

# COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE



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Theme Verse:  
*“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”*

*Ephesians 4:29*

## Beliefs That Hinder Understanding

- “All my marital problems are my spouse’s fault.”
- “If our marriage takes hard work, we must not be right for each other.”
- “My spouse can and should meet all of my emotional needs.”
- “My spouse owes me (for all I do).”
- “I shouldn’t have to change who I am to make our marriage better.”
- “My spouse should be like me.”

Thurman, C. (1999). *The Lies We Believe*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

## The Communication Cycle

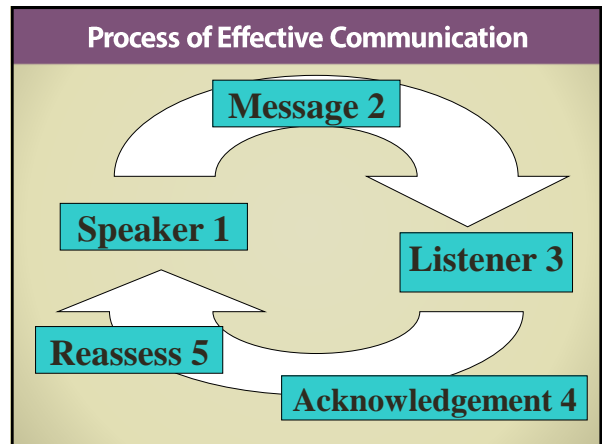
*Proverbs 25:11 “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”*



## Communication Cycle: Speaker-Listener

- Slowing down and being clear on who is the *Speaker* and who is the *Listener* can prevent misunderstandings.
- Conversations are more likely to spiral out of control when there are **two Speakers** and **no Listeners**.
  - Not every conversation needs to be slowed down.
  - If you think communication isn’t going well, call a “couple negotiated time-out.”

Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg *Fighting for Your Marriage*



## Communication Cycle: #1 Speaker

- The *Speaker* “has the floor.”
- Speak in short sentences.
- Speak from your perspective.
- Don’t expect the *Listener* to be able to “read your mind.”
- **Ephesians 4:15** “*But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.*”
- **Romans 12:10** “*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.*”

## Some Helpful Tools

- **Use X, Y, Z format**
  - “In situation X, when Y occurred, I felt Z.”
- **Use “I” statements**
  - “I feel frustrated when you don’t call me to say that you’ll be late.”
- **Avoid “You” Statements**
  - “You never help me around the house.”

## Communication Cycle: #2 The Message

- “Say what you mean and mean what you say!”
  - **James 5:12** “*...but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay...*”
- Don’t switch topics mid-conversation.
- Non-verbal communication is just as important as verbal communication:
  - Facial expression, eye contact, posture, tone of the message, etc.
  - Actions speak louder than words.

## Communication Cycle: Message Scriptures

- **1 Peter 3:10** “*For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile.*”
- **Ephesians 4:25** “*Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.*”

## Communication Cycle: Be Aware of Filters

- Filters are anything that come between the *Speaker* and *Listener* that can potentially alter the meaning and/or reception of the message.
  - 1.Environmental Filters:** radio, children, telephone, being in different rooms, etc.
  - 2.Internal Filters:** being tired, frustration, having a headache, being sick, etc.

## Communication Cycle: #3 Listener

- Focus on **understanding** your spouse instead of formulating your response.
- Listening is a gift you give to your spouse.
- Body language and eye contact are important.
- **Your** job is to:
  1. Hear what the *Speaker* says.
  2. Comprehend it.
  3. Let the *Speaker* know you understood what s/he said.

## Communication Cycle: Listener Scriptures

- **Proverbs 18:13**  
“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”



## Communication Cycle: #4 Acknowledgement

- This part of the communication cycle is often omitted.
- The purpose of the acknowledgement is to let the *Speaker* know s/he has been heard.
  - “Reflect back” what you heard the speaker say.
  - Don’t simply “parrot-talk” back.
- **James 1:19** “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

## Communication Cycle: #5 Reassess

- When the *Speaker* hears the *Listener’s* acknowledgement, it can be determined if the message got through correctly.
- At this stage the *Speaker* can say:
  - “Yes, that’s correct.”
  - “That’s part of it, but also...”
  - “No, that’s not what I said.”

## Too Much Talk... Or Not Enough?

### How Personality and Communication Styles Affect Your Relationship

## Expanders and Condensers

- It is common for spouses to differ in the quality and quantity of communication they are used to giving and receiving.
- Understanding personality can help shed light on the way each spouse communicates.
- One simple way of discerning communication style is by looking at the amount one talks.
  - Expanders and Condensers

## Expanders

- Tend to:
  - Talk more than others.
  - Elaborate and give detailed, lengthy descriptions.
  - Have a dislike of silence.
- They are frustrated by:
  - Condensers who do not provide as much information when talking.

Wright Communication: Key to your Marriage.

## Condensers

- Tend to:
  - Not talk as much and don't include a lot of detail in their conversations.
  - Prefer an efficient use of words.
  - Tend to stick to the main points or the "bottom line" when communicating.
- They are frustrated by:
  - Expanders who overwhelm them by what feels like an excessive use of words.

## Direct and Indirect

### Direct

- Immediately "say it like it is."
- Less room for misunderstanding.
- More risk of surprising or offending.
- Example – "I want to move closer to where I work."

### Indirect

- Don't immediately say exactly what is needed.
- More risk of misunderstanding.
- Less chance of offending.
- Example – "My work is pretty far from where we live."

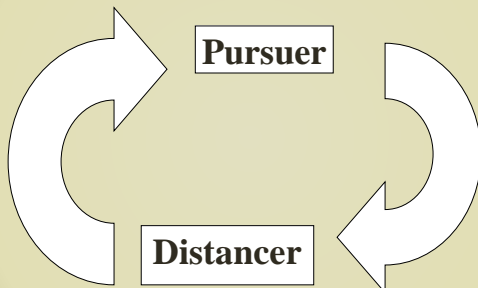
## The Pursuer-Distancer Cycle

Around and around we go!!

## Recognize the Pursuer-Distancer Cycle

- Spouses commonly have different ideas about how to resolve conflict.
  - Often, one of the spouses wants to talk about problems right away (many times the wife).
  - The other spouse often wants time to think about it, talk later, or avoid the issue altogether (many times the husband).
- This arrangement often leads to the **Pursuer-Distancer cycle**.

## Who Causes the Pursuer-Distancer Cycle?



## Pursuer-Distancer as it evolves

- When the *Pursuer* puts pressure on the *Distancer* to talk when s/he is not ready...  
...the *Distancer* withdraws.
- When the *Distancer* doesn't address the *Pursuer's* concerns and attempts to withdraw...  
...the *Pursuer* pursues.

### If You Tend To Be A Pursuer...

- Be careful not to be too pushy.
  - Just because you feel like talking through an issue doesn't mean it is the right time to discuss a conflict.
- Instead, let your spouse know you have something you want to talk about.
- Find a good time for you both to talk about it.

### If You Tend To Be A Distancer...

- Be careful not to immediately withdraw when your spouse wants to talk.
- If your spouse wants to talk about something and you aren't ready to talk:
  1. Let your spouse know you are aware he/she wants to talk.
  2. Tell him/her that it isn't a good time for you to talk.
  3. Negotiate a time in the near future that both of you can talk (be specific!).

## Ways to Stay Connected

### When you are apart...

### Preparation for a Trip

- Minimize surprises - communicate about upcoming events, responsibilities or obligations (i.e., bills, repairs, or chores).
- Back-up plan - consider developing a list of options should issues develop (i.e., auto mechanic, a trusted repairman).
- Travel plans - provide spouse with a complete itinerary (include dates, location, phone numbers, and key contacts).



### Stay Connected While Apart...



### Stay Connected While Apart...

- Accessibility - in addition to cell phone, provide key contacts in case of emergency. Consider "code" for emergency while traveling.
- Dependability - schedule consistent times to call as well as talk about times of mutual availability. Text when you arrive to destination. FaceTime for family devotions.
- Respect - be intentional about engaging in two-way conversations. Don't wait until the end of the trip to talk about events at home.
- Trust - be where you say you will be, doing what you are supposed to be doing.
- Role Acceptance - find ways to acknowledge that parts of the job are not ideal.

## Summary & Conclusion

- Communication Cycle
- Avoid “you” statements, use “I” Statements
- Know your style and personality of communication
  - Expander vs. Condenser / Indirect vs. Direct / Pursuer vs. Withdrawer



## PERSONAL / COUPLE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How effective are you at actively listening to your spouse? Is it easy to focus on understanding the message your spouse is conveying (through feelings, body language, etc) instead of formulating your response?

If you could implement one skill today to improve your communication with your spouse, what would it be?

## Appendix A

### Communication during Menopause

## COMMUNICATION: MENOPAUSE

### MEN

- Listen, don't criticize or try to "fix."
- Accept there will be mood swings.
  - Seek to go with the flow.
  - Seek to not personalize.
- Believe she is doing the best she can.
- Talk about Menopause symptoms and what you can do to help her feel better.

### WOMEN

- Communicate with your spouse and let him know what you need.
- Affirm your husband when you feel understood by him.
- Track your symptoms and identify specific times when the two of you can communicate effectively.
- Do your best to stay positive.