

Communication In Marriage



Introduction

In the Bible God has said: “And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.” [Genesis 2:18]. And so, our heavenly Father must surely desire that a Christ-centered marriage would be a tremendous blessing to both parties involved. A marriage of two believers should reflect the sacrificial love that Christ has for us. But just as we would not have known Christ’s love if it had not been put into action, as husband or wife, we need to put our love into action. We need to communicate our love. Love can be communicated both verbally and non-verbally, through what we say and what we do. The psalmist shows us here how love is communicated:

“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” [Psalm 19:14]

*If we could say to our mate, as well as to the Lord: **“Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight”** we are well on our way towards understanding the kind of communication in marriage that will bring both partners great joy.*

Communicating positive thoughts

Words are powerful. With them we can cut people to ribbons or we can bind up the broken hearted: “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” [Matt 12:34b]. We can and should look to the scriptures for words that help direct our thoughts and actions towards the kinds of thoughts and actions that will foster loving and lasting relationships. Why tear down the person who has committed to be with us through sickness and health, for better or worse, ‘til death do us part? Shouldn’t we rather go out of our way to make our partner glad they married us? Shouldn’t we strive to give them many reasons to be thanking God for us? Shouldn’t we have the attitude towards our spouse that the writer of Song of Solomon had: “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.” [SOS 7:10]. Would our mate drop dead if we *frequently* called them beloved, or darling, or dearheart, or some other term of great affection? Hopefully not!

Communicating by our actions

Ideally, our marriage relationship should be better than when we were courting our spouse. And there is absolutely no reason why it cannot be, for with God all things are possible! If we have the attitude towards our husband

or wife that the psalmist had towards God, then the impossible becomes a blessed reality: "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." [Psalm 40:8]. Do you want your spouse to delight in you? Well, have you ever prayed to God to make you the kind of person that your mate will take great delight in? What kind of person would your mate delight in? Perhaps someone who is patient, kind, not envious, not prideful or arrogant, not rude, not selfish, forgiving, and someone who thinks the best of their mate and gives them the benefit of the doubt:

"Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." [1 Cor 13:4-7]

Having a positive yet realistic perspective of one another

Do you think of your mate as a helper, a friend, and a lover, or as an adversary or a hindrance? Do you realize your mate is just as human as you? Just as imperfect as you? Do you admit your own faults to your wife or husband so that when you offer constructive criticism, they will appreciate the fact that they are not the only one who needs to improve in some area of their life?

Understanding biblical roles

It is a great privilege for the man to be the head of the wife, but it involves a great responsibility. This headship of the man is not personal in that God favors the husband more, but rather, is organizational; it helps to have one person make the final decision when there is uncertainty. In Ephesians 5:25-33 we learn that the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the Church:

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband."

The husband's role

How did Christ love the Church? He gave Himself up for it, he prayed for it and He cherished it. For the husband this involves submitting his desires for his wife's best welfare, and doing his best in leading her to best follow Christ.

The specific titles of a husband following Christ's example would entail being her "savior", "sanctifier", "nourisher" and "cherisher". As a savior he is to deny himself for her; as a sanctifier he is to keep her holy and set a good example for her; as a nourisher he is to take good care of her and provide for her needs; and finally, as a cherisher he is to "cuddle" her as a prized possession as a number one priority in his life.

The husband being under the authority of God is one of the first steps in communication in marriage. His submissive attitude will be an example for the wife and will help her in freely submitting to him, which is the other first step in communication in marriage:

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." [Col 3:18-19]

If the husband is disrespectful to her in some way and then commands her to do something, she will be very reluctant to do it. But if he has been loving to her she will be willing to submit to almost anything (because she is trusting him to look out for her best welfare).

The wife's role

There are two dimensions of the submissiveness of a wife when the husband fails:

1. The first dimension is not to nag. She should let him know of a need that needs to be met, but only request it *one time*; place the situation in his hands and leave it there. If she goes on and on about something he will only be pushed more and more away from doing it. She needs to understand that at times he is tired and may not feel like taking out the garbage when he first comes home from work.
2. The second dimension of a wife's submissiveness is "waiting". In 1 Peter 3:1-6 we read of a woman trusting God with an *unbelieving* husband:

"Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God

of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement."

What if husbands don't fulfill their roles?

When the husband refuses to do something that she feels he biblically should do, she should just pray and trust God to change his heart. Do not go ahead and do it yourself if it is the man's responsibility, even if everything goes to pot. Let him take the consequences for his own irresponsibility. Many women think that the welfare of the household is their responsibility, but in actuality, a part of the man's "headship" has to do with ruling his own house. If things fall apart with the house or the children in the house, it is his responsibility to see that changes are made.

Understanding each other's uniqueness

There are no two people totally alike and differences are okay. In fact, they are good. Unfortunately, we as people think that everyone should be like us, or that we should be like so-and-so. In a marriage we have two beings with totally different backgrounds and personalities coming together as one. Each needs to realize that the God-given differences of the other are there to enhance the relationship. Opposites do attract and each can share with the other new and different aspects of life. Each should realize that his or her position is not better than the other person's - just different.

Handling conflict in a God glorifying way

When a conflict arises it would be easy for the husband to say, "God made me the head over you, so we'll do what I say!" However, if the man desires to cherish her as Christ does the Church, he will want to find a way of compromise. Each one should try to get into the other person's shoes and find out where he or she is coming from. There needs to be some discussion of where each is coming from and how they do things. This should be done in an atmosphere of warmth and respect for the other person's feelings.

Showing warmth and respect to the spouse during a disagreement has to do with the idea of acceptance. This acceptance is an unconditional regarding of the person as a special gift from God. It says to the person "I care about you as an individual and I think what you have to say is worth listening to - even though I have a different way of doing things." In this way, the other person does not have to earn our acceptance by doing things our way.

Express negative feelings in a positive way

The best way to respond to negative feelings is to make the person feel heard and understood. The best way to do this is to actively listen. Active listening involves four components:

1. listening to both words and feelings
2. responding to the feelings
3. looking for non-verbal cues
4. giving adequate feedback

Listening to both words and feelings

The first step merely involves quietly listening to what the other person has to say. Give them unhurried time to express how they feel about a certain situation. Don't be in a hurry to express your views or they will feel that you have not adequately heard them. Listening to both the words and the feelings of the other person is important, because what they say may not necessarily be what they feel deep inside.

Responding to the feelings

Then respond to what you perceive them to feel about the matter. Our words may be saying one thing, but our feelings another. For example, if a husband yells at his wife and says, "NO, I DON'T CARE. GO AHEAD AND GO SHOPPING IF YOU WANT!" he is not being totally honest with his feelings. What he is really feeling and should say is: "Honey, it bothers me that you go shopping so often. I would really prefer if tonight, you could spend some time with me." He is sharing in a non-threatening way that he is upset, instead of verbally showing her. Each needs to respond to his or her own feelings, and say "I feel <this way> about <such-and-such>"

Looking for non-verbal cues

A way to discover what the person is really feeling is to look for non-verbal communication, i.e. is the person looking away from you when he or she talks? Does he or she have a frown on his or her face? People express themselves with their eyes, body posture, tone of voice and many other non-verbal ways. So, to enhance active listening, each needs to look at the speaker when he or she is speaking.

Giving adequate feedback

Finally, we need to let the speaker know that we are paying attention by responding to what we have been hearing, which we can do non-verbally by nodding of the head or eye contact and verbally by asking for clarity, asking them further questions, and or summing up what they have said in your own words. All this should be done in an atmosphere of empathy and warmth.

Some of the common errors in active listening are as

follows:

1. Inappropriate times for listening. If a person is in desperate need of immediate help, it is no time for someone to sit and say "You must really be in a lot of agony right now, aren't you?"
2. Focusing on the feelings only. Find out *why* the person feels the way he or she does. You may have done something to stimulate the problem.
3. When you do not have time for discussion, it is better to tell your mate that you would like to arrange a time when you have more time than to fake like you're listening attentively as you're running out the door.
4. Do not try to second-guess or analyze your partner. Don't try to second-guess or assume why your mate is feeling or acting a certain way. Let them discover and share the truth of why they are feeling the way they are.
5. Do not merely give them feedback of what they are saying without showing compassion and concern for their feelings.
6. Try to share all of what you sense they are feeling and do not hold back anything.

Accept responsibility for your part in a problem

A part of showing acceptance to your partner during a disagreement is to "own" the problem ourselves. It is very important to say "I feel <this way> about <such-and-such>" because what we feel cannot be good or bad. It is just a feeling. We are not judging or labeling our partner, which we would be doing by saying "you are <something>" Saying "You are" is very threatening and pulls at our partner's innermost being. It can really crush his or her self-image. When we do this it will make him want to tear back at us in self-defense. Therefore, it is better to admit that the problem starts with you.

Learning how to claim the problem as yours is difficult. It begins by a request; request that the person meet one of your needs. Secondly, suggest alternatives if he/she doesn't like your request. Work on a Compromise. Thirdly, report your feelings (anger, hurt, misunderstanding). Do not accuse or blame him/her for making you feel this way - no one makes us feel any certain emotion, we choose how we will feel about different situations.

"I" messages are important, because they show ownership of the problem and do not point the finger at someone else. For example, if Jane says, "YOU MAKE ME SICK!", she should really say "I feel that you are not listening to me when you do not do the things I ask you to do." In this way, she is expressing herself honestly and openly and in turn, hopefully, he will be more responsive to her. Telling someone how we feel is much less threatening than making him or her feel like he or she is a horrible person. We should not attack a person's self-esteem:

["For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." \[Romans 12:3\]](#)

It will not make them give in to us, but it will probably make them even more hostile to us. When we build someone else's self-esteem with positive reinforcement, they in turn, will be positive towards us.

Avoid the silent treatment

It is important to express our needs and not do the opposite of verbally attacking, which is keeping silent. Keeping silent is not being honest with our feelings and is frustrating to the other person. It will also cause the passive aggressive one to bottle up anger. In "I" messages one can share his or her feelings about the problem without attacking the other's self-esteem. So, It is good to trust the other person that he or she will not get upset if you express your feelings.

Focus on the behavior, not the person

"I" messages are less threatening because they focus on the effect of the person's behaviour instead of attacking the person's inner being. When a spouse says "I" then he or she is taking the focus off of the other person and to himself or herself. This allows the other person to volunteer to change his or her behavior in order to "help" the spouse with his or her "problem". The spouse is not being manipulative, but rather, in a respectful way is expressing how he or she is feeling about a certain situation, and allowing the other spouse to choose if he or she would like to help.

When we "leave the ball in the other person's court" we are expressing that we trust them enough to care about our needs. This encourages them to meet our needs. Then he or she will be motivated to share his or her feelings, and thus, enhance communication.

Express what changes you are looking for

When couples are arguing frequently or not getting their way, they desire things to change. A way to have this change is not to force your mate to do things your way, but rather, to communicate so both parties are satisfied. Each needs to express how he or she feels about a situation and tell his or her partner what he or she desires.

There needs to be a designated time and place to sit down and list the areas and ways of desired change. This meeting should not be forced on the other - when he or she is ready to talk, he/she will. Each party could make his or her own list and then come together to share what was written (of course things can be stated instead of written). The proposals should be stated in "I" messages and leave room for feed back. If the person does not like your idea for change there can be a suggested modification of the first proposal or a compromise. This all should be done in an attitude of acceptance. When people are communicating in an attitude of acceptance, then they will see

changes in their relationships for the better, which God is pleased with.

**“And above all things have fervent charity [love] among yourselves:
for charity [love] shall cover the multitude of sins.” [1 Peter 4:8]**

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