

COVENANT KEEPERS

“Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles”

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Fall Edition

Developing effective communication.

How effective is your communication with your spouse when there is a serious problem in your marriage? Can you discuss it constructively or do the lines of communication immediately get cut? This is a question that should be answered *before* the need arises so that steps can be taken to strengthen your connection with each other.

Your ability to communicate with your spouse is fundamental to the deepening of your relationship and ultimately to the success of your marriage. Every failed marriage can be traced to one or both partners' failure to communicate. If two people have no way to communicate, they can't resolve conflicts. Consequently, their marriage will become a lonely standoff or the relationship will dissolve altogether. Likewise, every enjoyable and satisfying marriage is directly related to that couple's skill and effectiveness in the art of communication.

If you truly desire greater intimacy and companionship with your mate, then your ability to communicate must grow. How do you do this? Here are some simple steps.

1. Are you willing? Here is where all effective communication begins. Change in any area of your life requires a willing heart. God will not force you to communicate anymore than He would force you into a relationship with Himself. Remember what Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day: *“How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers*

her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (Matthew 23:37)? How often a spouse will say this same thing to me in counseling. “I want a close relationship and intimacy, but he (she) is simply unwilling.” In this passage Jesus points out that willingness is the key to any relationship. In most cases when communication is suffering in a marriage, it's not a question of a person's lack of ability to communicate, but simply their unwillingness to do so.



Set time aside to communicate!

Therefore, how willing are you to spend the time necessary to build your communication skills? Are you ready and willing to ask forgiveness for any failure in this area of your relationship? Are you also eager to learn new ways of becoming a better communicator?

2. Give up your excuses. If you are truly willing to allow God to improve your ability to communicate, first you must give up any excuses you have established in your mind. An excuse is any reason you use to evade your responsibility to communicate with your spouse.

What are some of these excuses? Some have said to me, “It's my parents' fault that I don't

communicate. I never had a good example in my family as I was growing up.” Usually people think this is an excellent excuse. However, I remind them that they do have a good example now, Jesus Christ. He is the best example that anyone could have of an effective communicator (John 13:15).

Or, people will tell me, “It's my spouse's fault for the way I communicate. If he or she wouldn't be so _____ I wouldn't respond the way I do.” But, this is simply not taking personal responsibility for your own actions. It is shifting the blame to someone else.

Let me give you an example of the ultimate excuse and God's ultimate solution. Moses possessed a seemingly legitimate excuse for his unwillingness to speak for God. He complained, *“O my Lord, I am not eloquent, ... but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.”* (Ex. 4:10). It appears that Moses had great insecurity about his ability to talk because of some kind of speech impediment. However, the most important question is, did the Lord accept his speech problem as a valid excuse? No! God responded by asking Moses, *“Who has made man's mouth? ...Therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say”* (Ex. 4:11-12). God's answer to Moses was to give him a promise that He would help him and teach him what he should say. Did the Lord keep His promise? All you have to do is read the books of Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy to see how well Moses did as he spoke to the people.

Therefore, give up your excuses! Instead, start asking God for His help and instruction concerning how to

She is your companion and your wife by covenant Mal. 2:14

become a better communicator. God will be with your mouth as He was with Moses.

3. Acknowledge your failures. The next step in becoming an effective communicator is to acknowledge your failures in communication. This means you must humbly and honestly consider where you are failing before God, and then confess it to your mate.

If you are thinking, *But what if I don't know where my failures are?* Stop and take a moment to think. Do you stubbornly refuse to acknowledge your faults when conflicts arise? When you are confronted, do you simply turn and walk away refusing to communicate? Or, do you viciously attack your mate with angry and harsh criticism when you disagree over an issue? Do you rudely interrupt your spouse simply because you are impatient? When your mate finds out that you have done something he or she considers wrong, do you lie to cover yourself? Or, do you exaggerate the facts to make yourself look better? If you struggle with any of these failures in your relationship, resolve them by first acknowledging them and asking your mate to forgive you. In addition, you should also humbly ask God for His conviction and instruction concerning how to change in these areas.

For further insight into your possible failures please read Vol. 5 Issue 2 of this publication entitled, *What causes communication breakdown?*

Change in any area of your life requires a willing heart.

4. Make time. Many times couples say to me that they just don't have time to develop better communication. Personally, I believe this is just another good sounding excuse. I say this because we all had

plenty of time to communicate when we were dating each other; why not now? The problem is not needing more time, but making better use of the time we have. I tell people almost every week, "You will never *find* the time to communicate, you must *make* the time to talk to one another." You always make time to do what is most important to you. If you want to see a basketball game don't you set the time aside to go? Once you've made the time, don't you refuse the other invitations you receive? Likewise, making the time for each other is a similar choice to do something you consider important. The Father made a choice to communicate His love all throughout history by sending His prophets and angels. Ultimately, "*in the fullness of time*" God sent His Son as a testimony that you were important to Him and so you would know that He truly cared (Gal. 4:4). Therefore, when you choose to make time to communicate, you are demonstrating your desire to love. Communication is, therefore, simply a choice to love.

Are you making this choice to love your mate on a daily basis? Do you take the time to sit down with your spouse and talk about how your day went? If you do, your behavior is telling your partner that he or she is very important to you. If you fail to make time for fellowship you are communicating just the opposite message.

5. Reduce your distractions. In order to make more time to communicate, you must also determine what things are consuming your time. What are the things that distract you from communication with your spouse?

What kind of distractions am I referring to? There are many. Some individuals have the TV on day and night. Why not try turning it off for just one hour after dinner so you can sit and talk to each other? Try it and you will find that even the kids will come in and sit with you.

For the workaholics who come home late or bring work home, why not set several nights aside where you choose to come home on time and leave all the work at the office? Wouldn't it be great to have dinner together with your mate and children?

If you are distracted by nightly commitments to sports or hobbies for yourself or even your children, why not reduce those commitments, or drop the children off one night and go out with your loved one for a date? Whatever distraction is keeping you from communicating with your mate, change it! If you want to establish and maintain real communication and friendship this is what it will take. Remember, your number one priority must be to enjoy oneness and companionship with your spouse (Gen. 2:18). This is the biblical priority. Don't let other things distract you from what is most important!

Ask God for His conviction and instruction concerning how to change in these areas.

6. Dates and recreation. Can you remember back to when you first dated each other and the hours you spent together doing fun things? What was the fruit of that time together? Didn't you naturally grow in your friendship and ultimately your romantic desire for each other? Why did this occur? Wasn't it because during those times together you shared your common ideas, which built up a strong bond between you? Communication is always the fruit of dating and recreation time together.

The best biblical example of this truth is found in the Song of Solomon. As you read this story it is quite obvious that Solomon and his wife had a very open, intimate, and expressive

communication with each other. The question is, how did they get this kind of relationship? The answer is found as you read the account; they did many things together. Solomon visited his wife while she was away in the mountains (Song of S. 2:8-9). They also went on trips together to Lebanon and other villages (4:8; 7:11). They would take walks together to smell the flowers (2:10-14). In this passage note how they talked while they were together. Solomon's wife declared, "Let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely" (v 14). Enjoyable communication was the result of these special times together.

When is the last time you went off alone with your spouse for a drive together or a walk around your neighborhood for some exercise? If you want to develop your communication here is one way to do it. Why not set time aside for a date this week or a night away by yourselves? Try it and see how it improves your communication.

You will never *find* the time to communicate; you must *make* the time to talk to one another.

7. Prayer together. Prayer is another very important tool in encouraging deeper communication within a marriage. You may be thinking, *How could prayer affect our communication?* It's very simple. When you pray with your spouse, you communicate the things that are most important to you. You will say things to the Lord in prayer that you won't ordinarily say in normal conversation with your spouse. When you share your most intimate secrets with your most intimate partner you can't help but be drawn closer together. Honesty and openness like this will

naturally stir up more communication.

When King David described his prayer life he said, "Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD" (Psalm 130:1). The Psalms are a powerful example of a man sharing his honest hopes, fears, and troubles with a God that he knew loved him. What is your reaction as you come into contact with the depth of David's heart? Don't you identify with his struggles and aren't you drawn to love this man? Similarly, if you will pray together and pour out your heart to God in the presence of your spouse, you will also be drawn together into a deep sense of understanding and love.

Don't let your fear, pride, or self-sufficiency keep you from joining your mate in prayer. Seek out your loved one and invite him or her to come and wait upon the Lord with you. As you do, your communication will surely grow.

8. Meaningful content. If you desire to truly enhance your communication, you must also develop the content of your conversations. You must not allow your fellowship to remain superficial, but you must share the most important things in your life. Meaningful communication is always fulfilling and edifying and will encourage you to come back for more. How can you develop a more meaningful content?

First, there must be something meaningful happening in your life. What do I mean? The most meaningful thing that can possibly happen in your life is what is occurring in your relationship with the Lord. When God is at work in people's lives and they are filled with the Holy Spirit, it is worth communicating. David declared the joy of this abundant life when he said, "Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul" (Psalm 66:16).

The disciples experienced the same thing after they were transformed by

the infilling of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Peter said, "For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:20).

Therefore, ask God to begin stirring you up spiritually and fill you with His living water. Seek God in His Word and then share what you've learned and what God is doing in your soul. The more you share spiritual things with your mate, the greater will be the depth of your relationship.

In addition, meaningful conversation consists of the important things that happen to you each day; your joys, struggles, and accomplishments. These are the important things in life. When you discuss them with your mate, he or she will sense that your relationship is becoming more meaningful. This will open up even more communication.

Therefore, tonight, why don't you purpose to share with your spouse one thing that happened to you today and how you felt about it. Then communicate one thing you learned from God's Word and how the Holy Spirit applied this truth to your life. As you take these steps, your fellowship will surely become more meaningful.

9. Be more encouraging. One of the easiest ways to enhance your communication is to simply be more encouraging by regularly declaring your appreciation for each other. It is so easy to verbalize your criticism and to find fault; it seems to come forth with no effort at all. But, why is it that encouragement and praise for a job well done seem to get stuck in our throat?

What are the things that distract you from communication with your spouse?

Scripture teaches that praise and encouragement are a valid and necessary part of good communication. We are told to "encourage one another daily" (Heb. 3:13). Solomon taught that "a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30). Even the Father will one day say to His faithful ones, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

I am sure that your spouse has done something today that is worthy of appreciation and praise. Have you declared it? Does your husband or wife fear God and faithfully serve the Lord? Consider all the things your spouse does every day to benefit you and your family. Why not mention how blessed you feel to have him or her as your partner?

What will happen when you begin to become more encouraging in your communication? Your entire relationship will be strengthened because your spouse will sense your love and care.

When you pray with your spouse, you communicate the things that are most important to you.

10. Make Christ your example. Jesus said, "Come... learn from Me" (Matt. 11:28-29). This command is especially applicable in the area of communication. Jesus is the supreme example of an effective communicator. He always maintained perfect balance in every situation. To the religious hypocrites He could speak the stern rebuke that was needed. In the very next moment, He could speak tender words to a child or a repentant sinner. He felt comfortable communicating His deepest emotions. He expressed His sorrow, His grief, even to the

point of weeping over the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 26:38; Luke 19:41). To His disciples He could also express His grand hopes and goals for their lives and future ministries (John 17).

Will you follow His example and allow God to start transforming you? If you are willing, He can make you an effective and well-balanced communicator. All He requires is your surrender to His full control and Lordship (Rom. 12:1-2). As you yield, God will also make you an example to your spouse and to your children of an effective communicator. Let God begin the work today and you will begin to enjoy your marriage relationship like you never have before!

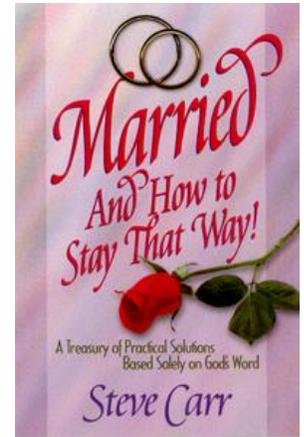
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For more information concerning the ministry of Pastor Steve Carr or for additional marriage resources for couples and counselors, please contact us at our web site www.covenantkeepers.org or by email at ccag@calvaryag.org or at 805-481-2320.

Additional Resources

Counselor Training Manual: The *Counseling Couples in Crisis* manual with accompanying DVD training material has been developed for pastors and lay counselors to assist them to counsel couples in crisis.

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