

How to Improve the Communication in Your Marriage

Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

The communication within your marriage and family has the power to hurt or the power to heal. What you say and how you say it can destroy a relationship or develop one. **Proverbs 18:21** says, "The tongue has the power of life and death." Your words have the power to build or destroy, the power to motivate or discourage, the power to lift or crush.

Good communication is a must if you want your marriage to be healthy and remain healthy. In a survey taken a few years ago, the Family Services Association discovered that 87% of husbands and wives interviewed said that the main problem in their marriage was communication.

Couples who struggle with communication will say things like...

- "We can't talk about anything important without getting into a fight."
- "Whenever I try to tell her how I feel, she seems disinterested and sometimes critical."
- "He simply avoids all conversation about us. We can discuss vacation plans, where to send the kids to school, and what car to buy, but he refuses to talk about our relationship."
- "She's too emotional. She's either crying or hollering or complaining about something. I just avoid her – it's easier."
- "We both try to talk through our problems, but it never makes us feel closer. We get defensive or impatient and end up farther apart than when we began. Something's wrong."

No matter where you are in the communication department of your marriage, you can improve and you can get better with God's help.

To help your communication be Biblical and better let's begin with a **basic principle: Wise couples know the value of attractive communication.** It's found in **Proverbs 15:2**, "When wise people speak, they make knowledge attractive" (GN). Notice the word "attractive." Wise people, when they speak, they speak in such a way that people want to hear and want to listen. They make what they say to the other person attractive. In marriage, whether in a general conversation or whether it's in an argument, if you want to keep your spouse's attention then you need to make what you say attractive to them.

How do you do that? How do you attract your spouse's attention so they will hear your heart and understand what you are thinking? How do you make contact with your spouse? Every good communicator knows the importance of making contact with the listener and the listener making contact with the one speaking.

To help you do that I want to give you seven Biblical principles on communication. To help us with them we will use the acronym CONTACT. When applied, these principles will help you make contact with your spouse's heart.

CLOCK: You must choose the right time for your communication.

First, pay attention to your spouse's **clock. You must choose the right time for your communication.** **Ecclesiastes 8:6** tells us, "There's a right time and a right way to do everything" (GN). Timing is important. If you have something serious you want to talk with your spouse about don't do it when they are tired, frustrated, ready to go to bed, about to leave for work. Don't do it when they are in a hurry or under pressure. You wait until the time is right for them. You may be ready to talk, but are they ready to listen? Maybe you have been thinking about it all day, stewing and brewing, and you have thought it through, but your mate comes home and the first thing you say is, "We've got a problem." Don't unload a bomb shell on them at your convenience.

Columbia University did a study and found out that most violent arguments were right before meal times. The husband has just come in from work (or both of them just came in from work), they are both tired, had stressful days, they are hungry, the blood sugar is low, and the frustration is high. Bad timing can equal explosive fireworks.

You need to discover when the best time is for both of you to sit down and talk things over. Remember, God's word says "There's a right time to do everything."

OPEN: You must be genuine and honest with your spouse.

The next principle is the **open principle**. You must be **genuine and honest with your spouse**. You must open up to your spouse. Let them know how you feel and what you think. Look at **Romans 12:17**, "Never pay back evil for evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honest clear though. (18) Don't quarrel with anyone. Be at peace with everyone, just as much as possible" (LB). Do things and say things in such a way that your spouse can see you are honest clear though. If they don't trust you, then they won't listen to you. You must be honest with them.

NEEDS: You must consider your spouse's interest.

The third principle deals with **needs**. You must consider your spouse's **interest**. **Ephesians 4:29** says, "[Speak] only what is helpful for building up others according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (NIV). Circle the words "needs" and "benefit." Those are the two key words when it comes to capturing attention when you want to communicate something that is important to you and should be important to the other person. No matter who you want to talk to, start with their needs, their hurts, their goals, their interest, and their benefits. People listen more closely when they see what the other person is saying addresses a need or an interest in their life. In communication the listener is always thinking, "Why should I listen to you? How is this going to benefit me? Does this help any of my needs?"

Why do people pay closer attention to things that benefit them and interests them? Because God created them that way. God has placed at the base of your brain what is called a RAS (the Reticular Activating System). It is a God-given filter that God has

placed in all of our minds so that we don't have to consciously reply to every stimuli. If you had to consciously respond to every sight, sound, and noise you would go crazy. God has placed in the back of your brain a filter that filters out things. Studies have shown that only three things really capture our attention.

- Things that threaten us.
- Things that are unique.
- Things we value.

To get their spouses attention about a serious issue one spouse may threaten to leave the other, threaten to take the kids, threaten to physically harm them, or threaten to embarrass. I would recommend that you stay away from threats, they usually don't end well. There are times you may have to offer an ultimatum, but leave that for the last attempt.

You could try to be unique. You could video tape what you want to say and leave a note on the table with it. Let them know you will be back at a certain time to discuss what you said on the tape. But again, I would try to stay away from gimmicks when it comes to serious conversations.

I would recommend you get your spouse's attention with what they value. Begin with what is important to them, their needs, what their goals are, what they are interested in. You will discover they will listen more often because God has built into them a mental radar that pays close attention to things they value. It sounds like this: "Honey, I know that you are frustrated about our finances, can we talk about that?" "I realize that you are not happy with our marriage right now and I want you to be happy, can we talk about that tonight?"

Communication flows when you show interest in their needs, their goals, their hurts and their interests. Communication is blocked when all you care about is your own needs.

THOUGHTFUL: You must think it through.

The fourth principle deals with being **thoughtful. You must think it through**. Don't speak your mind, until you know what's in your mind. **Proverbs 16:23** tells us, "Intelligent people think before they speak. What they say is then more persuasive" (GN). When it comes to important issues in your marriage the best thing you can do is think through the issue. If you think your spouse is not going to understand or easily accept what you have to say then think of two or three illustrations that will help explain your view. Think about how you will start in order to get their undivided attention.

- Think about the right time to bring up the subject.
- Think about how you really feel and perceive about the issue. Before you bring it up ask yourself these questions, "Why am I upset about this? Am I being selfish? Is it really their fault or am I part of the problem?"
- Think about how to bring it up that addresses their needs, interest or values?
- Think about the most positive way to say what you are going to say.
- Think about how you will react or not react if they don't agree with you.

Remember, intelligent people think before they speak.

ATTENTION: You must listen to what they say.

The fifth principle deals with **attention. You must listen to what they say**. You must focus on understanding them. Be patient and hear what they have to say. Remember, communication is a dialogue. **Proverbs 18:13** says, "Listen before you answer. If you don't you're being stupid and insulting" (GN).

Have you ever been in a discussion with someone and had no idea what the person just said because you were anxiously waiting for an opportunity to talk? You get so caught up in making your point that you're not listening at all. You're only thinking about what you are going to say next. Listen before you answer. If you don't you are being stupid and insulting the Bible says. We get into trouble if we speak before we think. We get into trouble when we make assumptions. How many arguments have

been started with assumptions or preconceived ideas? You can avoid a lot of trouble by listening to what your spouse is really saying. Become your spouse's expert listener.

COURTEOUS: You must speak in a positive way.

The sixth principle is learning to be **courteous. You must speak in a positive way**. You need to retrain yourself to talk about problems with a positive slant. **Proverbs 16:21** says, "A mature person is known for his understanding. The more pleasant his words, the more persuasive he is" (GN). I'm never persuasive when I'm abrasive. The more pleasant your words the more persuasive you become. The most positive speaker is the most persuasive speaker. Learning how to speak pleasant words and positive words, even in an argument, is a mark of maturity and understanding. The more persuasive you want to be the more pleasant you need to be.

THANKFULNESS: You must end with an encouraging word.

The seventh principle is **thankfulness. You must end with an encouraging word**. **Proverbs 12:25** tells us, "A word of encouragement does wonders" (LB). End on a high note. Even if you had a very heated discussion where both of you took some major hits, where maybe feelings were hurt and egos bruised a little bit... even if you are very angry with each other, you need to conclude the conversation by encouraging your spouse by reaffirming three things:

- **Reaffirm your commitment to the marriage.** You say, "I want you to know that right now, even though I can't stand the sight of you and I am furious with you, I'm committed to you until death do us part." (After you say that, don't go looking for the insurance policy on them).
- **Reaffirm your love for your spouse.** Love is a choice, not a feeling. Can you be angry at someone and love them at the same time? Yes you can, because love is a commitment. A commitment to give a person what they need, not what they deserve.

- **Reaffirm your thankfulness for them.** Tell your spouse that you are thankful that God gave you them. It's amazing what a little thankfulness and appreciation can do to change a person.

Conclusion

The communication in your marriage has the power to hurt your marriage or to heal it. God gives us His divine principles to help us make contact and connection with our spouse's heart. These principles will work, if you will work them. There are relationship rewards from applying these principles in your life.

The greatest contact you will ever experience is not you getting connected with your spouse, your children, or your closest friend. The greatest connection you will ever make is getting connected with God. God loves you. He wants to spend eternity with you. He wants you to live in heaven. He wants you to have eternal life.