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Communication

Goal: To learn to establish good communication with my spouse.

Good communication to a marriage is like water to a plant. While a plant can survive for a time without water, eventually it will die. Over time you can look at a plant and tell whether or not it has been getting water. It will be lush and green, or it will be parched and dry. The same is true of a marriage. Over time a marriage will reflect the quality of its communication.

Good conversation starts with talking about what activities you will do today and continues to a deeper level: what you think, how you feel and why. What do you want the quality of your communication to be in your marriage? What are your goals? How will you get there? What will it take from you? Are you willing to learn and change your habits to obtain your goal?

Learn to Listen

James 1:19

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

How well you listen will determine how well you communicate. While everyone listens every day, few do it well. A good listener makes their companion feel heard, loved, respected and valuable. Before you judge how well you listen, consider the following fundamentals of listening. Do yourself a favor: Learn to listen. The level of intimacy you share with your mate will be determined to a high degree by how well you listen.

1. **Bring the right mindset** – Move yourself into the background and focus on the speaker.
2. **Give your full attention** – Face them squarely and interact, making eye contact. Show interest.
3. **Draw them out** – Learn the words that draw them out and encourage them to talk more.

Proverbs 20:5

The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.

4. **Understand their reasoning** – Be able to make their case, convincingly, to someone else.
5. **Feel what they feel** – Notice their tone, inflection and body language. What are they feeling?
6. **Share what you hear in your own words** – Good communication requires feedback, in your own words.
7. **Let the Spirit guide you** – Be sensitive to where he leads you; he will help you to listen.

Why We Don't Listen

The world today, filled with busy lives, sets very low standards for listening. We feel some situations justify our not listening. We focus on a task or a problem to the exclusion of all else around us. We exhaust ourselves to the point that we think our brains are mush and incapable of listening. We feel that we have worked hard enough for the day, and we are ready only to be entertained by the TV or a movie. The list goes on and on. Even when we do hear the words that are said, often we do not really listen. Consider the following obstacles that prevent us from being a good listener, and think about how to overcome them.

1. **Not interested** – I have no interest in what you are saying.
2. **Easily distracted** – You said something that made me think of something else.
3. **My turn to talk** – I have more valuable things to share than what you are saying.
4. **I disagree** – When you make a mistake, I am ready to set it right with persuasive facts, figures and arguments. I enjoy a good argument. It helps me to learn and communicate.
5. **The fix-it shop** – I listen because I know how to help. I can tell you how to fix your problem.
6. **Judge and jury** – Every conversation is a chance for me to rule on what you did or said.

Which of these obstacles to listening tempts you the most? How often?

Which of these obstacles to listening most tempts your spouse-to-be? How often?

Read the following story and underline what he did right. Though the story is written about a male listening to a female, it applies both ways.

His friend on the phone made him laugh again, just as his wife walked into the house. He noticed her taut face, the glare in her eyes and her stiff but quick walk. Clearly, she was upset as she returned from her mother's house. He ended the phone call, lost the smile from his face, and patiently waited for her to speak. Though he wanted to tell her about the award he received at work today, he decided now was not a good time. He began to think about what might have happened between her and her mom. He remembered their recent decision to spend her birthday at home rather than go to her mom's as she always had in the past.

He sat solemnly for a couple of minutes waiting for her to speak. Then he said, "What happened?" She said, "I don't want to talk about it."

"Is your mom upset?" he asked.

"She makes me so mad. She still thinks I am five years old," she continued. She talked for the next five minutes, pausing only for an occasional response from him: "Oh," "Hmm," "Really," and "that must have been hard."

He resisted his urge to point out where she had been wrong and to suggest another approach. Before she finished, she began to feel bad about the way she had treated her mom. She finished with, "It must be hard for Mom to miss my birthday for the first time. I am going to call and apologize to her. Honey, you have been so helpful. Thanks."

"You're welcome," was all that he said before telling her his good news.

What can you learn from the man in the story?

Couples Need to Talk

What is the purpose of talking in your marriage; what do you hope to accomplish?

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|----------|----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ |

Married couples need to talk, beginning with chit-chat. Small talk plays an important role in communication. Like warm-ups before exercise, light conversation helps a couple to move into heavier topics. Everyone can learn to do this, but some couples need more help than others. Interacting with another couple can be helpful. Observe how they talk to each other, and ask them how you can improve conversation between the two of you. No heavy emotion and no heavy topics allowed, just chat.

Keep it light and informative. Think about twenty minutes a day as a minimum. Fight for this time. Use the phone if that is the only way to make it happen. Even when you travel out of town, you can talk via cell phone or long distance to keep each other informed. See a sample of suggested topics listed below:

Morning (Breakfast)

- What are your plans for the day?
- What are your plans for this evening?
- Do you have any major events today?
- (Current events) What do you think?
- When will you be home?
- What do you want or need from me today?
- What do I want or need from you?

Spiritual

- Thought from your time with God

Dinner

- How was your day; what happened?
- What did I do today?
- Did you have any significant conversations?
- Did I?
- Were there any surprises?
- What are your plans for the evening?
- What do you want or need from me?

Spiritual

- Temptations today

Go Deeper: Share your feelings

One of the most exciting aspects of marriage is the opportunity to know and to be completely known by another person. God showed us the pattern for great relationships. He knows us (Matthew 10:29–30), and he wants us to know him (John 15:14, Acts 17:27). This never happens by accident. Knowing requires curiosity, inquiry and the interest to remember and digest. Being known requires the willingness to reveal yourself to another, to tell them everything about you, including how you think and how you feel. Because others in their past may have used this information for harm, many find it difficult to reveal their inner self, even to their mate. Some may fear that their mate might run away if they knew the ugly truths they keep locked inside. However, over time we learn to share our inmost feelings.

Genesis 2:24

*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,
and they will become one flesh.*

Becoming one flesh means that, in marriage, you commit to share everything. Though sharing everything may sound easy, most couples find it challenging. Do not be discouraged if your attempts to practice this fall short of your expectations. This process takes time. Open your heart to your spouse. Learn to share what you think and feel about everything. If you have trouble sharing how you feel toward each other, start by sharing how you feel about other things.

All people experience feelings, but their approach to their feelings varies widely. With regard to understanding what they feel, most men and women enter marriage at very different levels; women usually understand their feelings better. Further, they enter with different levels of comfort in talking about their feelings; women usually feel more comfortable. Consider the following examples.

"How are you feeling?" she said, hoping to find out more about his inner thoughts on the subject.

"Fine," her spouse replied, with a blank expression that revealed nothing to her. He could not understand her preoccupation with always wanting to know how he felt.

"Why won't you let me inside? You always push me away," she said, now both upset and hurt. Women, he thought, were not made to be understood.