

MATTERS

FAMILY

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the couples of Heritage Baptist Church, Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania, to whom we taught these lessons on Wednesday nights in the spring of 2007 and who provided valuable input and insights on marriage, which we incorporated in this study.

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Introduction

We have issues!” or “This is an issue with me!” are two statements commonly made by married couples. Quite frankly, everyone has issues, and it isn’t long before issues surface in marriage. The question is not, Do you have issues in your marriage? But, Do you know what the vital issues in marriage are? By “vital” issues we mean the ones that matter most or that matter to God. What issues in marriage does God’s Word speak to as important or deserving of our undivided attention?

Having been married for over thirty years, we have learned, often the hard way, that what we may have thought were real issues are not. How the tube of toothpaste is squeezed, how the toilet paper unrolls, who speaks the most, who pays the bills, or how the responsibilities are assigned are not the real issues. Some husbands and wives can make an issue of anything, while others never see anything as an issue. Both of these extremes are to be avoided.

In this third book in the Family Matters series, attention is given to issues in marriage that represent “real” issues, or those that are common to every marriage because they are part of marriage itself. No matter how wonderful or positive your marriage is, these common issues are woven into the fabric of

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marriage. They need to be dealt with repeatedly throughout the years of marriage. This book covers five of these issues:

- Communication. A marriage rises and falls with communication. It makes or breaks a marriage.
- Conflict resolution. Because every marriage consists of two sinners, though one or both may be redeemed, conflicts come up. Thus, knowing how to resolve inevitable, predictable conflict is a must for any marriage.
- Forgiveness. There is freedom in forgiveness; likewise, there is bondage in an unforgiving spirit.
- Sexual intimacy. It's God's idea; therefore, it is good. But sin has spoiled and tainted it. Sex can be a couple's greatest pleasure or deepest disappointment.
- Money management. The love of money is the cause of all sorts of evil, but money is neutral and necessary. It can fulfill or frustrate, depending on how a couple manages it.

Are there other real issues in marriage besides these five? Probably, but we believe these are the “Big 5” in which the others are rooted or from which the real issues grow. A wise person once told us, “Choose your issues carefully.” These are the five we have chosen and commend to you as well. So, let's consider these essential issues of a good and godly marriage—one that is dynamic rather than stagnant, that will represent Christ and the church, that will glorify the Father Who is in Heaven, and that demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit.



Communication, Part 1

THE MAKING OR BREAKING
OF A RELATIONSHIP

KEY 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).

In many contemporary cultures, when a young woman accepts a marriage proposal, she confidently expects to be able to talk to her husband about anything and everything. She even dreams of being understood so well that words are not needed; she thinks she and her husband will just know what the other one thinks. The couple are convinced they will communicate openly, honestly, and kindly—keeping their promises to nurture each other through unparalleled lifelong commitment.

How is it that the same partners who once said, “I can talk to

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him about everything” . . . “She makes listening to me a priority” . . . “He [or she] is the one person who truly understands me” find themselves saying, “We no longer communicate” or “We just no longer understand each other”?

“We don’t communicate” is one of the most common complaints of marriage partners, parents, and children. When communication breaks down, so do relationships. Though many couples have grown in the way they practice communication, it is an issue of marriage that continues to need attention and care until death parts them.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What is your definition of “communication”?
2. Circle the phrase or phrases below that you think describe the quality of communication in your marriage:
Needs no improvement Inconsistent
Highly effective Superficial
Satisfactory Frustrating
Highly inadequate
3. Now go back and underline the phrase(s) that you think your spouse would choose.
4. Evaluate your personal communication with your spouse:
Husband
 - Are you predominantly appreciative and affirmative, or critical and negative?
 - When your wife wants to talk to you, do you give her your undivided attention, or are you usually distracted?**Wife**
 - Do you tend to dominate a conversation?
 - Do you sometimes read into your husband’s words and accuse him of meaning things he didn’t really say?

At the risk of oversimplifying, communication consists of three things: talking, listening, and understanding.

That we have talked and/or listened doesn't mean we have communicated. Both talking and listening must be done with the goal of understanding. One reason for communication breakdowns is that people try harder to be heard and understood than to hear (or listen) and understand. Since we have two ears and one mouth, perhaps we ought to listen twice as much as we talk.

Careful, thoughtful listening is at the heart of good communication, which is an act of love because it requires time and attention. James wrote, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear" (James 1:19). This means being ready to listen, which displays respect as well as love, since it attributes value to what a person says. Listening implies thinking before talking, so James continued with, "slow to speak." Being slow to speak often precludes arguments, so James concluded with "slow to wrath." The person who thinks before answering spares much misunderstanding and grief.

USE YOUR BIBLE

The word "communication" occurs very few times in the English Bible and is often a translation of a word meaning "words," such as in Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupt *communication* [literally "words"] proceed out of your mouth" (emphasis added). Although people communicate nonverbally, using body language, most communication involves words either spoken or written. Many references in the Bible mention the tongue, lips, or mouth, which represent the physical means of speech or communication.

Communication is vital to healthy relationships, because the tongue is an instrument of either blessing or cursing, building

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up or tearing down, or constructive or destructive communication. These two outcomes to speech are summarized in Proverbs 18:21: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” They can be applied to marriage by saying, “*Marital* life and death are in the power of *communication*” (emphasis added).

1. What do you learn about communication from the following verses?
 - a. Proverbs 18:13
 - b. Proverbs 20:12
 - c. Matthew 13:9
 - d. Colossians 4:6
 - e. James 3:2

President Ronald Reagan was called “the Great Communicator” because of his skillful speech, respect for people, listening ear, and ability to understand and be understood. But Jesus Christ is “the Master Communicator.” He is the Word Who became flesh (John 1:1, 14), declaring God to us, or revealing the invisible God in visible, personal, and audible form for all to know and understand (John 1:18). When Adam and Eve “heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: . . . [they] hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God” (Genesis 3:8). How can a voice walk unless it is the Word in its preincarnate form? Even after the Fall, God communicated with His image-bearers, and that same Word, or “voice,” became flesh and dwelled among us (John 1:14).

2. What do the following verses teach us about the communication skills of Jesus Christ?

- a. John 4:3–19
- b. John 8:1–12
- c. John 21:15–17
- d. Matthew 6:25–34

We don't always say what we mean or mean what we say. Communication breaks down when truth is compromised and/or assumptions are made. An essential rule for good communication is that we must be honest and lovingly transparent. Paul wrote, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25). Honest communication is a must in building relationships. Paul quoted from Zechariah 8:16, which records God's expectation of the people of Judah in Jerusalem. Paul then applied these words to God's expectation of Christians, who are members of His family, the church, and are His children. We can apply these words to members of the same marriage, family, or household, who are neighbors or "near ones."

3. Read Ephesians 4:15, 22–25.
 - a. According to verse 25, what must be "put off"?
 - b. According to verse 25, what must be "put on"?
 - c. How do we lie to, or are dishonest with, each other?
 - d. According to Ephesians 4:15, how are we to speak the truth?
4. How does this apply to the criticism, "It's not *what* you said that hurt, but the *way* you said it"?

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5. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”? Why? (See Proverbs 18:8.)

6. To gain further insight on honest speech or communication, read Proverbs 12:17–22 and answer the following questions:
 - a. What is declared by the one who speaks truth?

 - b. What will happen to truthful lips?

 - c. What does God think of lying lips?

 - d. What does God think of those who deal truthfully and act faithfully?

If we are going to edify, or build up, our spouses and family members, then we must speak the truth in love or practice loving, honest communication. To speak the truth without love is to brutalize one another. To speak lovingly without truth is mere flattery, which is dishonest speech. To be honest and not hypocritical, we must speak truth kindly and compassionately and be ready to forgive (Ephesians 4:32).

APPLY THE TRUTH

Let’s review what we have learned in this first lesson on communication:

1. To be a good communicator, I must _____, _____, and _____.

2. To be a good communicator, I must be _____ (Ephesians 4:25).

3. To be an honest communicator, I must speak the _____ in _____ (Ephesians 4:15).
4. The goal of a good communicator is not simply to be understood but to _____.

Now let's apply what has been learned by practicing the following levels of communication—being careful to talk, listen, and understand. New levels of communication and understanding are achieved and realized as spouses compare ideas, feelings, and attitudes.

5. Answer five of the following questions and share your answers with your spouse.
 - What are two strengths in your marriage?
 - What is one of your financial goals?
 - What is one of your dreams?
 - What is one of your personal prayer requests?
 - What is your favorite book of the Bible?
 - What is your favorite table game?
 - What is your favorite pastime or way to relax?
 - What is one of the blessings that you have had in the past week?
 - If you could go anywhere in the world, where would it be?
 - What kind of a date would you enjoy during the next month?