

Marriage Enrichment



HOW WELL DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

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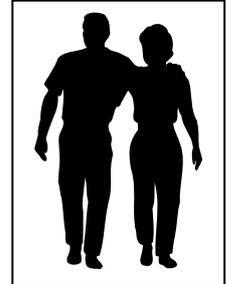
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HOW WELL DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

Introduction

Effective communication is at the heart of our discipleship and at the heart of a good marriage. It is the most difficult thing to get right in any relationship, whether in the family, the ecclesia, at work, with friends, or in marriage.



Think about the following:

Is it possible to have a relationship without communication?

The way in which we communicate can be an indication, not only of how we feel about each other, but also how we feel about ourselves.

Communication that is lacking in warmth, kindness, love, interest in the other person, or simply a failure to communicate at all, creates distance, hurt feelings, and isolation. This can be so painful for the individuals involved.

Effective Communication

The blessing of a good relationship stems from God. In the spiritual context if we communicate with the Lord God effectively we draw closer to Him:

Come near to God and he will come near to you. James 4.8 (NIV)

If we cease communicating with God through prayer, reading, worship and contemplation we begin to feel far away from Him.

On a human scale too, effective communication helps people to draw closer to each other. it involves:

speaking, attentive listening; active participation in a conversation;
making allowances for the other person; trying to see their point of view.

At times, this can be very difficult and it takes a lot of effort. We often fail. To keep trying is part of what discipleship is all about. It's particularly important in the marriage relationship.

HOW WELL DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

Talking and Listening

Talking and listening are the most important things you can do to build and maintain a successful relationship. Even when things go seriously wrong, if you are talking honestly about it, you have a much better chance of resolving it.

WHEN
COMMUNICATION
BREAKS DOWN,
IMAGINATION
TAKES OVER

If you don't share your thoughts with your partner about the important areas of your marriage, then they will probably feel that you are shutting them out. They will guess at what you think or feel about things, often incorrectly, and this could lead to further problems. Talking *and listening* are crucial.

When couples cease to communicate the relationship begins to die.



Discuss the following teachings with each other. How can you put them into practice in your relationship?

- Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.
James 1.19 (NIV)
- Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.
Prov 16.24 (NIV)
- A gentle answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger.
Prov 5.1(NIV)



How far do you agree with the following? Share your thoughts with each other.

Every word, every tone, every look, every sigh, every smile,
every touch, every gesture, every action,
is communication.

HOW WELL DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

Words are not enough

When we communicate, the way we are understood depends on the words we choose *and also* our tone of voice and our body language. You may be surprised to know how much of our message is conveyed by these three routes.

Generally, we take much more notice of *how* something is said and the body language that goes with it, than the words that are actually spoken. For example:



Try saying 'Hello' to each other using different tones of voice to convey different moods, for example, happy, sad, irritated etc. (The word is the same but the message each time will be very different.)

On a daily basis, the notice we take of our partner's communication is in the region of:

WORDS	7%
TONE OF VOICE	38%
BODY LANGUAGE	55%

It is through voice and body language that we convey mood, emotion and feelings, sometimes intentionally, but more often than not, unintentionally.

This means that it is easier to talk about issues that are difficult or painful if you are 'touching and talking', curled up comfortably together.

It also means that the telephone or email or texting are not very satisfactory when conveying messages sensitively because the body signals are missing. In this situation, words can easily be misinterpreted leading to confusion or difficulties.



Think about the following:

If you are separated from each other for a while, and communication has to be by telephone or some other means, how will you overcome the difficulties that could arise?

HOW WELL DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

In his book *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I am?*, John Powell identifies five levels of conversation. Level 5 is the simplest and most basic; level 1 represents the most effective communication.

Level 5 Cliché conversation	Hello. How are you? I'm fine, thanks. How are you? Very well, thank you.
Level 4 Reporting facts about others	I saw J at the meeting last night.. That's nice. How is she? She's very well.
Level 3 My ideas and judgements	I thought T went on a bit today. He could have cut down on the last ten minutes.
Level 2 My feelings	I'm anxious about how I shall get on with your parents. I feel a bit scared about meeting them.
Level 1 Absolute honesty and openness	I'd like to talk to you about . . . because it seems to be a problem between us that we need to resolve. I'm glad you've mentioned it, because I've been bothered about it, too. Let's talk.

Building a relationship with each other

It is vital that we are able to talk on levels 1 and 2 if we are to build a strong and lasting relationship. It is on these levels that we really begin to connect with each other. This means spending TIME together. Notice how the Lord Jesus took time to be with his disciples and to have long and important conversations.

Look at John chapters 13-17. Notice how Jesus shared his innermost feelings with his disciples.

HOW WELL DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

Sharing Feelings

How good are you at sharing your feelings? Do you find it easy to talk honestly and openly about your worries and fears? Many people find this very difficult to do because they are used to hiding their feelings.

Sharing your innermost thoughts with someone else can make you feel very vulnerable; and yet a healthy relationship which is built on love and trust, can respect and accept that vulnerability. Through it you can grow together - emotionally and spiritually.



Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another .

James 5:16 (NKJ)



Think about the following and then share your thoughts with each other.

- Where and when do you feel you had the most open (and perhaps most important) conversation between you?
- What sorts of things do you find it difficult to talk about?
- Do you avoid talking about certain things because your partner may become upset?
- Have you talked about anything that is really important to you but which you feel your partner still doesn't really understand?
- Does your partner *really* listen to you?

Score out of 10 (1 being low, 10 being high), how openly you can talk to each other about:

- Your faith
- Your family
- Sex
- Money
- Your partner's family
- Your worries and fears

HOW WELL DO YOU COMMUNICATE?

Building a relationship with God

Remember that we have a powerful resource that is unavailable to those who do not share our faith and understanding of God's Word: PRAYER.

When you spend this important time together talking about the things that are so important to you - your hopes and fears, plans and ambitions - try to pray about them together. That way you will build your relationship in God's strength and with His blessing.



A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4.12 (NIV)



Share your thoughts with each other about how you would like to put the following teaching into practice in your marriage.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Eph. 4:15 (NIV)

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, . . . then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Phil. 2. 1-3 (NIV)

Think also about the command that Jesus gave us to love one another (John 15v12). It involves kindness, seeking to understand the other, not fault finding.



Finally, how would you finish the following?

A good relationship doesn't just happen; it needs . . .

NOTES