

HEALTHY COMMUNICATION IN YOUR MARRIAGE

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If you found yourself in a crowded public place and began to ask strangers what they felt the most important factor of a marriage was...what do you think they would say?

Love? Trust? Honesty? Of course, these are all important. But one factor that seems to be talked about much less is **COMMUNICATION**. Communication matters not only in a pandemic but all times. The problem before the pandemic, during the pandemic and after in many relationships is that we talk at each other but not to each other. As a result of being locked in with each other the issue is heightened even more. The way a married couple discusses their issues, or if they discuss anything at all, is crucial to a sustained and fulfilling marriage. Let's take some time to understand the importance of communication in marriage in normal times and examine how that is exacerbated in these times! *Let's see what forms of marital communication will create the atmosphere of a strong and caring marriage.*

Communication as a cornerstone! **Communications** is the key to any relational success story. Love, trust, honesty, and every other important characteristic of a strong marriage aren't meaningful in themselves without this bedrock of **communications**. It is the expression of these things that produces a marriage worth envying. Showing that **love**, showcasing your **trust**, and **acting honestly** is where the magic is. Yet **being able to communicate** how much your wife or husband means to you is where your marriage goes from good to great.

Now please note this. *Some of us are better at communicating to others this greatness than we are to the one who makes it great!* Could it be due to the fact many have not sat long enough and talked with each other in the spouse's language? *This pandemic is forcing us to sit and now the question is can we speak?*

Ladies and gentlemen *we do not need revolutionary thought process* nor ideas on how to communicate during the pandemic. I suggest *we need to go back to the basis and apply foundational stones of communication* to these trying times. Please understand the pandemic has closed us in and now **we must address the fact that looks and actions speak louder than words.**

Communication is more than just speaking. There is **verbal** communication, **nonverbal** communication, and **physical acts** that can be placed under the umbrella of communication. In each of these forms please note that *all communication forms must remain considerate and constructive.* The goal in these times must be to express a style that leads to mutual understanding and creates a loving partnership. So **how do we do that in these times?** Let's begin by **examining our verbal communications.**

- **Verbal communication**

Everyone likes to hear that they look nice and everything is rosy. Yet in these pandemic times that is not the case. *Verbal communications must be a revelation and release of inner truth.* I want to *release this that I'm holding in so that you can understand me and let me speak in terms of being understood.* I need in these times of uncertainty to be able to **communicate needs, wants, hurts, pains, and joys.** I need as we said in the book Marriage Matters to do this in my love language so that you can understand and relate to me!

Everyone likes to hear that they are loved but is it spoken in a language that endures good times, bad times, open times and isolated times? *Verbal communication that allows you to express how you feel to your spouse through the words that you speak, is essential to effective communication particularly in these times.* I need to pour out my heart without fear or doubt. Along with expressions of pleasure, you have to be able to speak up about what you're not happy with. **Communication between married couples is imperative to marital happiness.** It all starts with the words expressed or not expressed but remember it does not end there.

- ***Nonverbal communication***

Never forget the old cliché “***Actions speak louder than words!***” We’ve all said something to a friend, family member, or spouse that was met with an unpleasant facial expression. That person didn’t have to say a word, but they told a story with their face. It’s not just facial expressions, either. *We as humans say a lot more with our bodies than we give ourselves credit for.* In a marriage, *the development of a good communication style is one thing, but maintenance is even more important.* **How do you maintain a good style in a pandemic season?** We use Hosea and Gomer as examples. ***Recognize the pain in your present reality and talk about it.*** When problems within and without arise both must be willing to admit “*Houston we have a problem*”.

Now if we have a mutual problem can we discuss it in close quarters with a willingness to change ourselves, situations and actions in pursuit of resolving? If your answer is yes then *be sure to monitor body language that is emotionally charged and cast doubt. I have to take ownership and responsibility for my emotions, actions and reactions. This is key because they eventually will become actual words.* This as in *MT.8:1-2, 14; PS.32:8* reveal then a need for us all to learn how to communicate in non-verbal ways that enhance and not deflate our attempts. It’s all in **our actions**. What will help us in this is to *remember the Bible teaches a sin of ignorance.* Never let it be said “If I had known then my actions would have been different!” Be aware of how your body language is communicating with your partner.

- ***Physical acts that they see without speaking:***

If I take ownership of the communication in verbal and non I will build hope through my acts. Simple chore accomplishments communicate a lot. One night my wife was aching. Without asking I went in ran a hot bath, loaded with Epsom salt, and her favorite bath wash. I escorted her there, helped her in and out. Afterwards she remarked that was the first time in 37 years I ever did that and it showed her how deep my love and concern was! Wow, a simple physical act said all that. So what else can we do? Making dinner. Going to the grocery store. Taking out the garbage. Going on an ice cream run for your pregnant wife. All of these aren’t things that you say; they are things that you do that show your spouse that you care about them. In doing these small and thoughtful acts, you are communicating your love for them without saying much at all. The phrase “actions speak louder than words” fits appropriately with this form of communication. The importance of communication in marriage cannot be stressed enough. *The open channels of communication ensure less misunderstandings and help in developing the relationship in a well-rounded manner.* **Communication is essential** to any successful marriage, **but you can’t rely on just one of the three** ways listed above and *just discussed.* **It will take a good balance of the trio** to show your spouse how much they mean to you as time passes. It has the power to make or break a marriage, and after the strong romantic feelings from dating and the honeymoon fade, it doesn’t take long for communication problems to reveal themselves. Many couples find that effective communication is the thing that takes the most work in their relationship. **Through these we instill hope, display empathy, and establish commitment.**

Communicating with your spouse should be fulfilling, not frustrating.

Most of us can use an occasional communication tune-up from time to time. Following are ***three of the most important communication skills for couples to master.*** These points in ***any crisis or good time will help to reconcile, restore, and provide an awesome renewal!***

- ***First don’t assume you understand each other.***

Living in close proximity to each other can lead spouses to the conclusion that they know each other well. But, as well as they know each other, spouses are likely to make inaccurate assumptions about what their spouse thinks, feels, or desires. Increase your understanding of your spouse. **Make a habit of showing a sincere interest in his or her experience by asking open-ended questions that begin with words like who, what, when, where and how.** *Ask clarifying questions to make sure you’re understanding, and it can also help you remember what you hear.* Keeping curiosity alive in a marriage fosters meaningful communication. Display

action communications or *when I hear I act. I do not act to flaws but act in a way that demonstrates kindness, forgiveness, and more importantly understanding.* I seek to understand my mate in these times not attack.

- ***Know when to talk and when to listen.***

The better spouses understand each other, the better they'll be at knowing when to talk and when to listen. I have to let actions overtake words. In love, opposites attract. Often one spouse is more talkative and the other a better listener. Complimentary communication styles may keep couples from continually talking over each other, but they can also be a liability. So I *learn how to listen to my spouse's thoughts, feelings, and attuning myself to respond.* Do you also know this signals the deepest sign of intimacy? For example, consider the husband who is more inclined listen and to keep his thoughts to himself. His wife freely shares her perspective but doesn't pause long enough for her husband to respond. He may start to think she doesn't care about his point of view or even him. She may conclude he doesn't have a point of view, or that he agrees with her.

Setting some structure around your conversations can be helpful. *The better you get to know each other, the better you'll become at knowing when it's important to make eye contact, give your full attention, and ask for and listen to what the other has to say.* This creates the language of intimacy in the sense it creates a closeness. *In pandemic times this allow one to share fears, desires, and vulnerable feelings.*

- ***Emphasize the positive.***

It's natural for most people to pay attention to the negative particularly in these pandemic times. It's a survival skill that helps us identify threats to our safety and security. But in a marriage, focusing on the negative leads to dissatisfaction and divorce. I want to communicate that we can live joyfully in spite of our hurts. We are hurting in many ways from the pandemic and life's responses. How do we conquer these hurts? We have to quote "flip the script." We have a ton of negatives to deal with but can we take a stroll down memory lane and find where God has brought us from? We are together because we have been through a lot! Let us pause, talk, and reflect together on that fact! We need to see the need is great for positive interactions.

Marriage researcher and psychologist *John Gottman has identified what he calls the "Magic Ratio" of positive to negative interactions.* Gottman used this ratio in a study of newlywed couples to predict which couples would divorce. He made his prediction with 94 percent accuracy.

The Magic Ratio is a ratio of five positive interactions to every single negative interaction. Gottman has observed that couples whose interactions adhere to this ratio enjoy the most stable marriages. Gottman has found that even the happiest couples experience some negativity because conflict is unavoidable if a couple is to grow together. *When communicating in your marriage, put an emphasis on positive interactions by expressing gratitude, fondness, and appreciation for your spouse and his or her best attributes and actions.* If this doesn't come naturally for you, practicing it will make it a habit. Research on **what makes marriage work** show that **happy and healthy couples have a ratio of 5:1 positive to negative behaviors** in their relationship.

This means *there are five times as many positive interactions* between happy couples (i.e. *listening, validating the other person, using soft words, expressing appreciation, affirmation, physical affection, compliments, etc.*) as there are **negative** (i.e. *raising one's voice, stating a complaint, or expressing one's anger*). I love you no matter what and let me show you becomes the key in these times. **So how do we continue to grow in these times?** Well we *begin with improving our effectiveness.*

To improve the effectiveness of **communication** in your relationship:

- ***Be intentional about spending time together.***

On average, couples spend only 20 minutes a week talking with each other. To change this, turn off the technology and make it a point to spend 20-30 minutes a day catching up with each other.

- ***Use more "I" statements and less "You" statements.***

This decreases the chances of your spouse feeling like they need to defend themselves. For example, "I wish you would acknowledge more often how much work I do at home to take care of you and the children."

Remember *love is expressed from the heart and our words reveal what is within*. I wish to convey that inward I love this opportunity to spend time together and I cherish the time to talk together.

- ***Be specific.***

When issues arise, be specific. Broad generalizations like, “You do it all the time!” are not helpful. So with the specific let’s use the reconciling moment to wine and dine, romance and enhance, while listening and showing our hearing. Be specific and deliberate in this and watch the results.

- ***Avoid mind-reading.***

It is very frustrating when someone else acts like they know better than you what you were really thinking. I have a cherished vessel here that is unique and distinct. I need to show the honor and appreciation but asking what can I do not assuming I know! Take a moment and let them reveal what is being held within.

- ***Express negative feelings constructively.***

There will be times when you feel **bitterness, resentment, disappointment or disapproval**. *These feelings need to be communicated in order for change to occur. **But** how you express these thoughts is **critical**.* It’s one thing to say, “I am really disappointed that you are working late again tonight.” But if you say, “You clearly do not care one bit about me or the kids. If you did, you would not work late every night,” will convey something entirely different. The pandemic more than ever will impact these feelings. So I must communicate through a lens of sensitivity. There is no weakness in being sensitive. This will allow a constructive communication flow. Framing becomes essential and critical in this setting.

- ***Listen without being defensive.***

For a marriage to succeed, both spouses must be able to **hear** each other’s complaints without getting defensive. This is much harder than learning how to express negative feelings effectively. ***I want to hear you not to defend my position but to release your discomforts and pains. I want insight into you! I want to listen with the intent of bringing you happiness.*** I must remember happiness comes from happenings so I listen to determine how I can make it happen.

- ***Freely express positive feelings.***

Most people are quicker to express negative feelings than positive ones. It is vital to the health of your marriage that you affirm your spouse. *Positive feelings such as appreciation, affection, respect, admiration, and approval are like making deposits into your love account.* You should have *five positive deposits for every one negative.* **If your compliments exceed your complaints, your spouse will pay attention to your grievances. If your complaints exceed your compliments, your criticism will fall on deaf ears.**

No matter how connected you and your spouse are now, there is always room to strengthen and grow your relationship. So as *Paul says "Let a man examine Himself!"* **Let’s express our love and open the door for it to be expressed back to us without all flaws and quirks. For after all it is a communicated love that keeps us together.**

Books used: Marriage Matters

Communication in Marriage by: Maria Hall

Improving Communication in Your Marriage by: Dr. Gary Rosberg, Barbara Rosberg

Improve Communication In Marriage/The Importance Of Communication In Marriage by Rachael Pace, Expert Blogger Verified Marriage & Family Therapist