

# COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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## What hinders communication in your marriage?

Communication is one of the most basic skills needed to establish and maintain any human relationship. In marriage it is especially important that a couple master this ability. Whenever you find a successful marriage, you will always find two people who have become skilled at communication. Likewise, wherever you find a failed marriage, a communication breakdown is always one of the root problems. Therefore, it is essential that you learn how to become a better communicator. Let's look at some basic issues that hinder good communication.

**1. Check your attitudes.** Your attitude is critical to being an effective communicator and is the basis for what you say and do. Without the correct attitude, your words will always come out wrong. You may be totally right in all that you say, but it's the way you say it that many times turns your mate off. Let's look at some of the attitudes I am referring to.

Do you have an arrogant or superior attitude when you talk with your mate, communicating that you are always right and that he or she knows nothing? Do you become indignant and refuse to listen when your spouse questions your actions or motives? Have you ever thought, "Who does he think he is to ask me that?"

The Scriptures teach that this attitude of heart is very destructive to your relationships. Solomon said, "*He that is of a proud heart stirs up strife...*" (Prov. 28:25). Is this attitude the cause of strife in your marital communication? If so, consider Paul's counsel, "*To speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men*" (Titus 3:2). Humility is the attitude of heart that

keeps you from speaking evil of anyone or to anyone, and enables a gentle spirit to communicate effectively. Your home needs this attitude.

Another sinful attitude that destroys communication is deep-seated resentment or bitterness, which is like poison to your life and marriage. The Apostle Peter noticed this attitude when he spoke to Simon the sorcerer. Simon had become envious and bitter at the success of the disciples' ministry. When Simon asked for similar abilities, Peter said to him, "*...You are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity*" (Acts 8:23). If you have a bitter and resentful attitude, your spouse will pick this up as soon as you begin to speak. Your tone of voice reveals the poison of unforgiveness inside. Jesus said, "*If you have anything against anyone, forgive him...*" (Mark 11:25). A heart of forgiveness will be your only remedy for this poison.

Indifference or apathy greatly hinder progress as well. Jesus described this attitude in the parable of the marriage feast; He invited many, yet "*they made light of it and went their ways...*" (Matt. 22:5). This is the same attitude that many experience when their mates try to talk or spend time together. Indifference becomes apparent when you say "not now" or you simply change the subject. When you *make light* of your mate's request to talk or spend time together, you are communicating to your spouse that he or she is not really that important to you. Every time you indifferently turn your husband or wife away, it will cause discouragement and a greater distance between you.

Of course, not every time is an opportune time to talk. If you have to postpone a conversation or time together, make sure you communicate your sincere interest and willingness to spend the time it takes to build the relationship. Then, be sure you are the one to initiate the next conversation over that same subject.

Can you recognize any of these attitudes in your heart? If you do, be assured that they will hinder effective communication. The Bible describes each of these attitudes as sinful and requires you to put them off.

**2. Check your words.** Once you have examined your attitudes or *the way* you talk, now consider *what* you say. What kind of words do you use?

Do you use harsh words? Do you possess the skill to cut and slash your spouse verbally in the midst of an argument? If so, you may win the argument and be daily destroying your relationship. Solomon said, "*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*" (Prov. 15:1). David also said the tongue can be like "*a sharp razor*" that can cut and wound a person very deeply (Ps. 52:2). Is this what your tongue is like?



*Speak in such a way that your spouse will receive your words.*

Harsh, condemning words are incredibly destructive. Think how you feel when a person condemns or belittles you. Doesn't it drive you away from that individual and make you want to retreat? If you speak this way to your spouse you will see the same results. Paul specifically commanded husbands, "...

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

love your wives and do not be harsh with them”(Col. 3:19). Likewise, this command could be equally given to wives. Clearly then, the husband-wife relationship cannot thrive with the use of harsh words.

Another class of words that must be avoided involves lying or deceitfulness, which slowly undermine your entire relationship. If you are deceitful and tell only half the story or a doctored version that makes you look good, sooner or later your spouse will catch on. Trust is fundamental to your entire relationship, but lies and half-truths will eventually undermine your credibility. Any amount of lying to your spouse is like taking an ax to the bottom of your own boat, it will ultimately sink the ship.

If you struggle with lying or deceitfulness, pray what David did, “*Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips and from a deceitful tongue*” (Ps. 120:2). Do what Paul commanded; “*Therefore, putting away lying, each one speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another*” (Eph. 4:25). As a married couple, you are members one of another in every sense of the word; you are one flesh. Don’t lie to one another.

Similarly, exaggeration works to destroy effective communication. Are you an exaggerator? Do you hear yourself say these words, “you always do this”, or “you never do what I ask?” The words *always, never, or every time* are like gasoline on the fire of an argument. These words will cause an explosion of anger because your spouse can always think of one time he or she *did* do what you say *never* occurs. The only solution to exaggeration is “*...speaking the truth in love...*” (Eph. 4:15). The truth may be that your spouse *many times* does this or that, as opposed to *always* or *never*.

As we strive to speak the truth, let us remember to speak the truth *in love*, for certain words of truth can also greatly *hinder* your communication. I am referring to the true statements about your spouse’s past failures which you bring up to use as ammunition during a conflict. These words cut deep, specifically because they are true, but they are words that should never be used to win an argument. If you have forgiven your spouse for a past failure, then it should be off-limits. Why? Because God talks about your sins this way: “*For*

*I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more*” (Heb. 8:12). The word *remember* means “to hold in a mental grasp or to recollect so that it may be used at a later time to punish.” God declares here that once He forgives, He chooses not to remember your sins and will never use them to condemn you; we must forgive in the same manner. Therefore, speak the truth about the present issue only.

Finally, foul language also tears down good communication. I have discovered that many couples swear and call one another names in the midst of an argument. If this occurs in your home, understand that these words will not be easily forgotten because they demean your spouse and signify your lack of love and respect. Once you have said these words, you can’t take them back. This is why Paul said, “*...you must also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth*” (Col. 3:8). He also said, “*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers*” (Eph. 4:29). Don’t tear your loved one down, but build him or her up when you speak. Ask God to put that check in your mind before you open your mouth. Pray as David did, “*Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; Keep watch over the door of my mouth*” (Ps. 141:3). God will answer this prayer.

**3. Check your actions.** The specific actions you take while you interact will either enhance or hinder your ability to effectively communicate. Let’s look at some of these actions.

Are you a good listener, or are you quick to interrupt when your spouse is talking? This disrespectful action will greatly frustrate your mate and tends to stir up anger. James said you must be “*swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*” (James 1:19). When you interrupt, it means you are thinking of how you want to respond instead of really listening, and this hinders meaningful and enjoyable conversation with your mate.

A related action to interrupting is sentence-finishing. This occurs when your spouse takes a pause to think about what he or she is about to say, and you help your mate out by finishing the sentence. Such behavior, is again,

extremely frustrating and reveals that you are not listening or trying to understand. It indicates that you have already pre-judged his or her thoughts and declares that you think you know what your spouse is about to say. Solomon said, “*He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him*” (Prov. 18:13). Rather, allow your spouse to fully complete the sentence, then respond. This will demonstrate you care and are truly listening in order to understand.

Explosive anger is another pitfall and is often only used to control a conversation. Sometimes people use anger to simply manipulate the other party into doing what is desired. This person knows that his or her spouse will cower and retreat in the argument once the rage appears. Yet, this ploy is very foolish because you may seemingly win the argument, but in the end you risk losing relationship and intimacy with your spouse in the process.

However, there are times when anger is not a ploy used to control another. Sometimes an individual just has no control of the emotions that rage inside, due to a lack of desire or understanding as to how to control them. Such a person is simply out of control. Irrational anger is what drove the religious people of Jesus’ day to attempt to throw Him over the cliff at Nazareth. These religious people were simply out of control. Luke says the people were “*filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city...that they might throw Him down over the cliff*” (Luke 4:28,29). If you have explosive anger that is not dealt with, deep and intimate communication will be impossible. No one ever wants to communicate the deepest things of their heart with someone who is raging out of control in an angry fit. Remember, “*...the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God*” (James 1:20). Your wrath and anger can never produce something good or righteous in your marriage relationship. What you need to do is get some specific counseling from your pastor regarding how to control your anger. The sooner you take this action, the sooner you will learn how to communicate effectively.

Third, beware of blameshifting. This is usually done when your spouse points out one of your faults and you quickly cover yourself by shifting the blame to your

mate or to another. This is what Adam and Eve did when they were first confronted by God for their sin. Adam said that it was, "...the woman You gave to be with me, she gave me to of the tree, and I ate". Eve also shifted the blame to Satan, "...the serpent deceived me, and I ate" (Gen. 3:12,13). Neither Adam nor Eve would take responsibility for his or her own actions. Adam in one breath blamed God for giving him this woman and blamed his wife for giving him the fruit. Eve in essence replied, "The devil made me do it." What solves this problem? Simply take responsibility for your own actions. Blameshifting is the result of pride and dishonesty. You know what you have done and your spouse does too, so why not admit it? Without you personally taking responsibility for what you've done, all you will do is play the blame game which only delays progress to a solution. This is a game that no one will win.

The last action that hinders good communication is the unwillingness to confess your faults during or after an argument. This is a problem that results from that same attitude of pride, and to resolve it the Apostle James suggests, "*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord...Do not speak evil one of another...Confess your faults one to another...*" (James 4:10.11; 5:16). God requires you to humbly and honestly look at your own actions and not shift the blame. When either husband or wife takes this action of first confessing personal faults, it usually softens the other to do the same, and communication is restored.

But, you may ask, "How do I change all these sinful attitudes, words, and actions?" Take heart, there is a way!

## What helps build your ability to communicate?

Let's look at some of the most important ways to build your ability to communicate.

**1. Establish intimacy with God and find His help for change.** Here is where you get the power to change in the areas where you have been failing. When God is at work filling you with His love and

teaching you His Word, you can't help but have something to talk about. Establishing this intimacy with God will inspire the most important communication between you, the sharing of spiritual things. When the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they went everywhere sharing Christ. When they were commanded not to speak anymore in His name their response was, "*We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:20). God was at work in their lives and they had to share it with someone. David experienced the same drive to communicate what God was doing in his life. He said, "*Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul*" (Ps. 66:16). What is the Lord doing in your life? Are you sharing that with your mate? The kind of relationship you have with the Lord, will naturally translate into your relationship with others and especially with your spouse. Your relationship and communion with Christ is where real communication with your mate begins.

If you are not walking with Christ at this time and have never made a personal commitment to Him, this is the primary reason why you are struggling in marriage and in your ability to communicate. He can dramatically change your entire life, but you will never experience it without a personal relationship with Him. You can start this relationship by simply acknowledging your sin to Him in prayer, asking Him to forgive you and come into your life. If you really want to change, He can help you do it. Take a moment right now to communicate with Him in prayer, and ask Him to come into your life. You won't be disappointed!

If you are a Christian, you can also be greatly hindered in your ability to effectively communicate by simply having sporadic devotions or no devotions at all. This is because when you are spiritually dry, you will have no power or joy to communicate with others. Let me illustrate. Think of the times when you have struggled spiritually and you have seen another Christian in a store, what did you do? Did you run up to this individual with an overwhelming desire to fellowship, or did you turn and walk another way so you wouldn't have to talk to him? The answer is obvious, you don't want to talk to another person

when you are discouraged or depressed; it's the last thing you want to do. When you aren't growing spiritually the same thing will happen at home. You won't have any desire to communicate with your spouse either. You will naturally retreat from communication with your partner.

Therefore, return to the Lord and ask Him for His help. Renew your relationship with Him, then the desire, power, and love you need to communicate with your spouse will begin to flow again.

**2. Acknowledge your faults.** This will take some brutal honesty in your own heart. Stop now and look back over your attitudes, words, and actions. Where have you been failing in your communication with your mate? You must first acknowledge your faults if you desire to see anything change.

Next, go and acknowledge these faults to your spouse, asking his or her forgiveness. Tell your mate that you truly want to change in these areas. Your spouse will probably be amazed that you would honestly confess to these things without being forced to do so. When you take this action, your ability to communicate will take a dramatic step forward. Acknowledging and reconciling your faults with your spouse is half the battle.

**3. Spend time together.** Once you have dealt with your failures in your attitudes, words, and actions, and have sought God for His power and help, you need to take the opportunity to communicate. Do you set specific time aside to communicate? You did this before you were married. You talked on the phone every chance you could. You went out on dates and would talk about everything and anything for hours. Do you remember how romantic and how much fun it was to talk? This is what must happen again. How?

You need to start dating the one you love on a regular basis. Why not call your spouse and set something up today? Then tomorrow, make a special effort to call your spouse again just to say, "I love you." Talk to your husband or wife about your upcoming date and your anticipation of being together. You may also try turning the T.V. off and sitting after dinner just to talk over your day.

Take a bike ride or a walk together. You need to regularly set time aside to just be together because failure to do so is one of the fundamental reasons why many couples slowly drift apart. Other things soon take priority over being together, then slowly and imperceptibly the distance begins to grow. You can stop this drifting, but it takes constant vigilance to keep time together as a high priority.

Solomon and his wife had the right idea. The Shulamite requested of her husband, "Rise up my love, my fair one, and come away...Let me see your countenance, let me hear your voice; For your voice is sweet, and your countenance is lovely" (Song of Solomon 2:10,14).

Do you want the kind of romantic relationship Solomon and his wife had? Then, take the same action that they did, and you will afford yourself the best opportunity for real communication and romance. Is the voice of your spouse still sweet? It can be, if you will again make the same effort you did before you were married. Your spouse is worth the time and the effort!

**4. Encouragement and praise.** If you desire to build good communication with your spouse, try this strategy. Each time you are together look for something that he or she has done well, and praise him or her for it. If you encourage the actions which are godly, loving, and responsible, you will build your mate up and build your overall communication.

This is what the Scripture teaches us to do. Paul says we must, "...Exhort one another daily..." (Heb. 3:13). Speak the words that, "...build others up..." (Eph. 4:29 NIV). Solomon declared that, "...A woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30). This encouragement could again be equally given to women to praise their husbands. But, the question is, do you do this? One day Jesus Christ will say to you, "...Well done, good and faithful servant..." (Matt. 25:21). If Jesus considered these words important to say, shouldn't you do the same? Praise and encouragement is an acknowledgment of your love and appreciation, which naturally builds a person up.

How often do you say an encouraging word, or a "well done?" Your mate must do *something* right, responsible, or

loving each day. Look for these things and then tell your spouse that you appreciate them. If harsh and critical words destroy your communication, think of what praise and appreciation will do. Take the time to talk and to spend time together. Be gracious with your words, and encourage instead of being harsh and critical; it will build your communication more than you could ever imagine.

Remember, "The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious..."(Ecc. 10:12). Therefore be wise. Go and give a word of praise and encouragement to your loved one today!

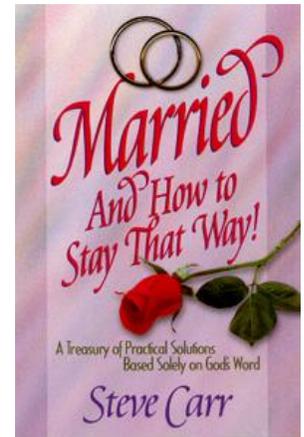
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