

Marriage and Parenting

Topic 6 – Marriage – Communication¹

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Introduction

Many of the problems within marriages are the result of lacking or poor communication. Communication, just like every other facet of marriage, has been marred by mankind's sin which began with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There is perhaps no other part of marriage that is so prevalent and necessary as communication. Without it, marriages can dry up, wither, and become lifeless. With communication, marriages have the potential to either flourish or be destroyed.

Definitions:²

1. The art of conveying information and meaning in order to come to a common understanding.
2. A process of sharing information with another person in such a way that the sender's message is understood in the way he intended it to be understood.
3. A process of sharing information with another person in such a way that the people involved are mutually strengthened, enriched, and encouraged, and they experience harmony, unity, and emotional closeness.

When married couples do not communicate well, there are many negative consequences: the relationship is superficial and shallow, boredom sets in, wise decision making is thwarted, disagreements turn into conflicts which remain unresolved, and sometimes those outside the marriage are sought out as a relational outlet. No Christian married couple would say that these things describe where they want their marriage to be. Unfortunately though, this describes many Christian marriages. Those it does describe often feel as though they cannot get out of the cycle of poor communication. However, there is hope that is real because it is rooted in God's Word.

❖ **How would you rate (0 - 5) your communication in your marriage? Ask your spouse to rate you.**

The Importance of Communication

It has been obvious from the beginning of time that communication and words were, and still are, important. We can know this by the fact that God chose to communicate with Adam using words. The first words Adam heard were not the words of another human, but the words of God (Gen 2:16-18). This was, and still is, how God revealed Himself to us – through His words.

Consider for a moment God's design in creating mankind. We have been created in His image. Therefore, we should seek to reflect that reality in our words. God's communication to man was intentional, powerful, true, gracious, and so many other things that not only took into consideration our needs, but more importantly revealed His glory. Too often, we convince ourselves that our words are not significant and therefore do not require much attention and/or care. This line of thinking could not be further from the truth! The truth is that we own nothing, not even our words (Psa 24:1). Communication, therefore, ought to be for His glory (1 Cor 10:31). We are stewards of the words we speak, just as we are stewards of our time, resources, children, etc. One author aptly notes, "Talk was created by God for *His* purpose. Our words belong to Him."³

❖ **Do you view your words as important? Do you view yourself as a steward of your words?**

1 Much of this study was taught by Casey Jenison during VBC's Biblical Solutions for Life Issues Class, Topic 32

2 Definition quoted from Wayne Mack in TMC Biblical Counseling Notes on Marriage and Family Counseling, 2007.

3 Paul David Tripp, *War of Words* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2000), page 15 [emphasis original].

The Origin of Sinful Communication

Reflecting back on the beginning helps us to pinpoint the moment mankind began to have problems in communication. Satan told the first lie and dramatically altered human communication (Gen 3:4). Before this, Adam and Eve only communicated lovingly and in truth with perfect timing and tact. After this, sin entered the world and mankind either spoke according to lies or according to truth, instead of only communicating according to truth and in love. Adam very quickly began speaking in such a way that reflected his fallen nature. He blamed Eve for their sin.

¹²The man said, “**The woman** whom You gave *to be* with me, **she gave** me from the tree, and I ate.” Gen 3:12

We still frequently and even habitually do this. Some common statements that we say to shift blame for our own sin onto others⁴:

1. “You make me so angry.”
2. “If you hadn’t _____ then I wouldn’t have _____.”
3. “I was never this way before I met you.”
4. “Whenever you do that, I just can’t control myself.”
5. “I was never this uptight before I had children.”
6. “If you weren’t such a good cook, I wouldn’t have this weight problem.”

When we make statements like these, we are not only trying to shift the blame to others, but to God.

❖ **How do you shift blame in your heart for your sin to others?**

Adam and Eve were created in the image of God, but they exchanged that image in their speech when they spoke like Satan had. When we speak, we either reflect the image of our heavenly Father or we reflect the image of Satan. We must humbly admit that our words have, do, and will at times reflect the image of Satan. We must then realize that our struggle to communicate in a way that reflects the image of God is a matter of the heart. It is not simply an altering of a set of techniques or the implementation of crafty methods. Either our heart is controlled by God or our flesh (which has been influenced by Satan and this world system). We need to yield our will to the indwelling Holy Spirit, that we might honor God in our speech.

So, communication is vitally important and was devastatingly altered by Satan in the Garden of Eden. The Bible says much about godly communication and how to honor the Lord with our words.

Speech to Avoid

Before we move on to Biblical principles of God-honoring speech, let’s look at examples of sinful speech to avoid.

1. Flattery (insincere praise to win favor)

¹⁶These are grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts; they speak arrogantly, **flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.** Jude 1:16

²⁸A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin. Prov 26:28

²They speak falsehood to one another; With flattering lips and with a double heart they speak. ³May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, The tongue that speaks great things; Psa 12:2-3

❖ **Do you try to gain an advantage over someone through flattery?**

⁴ Tripp, *War of Words*, page 24.

All Scripture are from the NASB ‘95 Update unless noted.

2. Lie means to communicate what is false, with the purpose of misleading; an intent to deceive.

⁹**Do not lie** to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its *evil* practices, ¹⁰and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him Col 3:9-10

²²**Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD**, But those who deal faithfully are His delight. Prov 12:22

❖ **Do you purpose to speak truth?**

3. Slander and gossip are closely linked. Slander (lies that damage a person's character or reputation). Slanderers here describes those who speak evil against others with the intent to injure the one spoken about

²⁸And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; **they are gossips**, ³⁰**slanderers**, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; ³²and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them. Rom 1:28-32

²⁸A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer (whisperer – ESV) separates intimate friends” Prov 16:28

Gossip (repeating negative rumors about someone that is none of your business). Romans 1:28-29 describes the sinful nature. Here the word means “whisperers” and describes an evil tongue which secretly conveys information, whether true or false and which is detrimental to the character or welfare of others.

In Titus 2, Paul uses a word that has been translated “malicious gossips”.

³Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, **not malicious gossips** nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, Titus 2:3

Malicious gossips [diabolos] is the same word used as a name for Satan and means slander or accuser. Satan is the father of lies, the false accuser. Diabolos comes from the roots to throw between and pictures what is done in relationships by throwing lies between. Gossip is a particular temptation to those who may have idle time on their hands.

⁹A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, *having been* the wife of one man, ¹⁰having a reputation for good works; *and* if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, *and* if she has devoted herself to every good work. ¹¹But refuse *to put* younger widows *on the list*, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, ¹²*thus* incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. ¹³**At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.** 1 Tim 5:9-13

❖ **Do you protect other's reputation with your speech?**

4. Hurtful talk. This refers to obscene and derogatory speech intended to hurt and wound someone.

⁸But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and **abusive speech** from your mouth. Col 3:8

¹⁸There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing. Prov 12:18

❖ **Do you strike out with your words?**

5. Quarreling (arguing)

^{19a}**He who loves a quarrel loves sin;** Prov 17:19a (NIV)

❖ **Are you someone who has to have the last word or win an argument/discussion?**

6. Complaining is an accusation or expressing dissatisfaction, resentment, displeasure, or annoyance. “Grumbling” is an audible expression in low tones of dissatisfaction, disapproval, or discontent.

¹⁴**Do all things without grumbling** or disputing; ¹⁵so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, Phil 2:14-15

❖ **Do you grumble, making sure that those around you know of your displeasure?**

Biblical Wisdom Regarding Communication

Wisdom from Jesus

Jesus makes the point that our communication problems come from the heart. In response to the Pharisees’ accusation that He was serving Satan in his miracles, Jesus communicates the fact that peoples’ hearts are known by their outward actions.

³³Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? **For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.** ³⁵The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil. Matt 12:33-35

It is here that we get an incredibly insightful truth: that our words reflect what is in our hearts. If we fill our hearts with bitterness and anger, then our words will eventually spew forth that bitterness and anger. If we fill our hearts with grace and forgiveness, we will be marked by that when we engage in conversation with others. Just as with every aspect of our faith and walk, God wants our hearts to be totally His. One of the most effective ways to check to see where our hearts are is by examining our words. Jesus then follows this up with an incredible challenge.

³⁶But I tell you that **every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.** ³⁷For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned. Matt 12:36-37

Often we do not place as much weight on our words because we convince ourselves that they are “just a joke” or “don’t mean anything.” Jesus confronts that thinking and shows us reality: We will give an account for *every* careless word we speak! In marriages, there are many words spoken that are not given the proper care and spiritual filter necessary to glorify God.

❖ **How can you ensure your heart is right before God?**

❖ **How might communication in your marriage look if your words are not careless?**

Wisdom from Solomon

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon (the wisest man other than Jesus), wrote profusely on the topic of communication. There are well over 100 verses in Proverbs pertaining in some way to speech. Here is a short treatment of the vast treasury of wisdom regarding words in Proverbs.

¹⁹When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise. Prov 10:19

¹⁸There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Prov 12:19

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

¹⁴The beginning of strife is *like* letting out water, so abandon the quarrel before it breaks out. Prov 17:14

²⁰Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him. Prov 29:20

¹He who separates himself seeks *his own* desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom. A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind. ... ¹³He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him. ... ²¹Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits. ²²He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord. Prov 18:1-2, 13, 21-22

Interestingly, the proverb following this strand regarding our speech is about marriage.

Wisdom from James

James' style of writing is very similar to the book of Proverbs in that there is little organization to the flow of thought, yet wisdom statements and instructions on practical living abound. Among these "life gems" can be found several insights into biblical communication that can be applied directly to marriage.

¹⁹This you know, my beloved brethren. **But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;** ²⁰for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. James 1:19-20

James 3:1-12

Wisdom from Paul

Our words can make us stand out from the world. Christian marriages should be much different from marriages amongst non-believers. Paul pointed this out to the Colossian church when he implored them to speak with grace at all times. Their words were to bring healing, they were to preserve those who heard them, and they were to be pleasant like the effects of salt.

⁵Conduct yourselves with wisdom towards outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

⁶**Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt,** so that you will know how you should respond to each person. Col 4:5-6

If this was how they were to speak towards "outsiders" how much more should their speech towards other believers and their spouses be God-honoring?

❖ **Does your speech bring grace or evil?**

Principles of Godly Communication⁵

Principle #1 – Walk in the Spirit – Foundational to any principles of godliness of any kind is the fact that we must walk in the Spirit and be at a place where God is on the throne of our hearts. If this is not the case, none of the following principles will have any lasting effect on our communication.

¹⁶But I say, **walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.** ¹⁷For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. Gal 5:16-17

It is noteworthy that one of immediate results of Spirit-filling is speech that honors God.

¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹**speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;** ²⁰**always giving thanks for all things** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; Eph 5:18-20

¹⁶Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, **with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** ¹⁷**Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.** Col 3:16-17

❖ Are you consistently walking in the Spirit?

Principle #2 – Speak the Truth in Love – First off, we need to speak the truth and not lie. It should go without saying that lying has no place in a God-honoring marriage. Where married couples go wrong typically is when they do not speak the truth in love. They qualify or justify the hurtful things they say with statements such as: “What?! I’m just being honest!” Much consideration needs to be given to how to lovingly speak the truth to your spouse.

²⁵Therefore, laying aside falsehood, **SPEAK THE TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR**, for we are members of one another. Eph 4:25, quoted from Zechariah 8:16

¹⁵“**but speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ. Eph 4:15

The battle to speak the truth to one another begins with the battle to speak the truth to ourselves. The Psalmist spoke of the one who was worthy to dwell in the presence of the Lord as the one who speaks truth in their heart. Many sins are avoided when one speaks truth in their heart: bitterness, “betterness” (pride), depression, anger, anxiety...etc.

¹O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? ²He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and **speaks truth in his heart.** Psa 15:1-2

Paul urged the believers at Philippi to dwell on whatever was true, thus echoing the Psalmist’s encouragement to speak truth in one’s heart.

⁸Finally, brethren, **whatever is true**, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, **dwell on these things.** Phil 4:8

❖ Does love or selfishness govern your “truthfulness”?

⁵ Principles taken from © TMC Biblical Counseling Notes on Marriage and Family Counseling, 2007.

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Principle #3 – Pursue Peace – All believers have the responsibility to pursue peace as far as it depends on them. This could not be more true and foundational for God-honoring communication in marriage. We need to ensure that our communication is used to pursue peace quickly so that bitterness does not take root.

¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with **all** men. Rom 12:18

❖ **Do you pursue peace with your spouse?**

Principle #4 – Build Up, Don't Tear Down – Marriages are not strengthened through harsh, critical statements intended to correct our spouse's behavior. How much more practical and biblical it is to strengthen a marriage through edifying words that are fitting and gracious?

²⁹**Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.** ³⁰Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Eph 4:29-30

- Our speech is to be wholesome (literally “putrid,” figuratively “offensive and injurious”)
- Edifying (words that build up, instruct or improve spiritually)
- According to the need of the moment

¹¹Like apples of gold in settings of silver is a word spoken in right circumstances. Prov 25:11

- Give grace to those who hear – we can be channels of God's grace through our words

Principle #5 – Be Selflessly Sensitive – The opposite of bitterness, anger, and slander is a kind and tender heart that is always ready to forgive. This takes an incredible amount of selflessness. Christ modeled this for us (Phil 2:3-4) and we need to be vigilant to speak in these ways. Once again, the key to doing so begins in the heart as we are filled with the Spirit.

³¹Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³²Be **kind** to one another, **tender-hearted, forgiving** each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Eph 4:31-32

Conclusion

Communication is critically important to all Christians since it was established by God Himself from the beginning. Unfortunately, Satan and sin have disturbed God's perfect design for communication. However, this disturbance is not too much for the changing and purifying power of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. The bottom line is godly communication pours forth from a heart that is bowed before the Spirit of God and His Word.

Real Life Scenarios

Yourself: You don't talk much, but that's just who you are. Your spouse knew this when they married you, but now it has become an irritant and a source of conflicts in the marriage. What needs to change in your self-perception? How can this occur?

Someone Else: Someone in your small group at your weekly bible study has shared several times about the problems of anger and bitterness in their marriage. They share at length often, taking up much of the small group time. As the small group leader, how would you handle this situation during small group? How would you handle it outside of small group in a one-on-one situation?

Marriage and Parenting – Additional Study

Topic 6 – Marriage – Communication

Consider the following self-evaluation to see where you are in your communication:

1. Does your talk with others lead to biblical problem solving?
2. Does your talk have a “stand together” or a “me against him/her/them” posture?
3. Do your words encourage others to be open and honest about their thoughts and feelings?
4. Are you approachable and teachable or defensive and self-protective when talking with others?
5. Is your communication healthy in the principal relationships in your life? (parent-child, husband-wife, siblings, employer-employee, friend-friend, body of Christ, neighbor-neighbor)
6. Does your talk encourage faith and personal spiritual growth in those around you?
7. Do you talk with others to develop relationships with them, or do you talk only to solve problems in times of trouble?
8. Do you speak humble and honest words of confession when you sin and words of sincere forgiveness when others sin against you?
9. Do your words reflect a willingness to serve others or a demand that they serve you?
10. As you face the struggles of talk, do you do so with a recognition of the gospel—God’s forgiveness, his enabling grace, and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit?

We can sin in many ways with our tongue. Check how often you sin in these ways in your marriage.

List of Sins of the Tongue	<i>regularly</i>	<i>occasionally</i>	<i>never</i>
Cussing			
Lewd jokes			
Slander			
Factiousness			
Arguing			
Hateful speech (name-calling)			
Complaining			
Lying, bearing false witness			
Gossip			
Sinful boasting			
Cursing others			
Exaggeration (lying)			
Flattery			
Foolish speech			