

Marital Communication

In recent years marriage has been getting “bad press.” That once permanent bastion of security and “until death do us part” commitment has become for too many an impermanent gamble lasting “until divorce seems convenient.”

There is a decline in understanding within marriage as the communication gap grows wider and wider. Many couples lack the elementary communication skills needed to produce the understanding necessary for a marriage to grow strong, or even exist, in these times “swapping, swinging and shacking.”

What can be done? Is there a way to make marriage work better—or work at all? What about the ideal called “Christian marriage?” Is a Christian marriage possible today?

There are three major changes taking place within the marriage institution today:

1. A decline in understanding between marriage partners
2. The loss of determination to stay married
3. The development of unrealistic marriage expectations

The decline of understanding and lack of communication go together. Many couples today lack the kind of communication skills that produce the understanding necessary for a marriage to grow strong, or even exist. Understanding in marriage does not mean that there are no differences, it does mean that you and your mate are able to talk about the differences and come to an understanding of each other’s views.

“Someone has likened the communication adjustment in marriage to two porcupines who lived in Alaska. When the deep and heavy snows came they felt the cold and began to draw close together. However, when they drew close they began to stick one another with their quills. When they drew apart they felt the cold once again. In order to keep warm they had to learn how to adjust to one another.

Lack of determination to stay married is seen today on every hand. Many enter marriage today with the attitude that if they do not get along they can break the relationship and try again. Many people are too impatient with their marriages. They do not want to live “happily ever after.” They want to live “happily right away” and when this does not happen they bail out.

Too many young couples enter marriage blinded by unrealistic expectations. They believe a high level of continuous romantic love should characterize the relationship. One lady commented, “I wanted marriage to fulfill all my desires. I needed

security, someone to take care of me, intellectual stimulation, economic security immediately—but it just wasn't like that!"

Charles Shedd in his book, **Letters to Philip**, tells the story of two rivers flowing smoothly and quietly along until they came together and joined. When this happened they clashed and hurled themselves at one another. As the newly formed river flowed downstream, however, it gradually quieted down and flowed smoothly again. But now it was much broader, more majestic and had much more power.

Dr. Shedd suggests, "A good marriage is often like that, when two independent streams of existence come together, there will probably be some dashing of life against life at the juncture. Personalities rush against each other, preferences clash, ideas contend for power and habits vie for position. Sometimes like the waves, they throw up a spray that leaves you breathless and makes you wonder where has the loveliness gone. But that's all right. Just like the two rivers, what comes out of their struggle may be something deeper, more powerful than what they were on their own.

Communication Guidelines

Gary Collins "Christian Counseling"

- 1. Remember that actions speak louder than words; nonverbal communication usually is more powerful than verbal communication. Avoid double messages in which the verbal and nonverbal messages convey something contradictory.**
- 2. Define what is important and stress it; define what is unimportant and de-emphasize or ignore it. Avoid faultfinding.**
- 3. Communicate in ways that show respect for the other person's worth as a human being. Avoid statements which begin with the words "You never. . ."**
- 4. Be clear and specific in your communication. Avoid vagueness.**
- 5. Be realistic and reasonable in your statements. Avoid exaggeration and sentences which begin with the words "You always. . ."**
- 6. Test all your assumptions verbally by asking if they are accurate. Avoid acting until this is done.**
- 7. Recognize that each event can be seen from different points of view. Avoid assuming that other people see things like you do.**
- 8. Recognize that your family members and close friends are experts on you and your behavior. Avoid the tendency to deny their observations about you—especially if you are not sure.**

9. **Recognize that disagreement can be a meaningful form of communication. Avoid destructive arguments.**
10. **Be honest and open about your feelings and viewpoints. Bring up all significant problems even if you are afraid that doing so will disturb another person. Speak the truth in live. Avoid sullen silence.**
11. **Do not put down and/or manipulate the other person with tactics such as ridicule, interrupting, name-calling, changing the subject, blaming, bugging, sarcasm, criticism, pouting, guilt-inducing, etc. Avoid the one-upmanship game.**
12. **Be more concerned about how your communication affected others than about what you intended. Avoid getting bitter if you are misunderstood.**
13. **Accept all feelings and try to understand why others feel and act as they do. Avoid the tendency to say “you shouldn’t feel like that.”**
14. **Be tactful, considerate, and courteous. Avoid taking advantage of the other person’s feelings.**
15. **Ask questions and listen carefully. Avoid preaching or lecturing.**
16. **Do not use excuses. Avoid falling for the excuses of others.**
17. **Speak kindly, politely, and softly. Avoid nagging, yelling, or whining.**
18. **Recognize the value of humor and seriousness. Avoid destructive teasing.**