

COVENANT KEEPERS

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Solving Difficult Communication Problems

The most difficult problems that I deal with in marriage counseling are issues with communication. Most couples struggle with communicating at times in their marriage, but some couples battle with just talking over normal things in life. The result is frustration, constant turmoil in the home, and a division that hinders every aspect of the family.

If you are reading this article, and what I've said sounds like your home, then you have some very serious issues that must be resolved, and it's likely your marriage will not survive or at best will always be frustrating. Why do I say this? Because if you can't communicate effectively, then you can't resolve much of anything else in your relationship. If you can't talk about things in your life, then you won't make decisions together. If you live independently of one another, then you will slowly grow apart. If you grow apart, you will fall out of love with each other, and without a passionate love for one another, you will eventually have little reason for staying together.

Let me ask you some questions. Do you have ongoing conflicts that never get resolved? Does your spouse say to you, "I can't talk to you"? Do you have constant explosions of anger or a deafening silence in your home? Are you just existing in your relationship without any real love and companionship with your spouse?

If these things are occurring in your relationship, then you have to get to

the root of the problem. It is more than just learning the right mechanics to enable communication; there are heart issues that must be radically changed. Don't misunderstand me; the mechanics of communication are important. If you want some of these mechanics for how to communicate, you can read my other articles entitled, "*What Causes Communication Breakdown*" and "*Developing Effective Communication*" at www.covenantkeepers.org. But, you need more than mechanics; you need a radical heart change.

How can you solve the difficult communication problems in your marriage?

What I want to do is to explain how the Apostle Paul sought to solve the communication problems that he had with the Corinthian church. His relationship with the people in this church was very contentious. This assembly of believers had many unresponsive and difficult people within it. They judged Paul's heart, twisted his words, charged him with not loving them, and even called him names (2 Cor. 1:17-18; 2 Cor. 10:10; 2 Cor. 11:11). Paul told these people exactly what the real issues were by addressing their root problems. This is exactly what you also need to do with your marriage problems. I would suggest that you first read 2 Corinthians 6:11-7:3. This section of Scripture allows you to see the principles I am about to teach you. Then you will be able to apply these principles in your own marriage. These principles will also apply to any relationship you have. What is communication all about? What makes communication effective?



"You need to turn around and start talking."

1. It's a heart issue. If you want to effectively communicate with your spouse you must have open hearts towards each other. Paul said to the church, "*We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open*" (2 Cor. 6:11). So, I ask you, is your heart wide open to your spouse, or is it hardened, resentful, resistive, and closed? To be open hearted simply means that you are receptive and willing to hear what your mate has to say. The condition and attitude of your heart will make all the difference in the world. Solomon declared, "*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life*" (Prov. 4:23). This means that it is a choice to keep your heart open to your spouse. So, is that what you are doing?

What happens if you don't keep an open and humble heart? The Bible teaches that you will have strife in your relationship. Solomon warned us, "*He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife*" (Prov. 28:25). When you allow pride to rule you, then your heart is closed to anyone's ideas but your own. Notice what else Solomon had to say about what enables you to listen and receive! "*Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise, and apply your heart to my knowledge*" (Prov. 22:17). In other words, if you

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

truly have an open heart, then you will be able to listen and hear your mate's words.

In addition, an open and wise-hearted individual will not only listen with an open heart, but they will also speak in a controlled way. *"The heart of the wise teaches his mouth, and adds learning to his lips"* (Proverbs 16:23). I have found that so often in counseling with couples one or both partners will not think before they speak. In anger they don't choose carefully what they will say. This failure leads to many foolish and hurtful comments that close the other person's heart and makes them unwilling to continue the conversation (Prov. 12:23). A closed heart like this is what Solomon described was like the bars on the gate of a castle (Prov. 18:19). The person's heart will simply lock you out.

If you truly have an open heart, then you will be able to listen and hear your mate's words.

So, do you truly have an open heart toward your spouse? If not, this is why your communication is so difficult with your mate. But, if you are thinking, *What about my husband or wife's heart? They have closed their heart toward me.* My response is, *"Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them"* (Matt. 7:12). It is your responsibility to ask God for your heart to be open! That is your first step. Hopefully, your mate will see your attitude and respond. This is what Paul was doing with the Corinthians.

2. It's an issue of love. Do you remember how you communicated with your spouse when you first dated? What was that like? You would talk for hours, and you were so respectful and kind to one another. You could listen without interrupting, and always find an agreement. That is how love affects the way you communicate. Paul encouraged all

believers that they must always speak the truth, *"In love"* (Eph. 4:15). Whenever your communication degrades from sincere love, an immediate roadblock will be set up to any further communication. Paul made this clear to the Corinthian church when he said, *"You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections"* (2 Cor. 6:12). In other words, Paul is telling them, I have not closed my heart off towards you, but you have closed off your heart towards me by your own lack of affection.

When you harden your heart and hold resentment toward your mate you will not be able to communicate in a loving way. In fact, when you hold resentment you will not even want to talk through issues; you'll just avoid each other. Remember, love wants to communicate and wants to express it's love in words and deeds. God has loved this world from the beginning of time and has expressed His love in many ways. He pursued Adam and Eve in the garden, and He has also pursued you (Gen. 3:8-9). He sent His Son to redeem the world so that He might draw you to Himself (John 3:16). He sent His prophets to His people just as He sent people to communicate His love personally to you (Heb. 1:1-2). His love motivated His communication to you.

How then should you respond to your mate? You can't change your spouse in how he or she responds to you, but you can choose to speak and act in a loving way toward them. Scripture says, *"As much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men"* (Rom. 12:18). The phrase, *all men*, definitely includes your spouse. Loving words and deeds will go a long way to resolving your serious communication problems. So, are you willing to start communicating in love?

3. It's an issue of Lordship. Many times, when people read this section of Scripture they miss the continuity of the message. When you read 2 Corinthians 6:11-13 you see clearly

that Paul is discussing his communication with the church. Yet from verse 14 through chapter 7:1, he seems to move to other subjects and begins to speak about not being unequally yoked with unbelievers and walking in the fear of God. But, are these really different subjects or a continuation of the same message? I believe he has not left his topic at all. Paul is still speaking about why they weren't getting along and communicating as they should. Why do I think this? Look at 2 Corinthians 7:2-3. Notice, Paul comes right back to his topic of having an open heart. This is why I believe these seemingly unrelated intervening words have everything to do with why this church had serious communication problems with Paul.

When you harden your heart and hold resentment toward your mate you will not be able to communicate in a loving way.

So, what is Paul addressing in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18? It is the issue of Lordship and who controls you. Does Christ control you, or are unbelievers and their ideas controlling you? Are you in communion with light or darkness? Are you in agreement with God or with the idolatry of this world? God wants you to separate yourself from the worldly ideas of those that might be influencing you, and allow the Father to be your God, and let His ways direct your path.

I have found that so often couples and people in general can't really communicate, because they have two different worldviews. One sees things through the eyes of God's Word and the other through the eyes of this world. How about you and your spouse? Are you both true believers in Jesus? Are you in agreement with God's Word and its authority to govern your attitudes and actions? Have you truly separated yourselves from the wisdom of this world? If you have, then you will allow God's Word

to correct your hearts that you may find agreement with each other. Jesus said, “*Agree with your adversary quickly*” so it won’t get any worse (Matt. 5:25).

4. It’s an issue of the fear of God. In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul then encourages the people to “*cleanse*” themselves from anything that has defiled their hearts or their behavior. Why should they do this? If they are truly believers and have separated themselves to walk under the Lordship of Christ, then they should remove anything that would hinder them. Why? Because they have a true fear and reverence for God.

Loving words and deeds will go a long way to resolving your serious communication problems.

In the conflicts that I have counseled over the years, many times people who are not getting along simply do not have a healthy fear of God. They are lying to each other, holding resentment, refusing to talk, and twisting each other’s words so they can turn the table on the other person. These behaviors are a total lack of reverence for God and His wishes. David said of the wicked that, “*There is no fear of God before their eyes*” (Ps. 36:1). This is another reason why Paul was questioning if the Corinthians were truly walking with the Lord. Paul asked the same question at the end of his letter so the people would check their hearts (2 Cor. 13:5).

If you want to resolve the issues that seem to defy solutions, first examine your own heart and make sure you are cleansing yourself, and turning in repentance from every sinful attitude or behavior that is contrary to God’s Word. These are the issues that are causing the communication breakdown in your marriage. You

must be “*Perfecting holiness in the fear of God*” (2 Cor. 7:2). Take the issues that God reveals to you, and ask for His power to change your heart right now.

5. It’s an honesty issue. Paul had “*spoken openly*” with the church which required him to be honest with them about the conflicts they were having (2 Cor. 6:11). Honesty is another essential ingredient if you want to resolve issues that seem unresolvable. If you or your spouse, or both of you are not being honest with each other, you will never resolve your problems. God requires “*truth in the inward parts*” of a person, or He will not bless your attempts to fix your problems (Ps. 51:6). Jesus called the Holy Spirit the “*Spirit of Truth*”, because truth is the only thing the Spirit works with (John 16:13). If you want to resolve your communication problems, then honesty is a must. Can you say without reservation that you are being completely honest with your mate?

Let me give you some examples of what dishonesty looks like. Are you giving all the facts of the conflict, or just the ones that make *you* look good? Do you exaggerate or add to what your spouse said or did? Are you the one who changes the subject when you get caught in a lie or fabrication of the facts? Do you play word games and twist out of context what your spouse has said? If you do any of these things you are not being honest with your mate. Let me leave you with this thought from Paul the Apostle. “*Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,” for we are members of one another*” (Eph. 4:25).

6. It’s a repentance issue. If anything in this article has spoken to your heart, and if you really want to change the way you communicate, then repentance is the next step you should take. The word *repent* means to change your mind and to reverse direction. You can begin to be honest with your mate, but honesty without repentance is hollow. You must admit

your faults in the way you have communicated and acted or your mate will not believe you. Paul explains this important step to the Corinthians when he said, “*For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death*” 2 Cor. 7:10). If you have a godly sorrow for the way you have communicated and hindered your marriage, then repentance is in order. It should be done today, first before God, and then by personal confession of your faults to your spouse. James taught, “*Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed*” (James 5:16). Personal confession like this will do *so much* to bring about forgiveness so that healing and restoration can begin.

If you want to resolve your communication problems, then honesty is a must.

Repentance and personal confession are usually where I begin in my first session of counseling with a troubled couple. I ask them to tell me what their personal faults are in their marriage. I want them to explain to me where they personally have lived selfishly and how they have ruined their marriage. After that has been done, I ask them to turn their chair around and face each other and ask their mate to forgive them. The willingness to be honest and confess personal fault reveals whether or not both partners are serious about reconciliation. Therefore, if you are serious about solving your difficult communication problems, this is another step you must take.

7. It’s a commitment issue. I want you to notice the last thing that Paul does with the Corinthians. Paul has honestly and lovingly expressed his desire to work through their disagreements. He ends by verbalizing his commitment to them and to the resolution he sought. Paul

declared, “Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one. I do not say this to condemn; for I have said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together” (2 Cor. 7:2-3). In other words, Paul is pleading with them to open their hearts and see that he has not tried to harm any of them; he is committed to them, because they are in his heart, even to death.

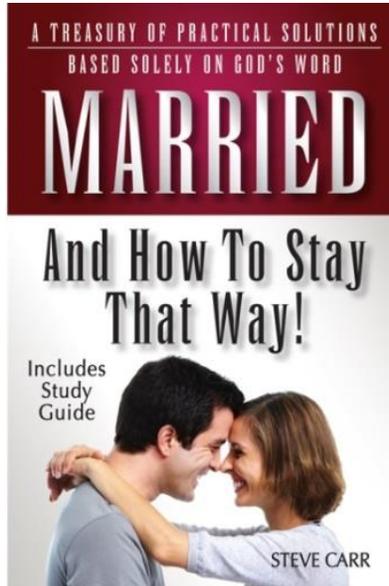
Yet, when couples have serious communication problems, they usually will be constantly throwing the word divorce at their mate. This threat will only create more problems for the relationship, because you are declaring you are not committed. This is being interpreted by your mate that you are not really interested in working at the problems. By your threats you are saying, I’m not committed to our marriage. Would you be motivated to work hard at resolving an issue with someone who really didn’t want to put in the effort? Probably not!

So, my encouragement to you is that you should ask God to change your heart and recommit yourself to your marriage. Ask your mate’s forgiveness for threatening to break your covenant promise before God and to them. Say to your spouse as Paul did, “You are in my heart, to live and die together.” Say to your mate as God has said to you, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). These words will go a long way to bring about reconciliation and an opportunity to heal your marital problems. Please, have *this conversation* with your spouse today!

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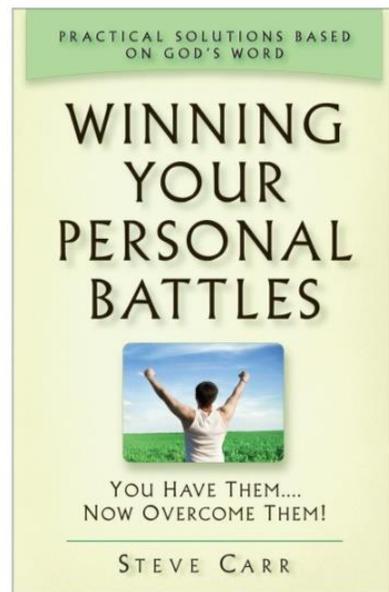
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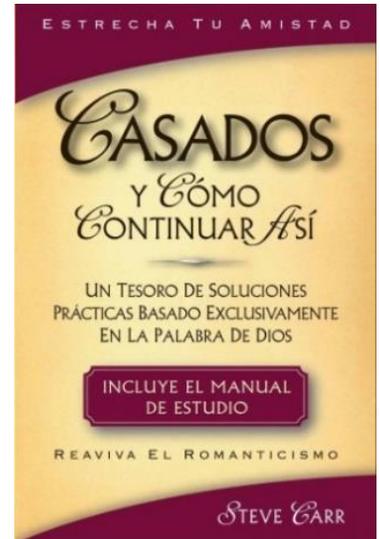


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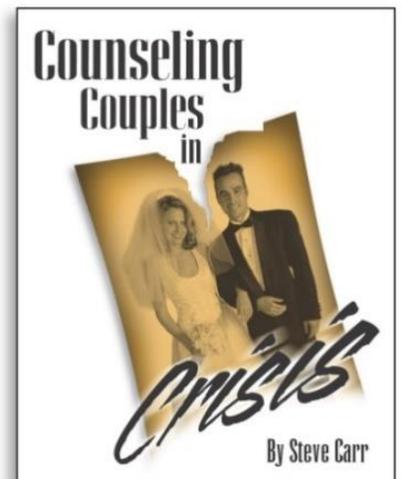
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