

### Communication

#### INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

The paradox of marriage (Gen. 2:20, 24–25). Communication is an important way to pursue being one flesh amidst great difference.

- Problem with oneness but no difference
- Problem with difference but no oneness

“To the degree that two people reveal themselves to one another, to that same degree they will or will not experience relational intimacy” (Lou Priolo).

Definition: *Good communication is a process of sharing information in order to come to a common understanding so that we are edified and encouraged with the result of increased intimacy and unity.*

#### PREREQUISITES TO GOOD COMMUNICATION

##### 1. Common Requirements

- a. We ought to be motivated by a desire to please God in all things, and especially in our speech (2 Cor. 5:9; Ps. 19:14).
- b. We must remember that we are accountable to God for what we speak.
- c. We ought to be listening more than we are talking. The best communicator is a good listener (Prov. 18:13; 20:5). Be quick to hear and slow to speak. How can we be good listeners?
  - Be actively attentive. Are you interruptive?
  - Be eager to understand. Are you argumentative?
- d. We must remember that communication is more than words: body language, tone, gestures, etc. We can communicate interest or disinterest, delight or disgust, without saying anything.
- e. We must be willing to work at it. We must put off sins in order to improve at communicating with one another: pride, impatience, selfishness, laziness, etc.

##### 2. Specific Roles of Husband and Wife

- a. A husband
  - Moving toward his wife in communication, making vulnerability safe.
  - Making sufficient time for communication.
- b. A wife
  - Responding to his leadership in communication.
  - Helping him to lead better.

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### PURPOSES OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

#### 1. To Know and Be Known

- a. How God communicated: the Word became flesh.
- b. The importance of vulnerability.
- c. Barrier #1 to vulnerable communication: you're not having the same conversation.

Six types of communication (from *Love That Lasts*)

- Small talk
- Information exchange
- Spiritual conversation
- Self-disclosure
- Value sharing
- Correction

- d. Barrier #2: different communication styles.

Drawing out the internal processor

- Asking good questions
- Summarizing what they said

#### 2. To Be One

- a. Oneness doesn't necessarily require agreement.

"Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17).

- b. How to pursue oneness when you disagree?

- i. Focus on understanding.

- ii. Start with values.

We're tempted to act as if a spouse's values are wrong when in fact we simply disagree on how to apply those values in the present situation.

When values conflict.

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### 3. To Build Each Other Up

“No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear. 30 And don’t grieve God’s Holy Spirit. You were sealed by him for the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:29–30).

- a. Our words must be *controlled*.
- b. Our words must not be *corrupt*.
- c. Our words must be *constructive*.
- d. Our words must be *considerate*.
- e. Our words must *convey grace*.
- f. Our words must be *consecrated*.

#### **Encouragement**

- a. The importance of encouraging faith:

“But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin’s deception” (Heb. 3:13).

“And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works” (Heb. 10:24).

- b. Paul’s example:

“I always thank my God for you because of the grace of God given to you in Christ Jesus, 5 that you were enriched in him in every way, in all speech and all knowledge. 6 In this way, the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you, 7 so that you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8 He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God is faithful; you were called by him into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:4–9).

- c. Practically: observing evidences of God’s grace.

- Observing how God’s grace has gifted your spouse in different ways.
- Observing how God is giving them grace to live with their hope trained on him during times of difficulty.
- Observing how God is giving them grace in places where they tend to struggle.
- Observing evidences of God’s grace in their speech, actions, desires, and ambitions.

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### Correction

- a. If Scripture is perfect and you are not, then correction should always be welcomed.

“The one who has contempt for instruction will pay the penalty, but the one who respects a command will be rewarded” (Prov. 13:13). “A rebuke cuts into a perceptive person more than a hundred lashes into a fool” (Prov. 17:10). “Let the righteous one strike me—it is an act of faithful love; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let me not refuse it” (Ps. 141:5).

- b. How to receive correction well:

- i. Agree with God’s *judgment*.
- ii. Agree with God’s *justification*.
- iii. *Listen* to correction.

- c. How to give correction well in marriage:

- i. *Don’t* correct in order to punish.
- ii. *Don’t* correct because you are in a bad mood.
- iii. *Don’t* seek to do what only God can do.
- iv. *Do* be specific as to what you see.
- v. *Do* be constructive.
- vi. *Do* be gentle.

## PRACTICE OF GOOD COMMUNICATION

1. Keep it *honest*.
2. Keep it *under control*.
3. Keep it *in season*.
4. Keep it *positive*.
5. Keep it *tactful*.
6. Keep it *private*.
7. Keep it *going*.
8. Keep it *considerate*.
9. Keep it *cleaned-up*.

“For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart” (Matt. 12:34).

## PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON:

- Read the two appendices attached to this lesson: “Principles for Effective Communication” and “The One-Minute Rule.”

### APPENDIX: PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

When you need to address a sensitive topic or find yourselves in the midst of conflict, these are helpful principles for communicating with your spouse.

#### PRINCIPLES FOR THE SPEAKER:

1. **Request permission to share.** Try saying something like this: *"I have something I would like to share and I would appreciate your listening. Is this a good time to talk? I would like for you to listen and try to understand if you are able."*
2. **Avoid exaggerations (only, always, never).** When you have something legitimate to share, using absolutes and exaggerations will make it very difficult for the person to receive what you are saying without getting defensive.
3. **Use "I" statements instead of "You" statements.** "You" statements tend to make the other person feel attacked or judged. If you focus on your own emotions in your communication, you will be sharing what is important to you while inviting the other person to enter into your experience.
4. **Avoid name-calling.** When you call a person names (like "liar," "loser," "nag," or "jerk"), you are reducing his or her identity to his or her strange or sinful behavior, which will drastically decrease the likelihood of a positive response.
5. **Be brief.** Stay on one subject at a time and try not to ramble. Share your thoughts and feelings in bite-size pieces so the listener does not get overwhelmed. Give the other person a chance to paraphrase what you just said.
6. **Be persistent.** If the listener violates the principles, don't quit. It is your responsibility to remind him or her what you want. *"I do want to listen to you, but will you first try to understand me? Would you share what you just heard me say so I can see if I am being clear? I know this may be hard, but it would mean a great deal to me if you would listen to what I have to say for a moment."*

#### PRINCIPLES FOR THE LISTENER:

1. **One person talks at a time.** Don't correct, defend, interrupt, or interject, which breaks the speaker's flow of thought. Do not talk, because when you talk, you're not listening and learning. Your goal at this point in the conversation is to learn and understand as much as you can. There will be plenty of time later on for you to present your side of the story once you have earned the right to be heard by first listening. God knows the truth and he will set the record straight in his timing.
2. **Enter the speaker's world.** This is a difficult skill to learn, but it is important to suspend your own frame of reference and try to see things from the other person's point of view. Learn to appreciate your differences as gifts from God.

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3. **Seek to understand.** Don't assume you understand; check it out first. The goal is *reflective listening*, which involves reflecting back to the person what he or she has shared so that he or she knows that you are listening and seeking to understand.
  - a. Select a key word, a key sentence, or a key phrase and repeat it back. Summarize the core message or the underlying implication you hear.
  - b. Paraphrase the person's thoughts by saying something like this: *"Here's what I am hearing you say . . . Am I close? Am I understanding you correctly?"*
  - c. Don't ask questions or change the subject until the other person feels understood. Request permission before sharing your perspective. Ask: *"Do you feel like I have understood you? Is there anything else you would like me to understand? May I comment on what you have just said?"*
4. **Focus on the heart.** What a person means to say and what a person actually says are often two different things. Remember that the initial statement or problem is seldom the real problem. Be patient and if possible, try to help the person to go deeper to discover the root problem. At first the person may start out at a surface level by attacking you and trying to make you the problem. Later on, if you have listened long enough where the person has gone to a deeper level, you will discover you are not the problem at all. The issue may actually be about them, not you!
5. **Don't correct emotions.** Allow the speaker to have whatever feelings they share without judging or correcting the validity of the emotions. Your goal is to create a safe environment where the person has permission to explore his or her feelings and to discover what is happening at the heart level.
6. **Don't fix.** This is not the time to try to solve the problem, offer advice, or take responsibility, etc. This is a time to listen, learn, and understand.
7. **Be patient.** Recognize that people open up in stages. The person may stop every so often, expecting something from us. He or she could be checking to see if we understand before continuing. The person may also want to know if we are accepting him or her before going any deeper. Reflective, non-judgmental listening gives the person a green light to continue.
8. **Don't steal the spotlight.** Shifting the focus to your emotions will invalidate the speaker's emotions. Avoid responses like these: *"You think that was bad? Let me tell you what happened to me"* or *"Oh, yeah? What do you think that was like for me?"* or *"How do you think that makes me feel?"*
9. **Express gratitude.** Always thank the person for sharing. Acknowledge how difficult it is to share feelings. Compliment the person by saying *"Thank you for sharing that with me. I appreciate your effort to help me understand."*
10. **Pause and pray.** Take some time to reflect on what the person has shared with you. Pray and ask God to help you respond with grace and repentance.

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### APPENDIX: THE ONE-MINUTE RULE

The One-Minute Rule is a tool that enables couples to hear each other and thus improve communication. It is particularly helpful for practicing reflective listening in difficult conversations.

#### GUIDELINES OF THE ONE-MINUTE RULE:

1. Each of you will be given opportunities to speak, in one-minute segments, on issues of concern to you. Each of you will be given opportunities to listen to your spouse in one-minute segments.
2. When you speak to your spouse, smile, look him or her in the eye, and speak for only one minute, using a gentle and pleasant tone. Use a timer to make sure that you speak for only one minute. Your objective is to communicate your point of view on a particular issue of your choice clearly and concisely, in the most appealing way possible.
3. When you are listening to your spouse, smile, look him or her in the eye, and seek to understand his or her point of view. Focus on understanding your spouse. Do not prepare rebuttals, interrupt, or give negative, non-verbal feedback. After your spouse has spoken for one minute, repeat back what you heard in thirty seconds or less. Do not add commentary or state rebuttals; simply communicate what you heard. If your spouse confirms that you have indeed heard what he or she shared, then you have one minute to speak and your spouse must listen to you and observe the same listening guidelines.
4. Continue the process until you both believe that you have been heard and understand each other's points of view.
5. After you have understood each other on a specific issue, then select new topics to discuss using these guidelines of the One-Minute Rule.