical/sexual intimacy is a powerful form of communication between a husband and wife in a holy relationship before God. Sexual touch provides a sense of deep, sacred belonging to a person in a way that we connect with no other. When a man cleaves to his wife and two become one flesh, a powerful bond is forged between a man and woman who love each completely (Genesis 2:18-25).

Loneliness and temptation to drift to someone else is kept at bay when marriage partners communicate through physical intimacy.

➤ **Roll's Insight For Sexual Intimacy: You don't have to eat at a restaurant if the cooking is good at home!**

PRACTICAL POINTERS FOR POSITIVE COMMUNICATION

- 1. Make it safe to communicate. It is okay for honest expression of feelings.**
- 2. Seek to understand, not to be understood.**
- 3. Listen...don't interrupt.**
- 4. Yelling and silent treatments are out.**
- 5. Don't jump to conclusions.**

- 6. Disagree, Yes! Disrespect, No!**
- 7. Don't label your mate.**
- 8. Deal in potential, not the past.**
- 9. Learn to express feelings through warmth, empathy and sincerity.**
- 10. Learn to wait until feelings of anger or irritability have passed before addressing sensitive issues.**
- 11. Do not become involved in quarrels. You can disagree without quarreling.
(See II Timothy 2:24-26)**
- 12. When you are wrong, admit it, and ask for forgiveness. (Ephesians 4:29-32)**
- 13. Try to understand the other person's opinion. Make allowances for differences.**
- 14. Always extend the benefit of the doubt.**
- 15. Be willing to negotiate and compromise. Meet in the middle.**
- 16. Do not blame or criticize the other person. No finger pointing! (Isaiah 58:8-9)**
- 17. Keep to the facts---don't generalize or exaggerate.**
- 18. Replace "Your" statements with "I feel" statements.**
- 19. Abandon "I told you so!" statements.**
- 20. Pray for one another. (I Samuel 12:23)**

“It is only when a husband wife pray together before God that they find the secret of true harmony, that the differences in their temperaments, their ideas, and their tastes enriches heir home instead of endangering it. There will be no further question of one imposing his will on the other, or of the other giving in for the sake of peace. Instead, they will together seek God's will, which alone will ensure that each will be fully able to develop his/her personality.

When each of the marriage partners seeks quietly before God to see his own faults, recognize his sin, and asks for forgiveness of the other, marital problems are no

more. Each learns to speak the other's language, and to meet him half way, so to speak. Each holds back those harsh little words which one is apt to utter when one is right, but which are said in order to injure. Most of all, a couple rediscovers complete mutual confidence, because in meditating in prayer together they learn to become absolutely honest with each other. This is the price to be paid if partners very different from each other are to combine their gifts instead of setting them against one another."

Paul Tornier.

KEEPING LINES OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION OPEN

Families that communicate well enjoy family life. Communicating as families must be a priority that takes precedence over the many other activities that families engage in. Families that communicate together usually stay together and grow deep in their relationships with each other.

Listed below are a few suggestions for enhancing family communication.

1. Learn to laugh more. (See Proverbs 15:13, 17:22)
2. Eat more meals together. Ask open-ended questions that require answers.
3. Discuss things you have seen or read together.
4. Tell your children of their spiritual roots and heritage.
5. Express appreciation verbally and through tangible actions.
6. Help kids learn to cope through difficult circumstances. Don't try to eliminate all obstacles.
7. Play with your kids. Do what they like to do.
8. Cultivate family traditions.
9. Admit your mistakes. We require it of our children. It is only fair.
10. Try less television, video games, etc, and more reading aloud.
11. Conduct family meetings in which all members can share their views.
12. Make room in your budget for occasional overnights for one parent and one child.

GOLDEN RULE OF FAMILY COMMUNICATION: Make it easy for family, especially children to share their lives.

LET'S TAKE INVENTORY

Here is a series of questions that you might ask of yourself or discuss with your marital partner about communication, including its problems and essentials.

TO THE HUSBAND

- ✓ Do you have special times when you and your wife are alone and talk? When?
- ✓ Do you listen to your wife and make her believe that she has your undivided attention?
- ✓ Are there subjects that you cannot discuss with your wife? Why?
- ✓ Do you enjoy talking with your wife?
- ✓ Do you look directly at your wife when you talk to her?
- ✓ Do you make her feel important and valuable as to her opinions and beliefs?
- ✓ Do you interrupt her before she is finished?
- ✓ Do you show interest in the activities of your wife? Do you ask her questions about what she is doing or what she likes?
- ✓ Does your wife feel that she can talk with you about anything without being judged or put down? If not, what would you do to change that?

SIMPLE THINGS A HUSBAND CAN DO TO PLEASE HIS WIFE

- Take the children out for a few hours.
- Take her on a picnic that you have put together.
- Fix that leaky faucet!
- Rake the yard and plant some bushes or flowers.
- Leave her a love note under her pillow, in her purse, pocket etc.
- Make all arrangements for an evening out, i.e. call the babysitter, make dinner reservations, and possibly stay overnight in a motel.
- Send her a card for no reason at all—maybe one that reminds you both of a special memory.
- Have a scavenger hunt with the final reward being a special gift or a trip for two.
- Use the phone. Call her just to say “Honey, I love you and was thinking of you.”
- Do one thing you did when you first met and were dating.

TO THE WIFE

- ✓ Are you sincerely interested in what your husband enjoys talking about?

- ✓ Do you pay attention to him when he talks to you?
- ✓ Do you look at him directly when you are talking to him?
- ✓ Are there subjects you feel that you cannot discuss with your husband? Why?
- ✓ Are you relaxed in talking with your husband? Do you get uptight?
- ✓ Do you make your husband think that you want something from him when you talk to him?
- ✓ Does your husband believe that you enjoy talking with him?
- ✓ Are there unresolved issues between the two of you that make communication difficult? What should you do about it?
- ✓ Would you rather talk with your husband about a matter before you speak with anyone else, If not, why do you talk to others first?

SIMPLE THINGS A WIFE CAN DO TO PLEASE HER HUSBAND

- Write him a letter and send it to his office or put a love note in his lunch box, briefcase, etc.
- Prepare his favorite meal.
- Arrange for an evening out for just the two of you.
- Wear his favorite dress with your hair done the way he likes it.
- Wear his favorite negligee.
- Purchase something small and frivolous for him that he won't buy for himself.
- Give him a nicely framed picture of you or you and the children for his office.
- Surprise him with an all-expense-paid overnight golf, camping, fishing or hunting trip.
- Put the children to bed early and prepare a candlelight dinner.
- Do something that especially pleased him when you were dating.

LET'S GET STARTED

These questions may have stimulated you and encouraged you to develop a deeper and more intimate communication with your partner. What steps should you take now to keep the communication lines open and growing? These few simple suggestions may be of help.

1. Set aside a definite time each week for communication between yourself and your spouse. Make it a priority appointment and write it on your calendar. Don't let other things rob you of this invaluable time together.

2. Learn to ask questions of your partner. Get out of the habit of telling your mate what you want or think and start learning about your partner's feelings, desires, and ideas.

3. Learn to talk privately, away from your children. Don't argue in front of the kids. Whenever a problem comes up, learn to say, "Let's go to our special place for a private to talk."

4. Say something nice and loving to your partner every day. Begin the day with "I love you". Show appreciation to each other before you go to bed at night for what has happened that day.

5. Speak quietly. Whenever you raise your voices, the chances of bad communication always increase.

6. Always consider your partner's reasons. Find out "why" and you will understand better how to communicate the next time.

7. Learn to pray together as well as separately and alone. If you can talk to God about it, you will have a much better chance of talking to each other with love and understanding.

Communicate or disintegrate.....is up to you! You choose which way your marriage and family will go.

DON'T WAIT....BEGIN TO COMMUNICATE!!!

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