

# COVENANT KEEPERS

"Dedicated To Strengthening Marriages Through Biblical Principles"

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## Speaking heart-to-heart!

One of the most common things that couples say to me is, "My wife and I just can't seem to have a normal conversation anymore with each other. Our words seem so superficial and only about the facts of the day. We just never get to those heart-to-heart times of fellowship we used to have before we got married." Have you ever thought or said these words? If you have, then this article is for you.

Why does conversation seem to turn in this superficial direction within a marriage? Once you understand why the communication has deteriorated between you, then you will see how to change it.

### Why does communication deteriorate over time?

**1. Holding resentment from past unresolved conflicts.** This is one of the most common and obvious reasons why communication deteriorates in a relationship. If a prior conflict is not fully resolved, the heart becomes closed and the walls will go up and communication will shut down. This is why Solomon told his son, "A brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle." (Prov. 18:19). If you have been fortifying your heart with bars, you have unresolved issues. If you want the superficiality to be removed then you must identify and deal with these conflicts.

**2. Hardening your heart.** When you refuse to resolve your conflicts, a hardened heart will always be the natural result. Why is this true? Paul equated hardness of heart with an unwillingness to repent of your sin. He

warned the Romans that, "because of your *"hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"* (Rom. 2:5). If you are hard-hearted today, there will not be any heart-to-heart fellowship between you. It is an impossibility!

**3. Allowing pride to control you.** When pride controls your heart, you will relate to each other in one of two ways. First, you can be verbally harsh, authoritarian, and speak to your spouse with a superior attitude. Or secondly, pride can also make you indifferent to your mate's requests to talk, and cause you to be unwilling to confess your own faults. These attitudes will only result in the walls being fortified between you. Remember, "By pride comes nothing but strife" (Prov. 13:10). Pride is the death-nail to heart-to-heart fellowship.

**4. An unwillingness to talk.** When one or both of you stops being willing to talk, your hearts only grow harder, and the walls are strengthened (Acts 7:57). This refusal to talk things through is another sign of the pride and hardness of your hearts. You are, in reality, moving further backwards and not forward in your relationship.

**5. Dominating the conversation.** If you dominate a conversation by the number of words you use, to attempt to overpower your mate's point of view, this will only further drive you apart. You should never think that you "will be heard" by the number of words you use (Matt. 6:7). If you say the same thing over and over again but just in different ways, and you don't allow your spouse to respond, nothing will get accomplished. This again only reveals more pride within your heart.

**6. Trying to control and force.** When one or both spouses attempt to dominate the conversation, this is a

controlling and forcing technique that only assures there will not be a true heart-to-heart conversation. Trying to control a person or a conversation is not love! Controlling behavior is also another form of pride.

**7. Not being a good listener.** Listening is a vital part of good communication. But, do you want to be heard more than you want to listen? Do you interrupt your spouse and not allow them to complete their thought before you begin your rebuttal? Solomon declared this behavior as folly. "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13). The word *folly* means stupid or to be without wisdom. This unwise practice will guarantee that there will be no heart-to-heart fellowship.



*Take time to talk!*

**8. Lying and deceitfulness.** When there is dishonesty between two people there will be no trust. Lying to one another is a rejection of your marital oneness with each other. Paul said, "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another" (Eph. 4:25). If Paul taught this truth concerning Christians in general,

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

how much more would it hinder your marital oneness (Gen. 2:24)? Lying and deceitfulness calls into question your entire relationship together.

### **9. Harsh and condemning words.**

Harsh words are like small knife wounds or razor blade cuts that slowly drain the life out of your love relationship. David said of his enemies who constantly pursued him, *“Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully”* (Ps. 52:2). When harsh and condemning words are allowed to thrive in a relationship, they will bring destruction to every marriage. Be assured, there will be no heart-to-heart conversation within this marriage!

### **10. You don’t want to reveal anything that might be used against you in the next conflict.**

If you are afraid to be honest about what you are thinking, feeling, or what you have done, there can be no real intimacy in your conversations. This kind of fear will shut down any real heart-to-heart discussion, because there is no trust. If you are afraid to open your heart to your spouse, it reveals that there are several basic needs missing in your marriage.

### **11. Not spending time together.**

Sometimes the distance grows between a couple not because they have a major communication problem, but simply because they just don’t spend much one-on-one time together. When you don’t take the time to date each other, pray with one another, or recreate together, the closeness and friendship between you will die. Before you were married, as you dated, you spent plenty of one-on-one time together, which is why the communication was so much better. Don’t allow all of the distractions of life to keep you from the one person you are to be one flesh with.

These are just a few of the hindrances to heart-to-heart communication. If you recognize yourself in any of the above issues, you must realize that this is the reason the communication has deteriorated in your marriage. I would suggest asking God to forgive you, and then turning to your spouse and doing the same. Then take the steps in the next few paragraphs.

## **How to change the way you communicate, and get back to heart-to-heart fellowship.**

### **1. You need to confront the problem.**

Many times, when couples struggle and they sense the distance growing between them, they beat around the bush with their mate, and don’t specifically address the problem. This is a major mistake. When this happens the problem only gets worse. If your car was running roughly or wouldn’t start, you wouldn’t just hope that the engine trouble would resolve itself. You would take the car into the mechanic to get the problem resolved. If you chose not to do this, one morning you would go out to start your car, and it wouldn’t run. So, don’t let the lack of heart-to-heart fellowship in your marriage get any worse. Resolve to talk to your spouse about it today.

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### **Once you understand why the communication has deteriorated between you, then you will see how to change it.**

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How should you bring up this problem with your mate? Choose a weekend day, when you and your mate are not tired, and there are no distractions. Find a time when you can be alone, with the children playing outside, or at a friend’s house. Ask your spouse to sit down to talk, and express that you believe that you are drifting apart. Express your love and desire to change things between you. Don’t blame your spouse, but express that both of you are at fault, and that both of you need to make some changes. Go through the following steps.

**2. Reconcile past issues.** If you regularly fight about specific issues with your spouse, or you have past issues that have never been resolved, make a list of these conflicts and begin a discussion about how you can resolve them. Without a truly reconciled relationship with your spouse, your communication will never be heart-to-heart. Unresolved conflicts are what

caused you to drift away from each other, and resolving them is the first step back. To help, I have two worksheets that would be very helpful for you to begin the process. Go to [www.covenantkeepers.org](http://www.covenantkeepers.org) and click on “Articles” and then “Worksheets” and print “How to Resolve Conflicts” and “How to Solve Conflicts.” Work through these together with your spouse to begin the reconciliation process.

Jesus made it absolutely clear that resolving conflicts with anyone was one of His top priorities. He said, *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother”* (Matt. 18:15). In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus also said, *“If you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”* (Matt. 5:23-24). So, if you have resentment toward your mate, or you know your spouse is upset with you, you have the responsibility to go to them and try to reconcile the issue. Keep talking and praying until it is resolved. When you take this step, you are removing one of the greatest impediments to having a heart-to-heart relationship again.

**3. Admit your communication failures.** Humility concerning your faults and your communicative abilities, is absolutely essential to opening up a new and deeper fellowship with your spouse. God has explained in many places throughout the Scripture that if you want revival and awakening in your souls, you must humble yourself. God spoke through Isaiah the Prophet and said, *“For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones’”* (Isa. 57:15). Jesus spoke heart-to-heart with anyone who would listen to Him, and He was *“gentle and lowly at heart”* (Matt. 11:29). Humility is a fundamental key to this entire process.

Go back and look at the list of communication failures that I gave at

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the beginning of this article and consider if any of these are yours. Do you do any of these behaviors? If you do, turn from these today!

**4. Be vulnerable.** How does vulnerability affect your ability to communicate with your spouse? It reveals your willingness to be honest and open with your mate. Vulnerability allows you to admit your faults, ask forgiveness, and listen to your wife or husband's thoughts, and speak heart-to-heart. This is why Jesus taught His disciples to, "*First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye*" (Matt. 7:5). What is Jesus encouraging in this verse? He wanted His disciple's to be honest with themselves about their own sins before they ever tried to tell others about their faults. Honesty with yourself is an absolute necessity if you want to become vulnerable with your mate.

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**Unresolved conflicts are what caused you to drift away from each other, and resolving them is the first step back.**

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King David revealed his own vulnerability throughout the Psalms. What an example for all of us to follow. He could talk about his failures and sins, his fears, his personal struggles, and his hopes (Ps. 51:3; Ps. 34:4; Ps. 119:81; Ps. 42:5). But the question is, will you be vulnerable like this with your mate? If you won't, then don't expect your spouse to be vulnerable with you. If you want heart-to-heart communication with your mate, then vulnerability is essential!

**5. Vulnerability also requires that you walk in humility.** The essence of vulnerability is humility. You know your own struggles and faults; therefore, you are not quick to judge your spouse for his or her faults. You can admit your needs before your mate. You can give and receive encouragement and correction from your spouse. Note how open Paul the Apostle was with the elders of the church of Ephesus. He said to them,

*"You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews"* (Acts 20:18-19). Can you talk about your struggles with your spouse? If your husband or wife has some helpful encouragement or correction, will you listen to it and not get angry?

Humility also enables a mutual submissiveness with your mate that further enables this openness and vulnerability. Peter clearly commanded this kind of fellowship with others when he said, "*Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'*" (1 Peter 5:5). Humility is the key to this submissive attitude that can listen to the other. In addition, without this vulnerability and humility, you will forfeit the great grace God wants to bestow upon your marriage relationship.

**6. Choose your words carefully.** One of the most critical requirements for heart-to-heart fellowship with your spouse will be the words that you choose to use. As Solomon said, "*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*" (Prov. 15:1). The word *soft* in this verse means tender or gentle words. The word *harsh* means to speak offensive and hurtful words. So, which takes place with your spouse on a regular basis, tender and gentle words, or offensive and hurtful ones?

Only you have the ability to choose how you will speak with your mate. You are the only one who can change the words you speak. Don't blame-shift and excuse your own responsibility by saying, "I wouldn't talk the way I do, if he or she didn't come off so harsh toward me." Being honest with yourself is vital in changing this part of your communication. You have the choice as to how you will respond! God has made it clear what He wants, He said, "*choose what pleases Me*" (Is. 56:4). This is your responsibility!

You can say things several different ways if you choose. When your spouse fails to do what you have asked them to do, you can say, "This is the fifth time I've told you that this bothers me. What is your problem? Are you deaf, or are you just dumb?" Or, you can say, "Honey did you forget about this or that issue? This is really important to me." Then explain the reason why this issue is so important to you. Which response would create a conflict, and which would help you get to a solution? The answer is obvious!

**7. Become a better listener.** In most marriages one person is more verbal than the other. The person who is more verbal usually dominates the conversations which hinders the less verbal person from taking. Consequently, the less verbal spouse begins to believe their mate does not value their thoughts and opinions. This causes the less verbal person to retreat and not share equally, which destroys the ability to have a heart-to-heart fellowship together. This is why James taught the church, "*My beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath*" (James 1:19).

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**If you want heart-to-heart communication with your mate, then vulnerability is essential!**

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How can you change this imbalance? It is just a choice. The more verbal spouse must learn to use less words, and the less verbal person needs to use more words. For couples that just can't seem to do it, I recommend using a kitchen timer. Set it for one minute, and say whatever you need to say. Then reset it for your spouse, and allow them to talk without interruption. This ensures equal time. Eventually people learn to discipline themselves to give this equal time to each other. Remember, you can't have heart-to-heart talks when only one person is allowed to talk.

**8. It takes two to tango.** The tango is the most intimate dance that two people can enjoy. Each must move and step in a precise manner, or the couple will step

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all over each other, or fall to the floor. My point is that communication is like the tango. Both partners must participate and work together to enable heart-to-heart fellowship. It can't be done alone. You need a willing heart, and your spouse also must be willing. You both must deal with your own personal faults, and you both must choose to be vulnerable with one another. Each of you must listen and give equal time to the other to respond.

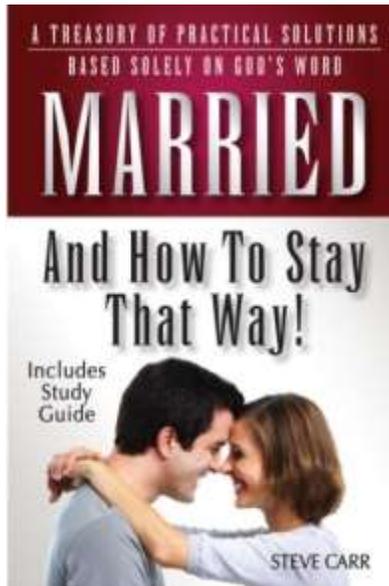
Therefore, I encourage you to respond to the Lord in your personal life, and allow Him to work within you to change the way you communicate. Focus on getting to the place of heart-to-heart communication with each other. It will take work, but the work will bring the rewarding relationship you desire.

All of the steps I have just outlined in this article must be obeyed by both partners. It can't be done by just one spouse alone. One of you must choose to start to speak heart-to-heart with the other. Trust that God will soften your spouse to respond. Remember, not even God Himself with all His power and authority, can by Himself fix the relationship with mankind. Ultimately, reconciliation requires men to respond to Him in repentance. This is why Jesus commanded those who heard Him to, "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15). So, I am asking you to repent of your side of the problem as it relates to communication, and humble yourself before God and your spouse. You take the step to start the conversation. You won't regret it!

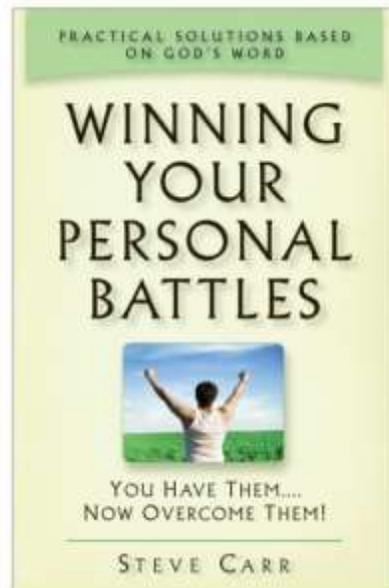
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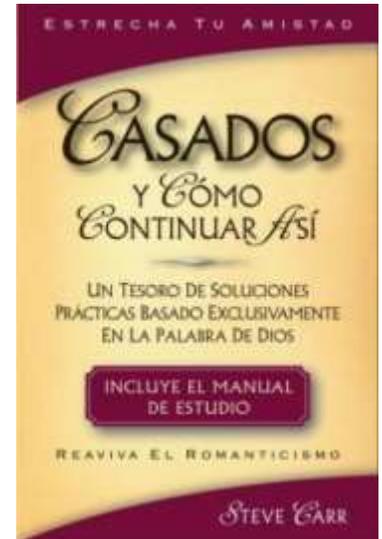
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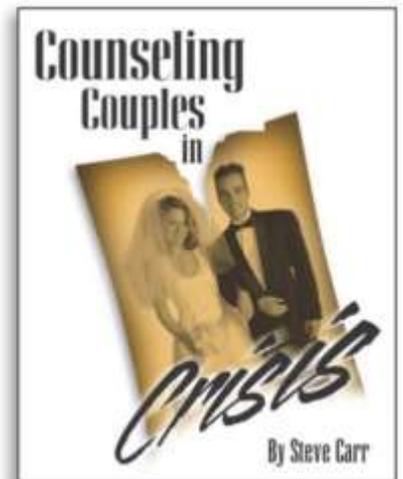
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