

# Communication in Marriage and Families

## Some Principles

Right from the very beginning of scripture we learn that within the Godhead there is communication. In Genesis we read “Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over..... Gen 1:26 NIV. God also spent time communicating with Adam and walking with him in the cool of the day. As God has made us in His own image then it should not surprise us that we have the ability to communicate with each other.

The Bible has many references about God communicating with his creation, a good summary being found in Hebrews Chapter 1 where we read in verses 1 and 2:-

In the past God **spoke** to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has **spoken** to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. Heb 1:1-2 NIV

Even though God loves to communicate, the whole area of communication with Him was spoiled by sin after Adam and Eve fell. Sin ruined the sweet communication and oneness that they shared with God and that has impacted communication to this day - and nowhere more noticeable than in the oneness of marriage where poor communication can be a major problem.

In Christ, our relationship with God can be restored and, once we are born again, we can communicate with Him in prayer and enjoy fellowship with him – which God loves. Despite that, many Christian marriages suffer because the principle of loving fellowship and communication which we can have with God somehow doesn't carry through to the marriage relationship and difficulties follow. If we apply some scriptures on communication to marriage and the family we see the following:-

Building Up/Pulling Down - Communication in the form of speaking to our marriage partner is of great importance and can be used to build up or pull down each other. That principle can be seen from these scriptures in Ephesians and James:-

Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. Eph 4:29 NLT

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be. James 3:9-10

As far as possible, our day-to-day communication with each other should be used to build up and not pull down.

The Lord himself is a wonderful example of godly encouraging communication summed up beautifully in Luke's gospel:-

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. Luke 4:22 NIV

Harsh Words - If we are on the receiving end of harsh words, here is a good response from Proverbs:-

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. Prov 15:1 NIV

More Than Just Words - Of course, communication is often more than just words. We see in the gospels where Peter denied the Lord:-

And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly. Luke 22:61-62. Nothing was said. A look conveyed all.

The world has a saying which illustrates communication by eye contact.... “If looks could kill”

Body language - This is a powerful form of communication too. For example the clenched fist, lowered head and narrowed eyes convey a message of anger. Looking out the window when someone is talking to us, yawning and checking a watch show disinterest and folded arms with body turned away slightly signifies rejection of what another person is saying. On the other hand, an open relaxed posture with a direct gaze and smile show friendliness and a willingness to listen.

Actions - Communication can also be effected by simple actions such as husbands giving gifts to their wives and giving help when a need arises. In addition, husbands and wives can communicate through loving touch such as holding hands, stroking hair and embracing. Married couples who have been in love with each other for many years know how to communicate very effectively through what they say, how they look at each other, through loving touches and other actions.

## **Levels of Communication**

It's been suggested that communication is like a building where stairs lead up and down to different floors. For example, there are stairs which lead down to a basement of criticism, arguments and stand-offs. The scripture has something to say about that. For example:-

Don't criticize and speak evil about each other, dear brothers. James 4:11 TLB

Don't criticize, and then you won't be criticized. Matt 7:1 TLB

There are other stairs which lead up to higher floors of communication which bond people together and build them up. Where there is a happy marriage it can be a sign that the husband and wife have learned to leave the basement of criticism etc and climb to higher floors in their communication and we'll look at those now.

First Floor - Exchanging Greetings. This is just about the most basic level of communication. It's the "Good morning how are you?" level. In marriage it's the "Hi, did you sleep OK?" level when the couple first wake up. A marriage where the couple barely rise above that level of communication is unlikely to give off an aura of joy unspeakable!

Second Floor - Exchanging Information. For example, "My boss came in late today". "I cleaned out the sink unit". "Your sister Jill phoned this afternoon". "The bin needs to go out tonight". It's a level at which the couple merely pass on information without any significant additional comment. In a marriage, that level is better than not talking at all but it hardly illustrates the kind of love between them that God intended.

Third Floor - Sharing Opinions. For example "My boss came in late today. That's every day this week so far. His wife keeps phoning him too and that's not usual. I wonder what the problem is?". "I cleaned out the sink unit today. You'll never guess. I found the nail brush we'd lost. It was right at the back of the cupboard under the shelf. Goodness knows how it got there". That level of communication almost draws the listener into the conversation and invites comments. That's a much better level of communication but there can be some degree of risk as an opinion which is shared may be opposed by the listener. For example "Your sister Jill phoned this afternoon. I wish she wouldn't keep telling me how to do the garden". "Well OK but, personally, I like Jill's garden and I think we could adopt some of her ideas". However, in a good marriage, each must be given room to express a personal opinion whilst respecting how the other feels.

Fourth Floor - Sharing Feelings and Emotions. For example "I lost an earring today and feel so upset. It was one of the pair that Sally bought me". "The operations manager told me today that I might be made redundant if the next round of cut-backs hits our section. I feel really concerned. What will I do if it happens?" The problem is that husbands often want to bottle up emotions and fears in the belief that it's a weakness to let them show. They then go through periods of quiet as they try to process things inwardly. As a result, wives don't know how their husbands are feeling and wonder what's wrong. Husbands need to learn that it's not helpful to wear a mask which hides from their wives the way they feel. Communicating feelings and emotions can draw husbands and wives close together as they share the way each other is feeling. Of course, as well as sharing sorrows, a happily married

couple will also make the most of sharing joys such as “James had his school report today and it’s the best ever. He’s doing really well. Grrreat!”

Laughing and crying together are at this level of communication. It’s good to laugh together often. It releases emotions and finds its root in the Lord who also laughs. See Psalm 2:4. Sharing in each other’s sorrows by crying together will give mutual support when it is needed most. Husbands in particular need to go out of their way to support their wives and provide the security and empathy they need at such times.

Fifth Floor – Being Open and Honest With Each Other. This is the level at which only those who are deeply in love with each other will be able to live. Only when a husband and wife are really in love can they reveal to each other those things about themselves which are deeply personal. It is the level at where one can tell the other who they really are and what their needs are and they can do it because they know the other will love them regardless. Lying is not part of such a relationship. Such a thing opens the door for evil in the home as Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). This is loving, open and honest communication at its best and makes for a very happy marriage and home life. One can even lovingly expose a fault in the other without fear of rejection or stand-off. No one wears a mask and no one lies. Each is able to be lovingly honest with the other. Where there are children they see it and learn by example from a mum and dad who love each other dearly and who love them to bits too.

### **Hindrances to Good Communication**

Not Being a Good Listener. In James we read “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry...” James 1:19-20 NIV. It’s been noted that the Lord gave us two ears but one mouth! When, say, a wife is talking to the husband, failure of the husband to give her his full attention by continuing to watch TV or read the newspaper is effectively saying “I don’t want to listen” or “You are not worth listening to”. After a while, his wife will give up trying to communicate with her husband who is always pre-occupied and the result will be an unhappy relationship. On the other hand where, say, a wife totally withdraws, refuses to listen to her husband or simply adopts a “We’re not talking” mood she will be wielding a powerful anti-communication weapon which will have a destructive effect on the life of her family. A Christian couple must never revert to that. Being a good listener is also essential where children want to communicate. A frequent “I’m too busy now” response is a poor way to answer a child who wants to talk and be taken seriously

Not Being Prepared to Put Time Aside. A wife generally wants to know about the day her husband has had. “Just fine” or “So-so” isn’t an adequate response. A husband should make time to share about his day. Wives like detail! A wife wants to tell her husband about her day too. Husbands and wives must make time to listen and share and shouldn’t wait until last thing at night when they are both tired. Couples shouldn’t keep allowing the phone to interrupt and rob them of times of chatting together. The phone is for their convenience – not the caller’s. Husbands and wives need to make time to share about the highs and lows of their day, the way the children have been, who came and went and what they said, fears, joys and other experiences. A husband and wife should make time each day to pray together too. Communicating with God and drawing close to God in that way draws husbands and wives closer to each other. Parents should involve the children as well. It’s more important than catching up with sport on the TV, watching the news, reading the paper, getting on the computer and so on. Making time to communicate will help cement a married couple – and their family – together.

### **Be Prepared to Change**

Husbands. God has put the husband at the head of the home. It is the husband’s job to see that the joy of the Lord permeates his family. He should also ensure that *he* not only communicates well with his wife and children but that lines of communication are always open for *everyone* in his home. If that is not the case, the husband must be willing to change, to step out and put that change into practice and to ask God to help him do so.

Wives. In many ways the home revolves around the wife who is usually gifted as the homemaker. To be the one who encourages communication from her husband, shows a loving interest in his day and who is willing to share details of her own will all help to make the home go round. A wife should be willing to change to help make it happen.