

Love^{and} Marriage

Lesson 6: Communication

Questions & Objectives

- Define and describe the next two “Horsemen” of relationships.
- Understand the importance of posture and non-verbal communication.
- Identify bids from my spouse and how to receive them.
- Understand the importance of accepting my spouse’s influence.

Lesson

Men and women can communicate differently at times. As Christians, we are all called to godly communication; interpreting each other accurately can be tough, though.

¹⁹My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry... ²⁶Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

- James 1:19, 26 (NIV)

The Four Horsemen – Part 2

Negative Communication Transmissions

1. Criticism
2. Contempt

Negative Communication Responses

3. _____

4. _____

OUR WORDS MATTER, BUT HOW OUR PARTNER RECEIVES THEM MATTERS EVEN MORE!



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The Importance of Posture

Albert Mehrabian, one of the co-authors of an early study on non-verbal communication went on to say:¹

"When there are inconsistencies between attitudes communicated verbally and posturally, the postural component should dominate in determining the total attitude that is inferred."

What does this mean? How can I apply this in my life?

¹⁸ Like a maniac shooting flaming arrows of death,
¹⁹ is one who deceives their neighbor and says, "I was only joking."

Proverbs 26:18-19 (NIV)

DON'T BE A MANIAC!

What does it mean to turn toward my spouse?

Turn Toward (Positive):

- Being _____, to help - For behold, I am on your side; I will turn toward you... - Ezekiel 36:9 (BSB)
- To look _____ on - I will turn toward you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will establish My covenant with you. - Leviticus 26:9 (BSB)
- To provide _____ and mercy - But the LORD was gracious to them and had compassion on them, and he turned toward them, because of his covenant... - 2 Kings 13:23 (ESV)
- Toward God, _____ from self - Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. - Psalm 119:36 (NIV)
- To behold and "_____" someone - Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." - Matthew 9:22 (NIV)
- To convey _____ - Then Jesus turned to the disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see." - Luke 10:23 (BSB)



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Turn Away (Negative):

Generally, to repent, disavow, or _____ something.

- **Turn my eyes away** from worthless things; revive me with Your word. – Psalm 119:37 (BSB)
- Give to the one who asks you, and **do not turn away from** the one who wants to borrow from you. – Matthew 5:42 (NIV)
- There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have **turned away**, they have together become worthless; – Romans 3:11-12 (BSB)
- **Turn away from evil** and do good. Search for peace, and work to maintain it. – 1 Peter 3:11 (NLT)

REFLECTION How is my posture toward my spouse? Am I turning toward or away from them? What strategies can I use to orient myself toward them?

Bids for Attention

When we turn our face toward something, what are we doing?

- We are giving it our full _____.

As couples, we often “make a bid” for our spouse’s attention.

- These aren’t only major things; they are often little bids.
- We respond to our spouse’s bids by either turning _____ them or away from them.

What does it look like to turn toward your spouse?

- _____
 - Your physical posture.
- _____
 - In help, care, support, and concern.

Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

– Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

THIS STARTS AT HOME!



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Missed Bids

So, why do we miss or ignore our spouse's "bids" for attention and care?

1. We can miss bids when they're wrapped in _____ emotion.
 - a. Address this with love. Pause before responding, and look for an underlying "bid" from your spouse.

*Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you.
If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also.*

Luke 6:28-29a (NLT)

...and again,

A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare.

- Proverbs 15:1 (NLT)

2. We can miss bids when we're _____.
 - a. The solution is reflection and open discussion with your spouse.

REFLECTION What does my digital device/technology usage look like when I'm around my spouse? If I'm honest, does this have a negative impact on our communication or interactions?

DISCUSS "digital etiquette" with your spouse. When is phone usage acceptable or unacceptable? What about television consumption?

*Couples often ignore each other's emotional needs out of mindlessness,
not malice.*

- John Gottman, Ph.D.



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Talking It Out

One of the best activities to add to your “emotional bank account” as a couple is to have a **“Daily Check-In”** where you set aside 20-30 minutes to talk about your day.

The **cardinal rule** for this conversation is that it’s not to address any conflict within your marriage. The goal is to support each other emotionally in other areas in your lives.

Timing is Important

If anyone loudly blesses their neighbor early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse.

- Proverbs 27:14 (NIV)

If you don’t already have a time set, first discuss this.

DISCUSS with your spouse what type of greeting would minister best to you when you arrive home and vice versa. What is the best time for you as a couple to have your Daily Check-In?

8 Tips for your Daily Check-In

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Take turns sharing. | 5. Take your partner’s side. |
| 2. Show genuine interest. | 6. Express a “we against the world” attitude. |
| 3. Don’t give unsolicited advice! | 7. Show affection. |
| 4. Communicate your understanding. | 8. Validate emotions. |

Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building up the one in need and bringing grace to those who listen.

- Ephesians 4:29 (BSB)

Be Malleable

Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future.

- Proverbs 19:20 (ESV)



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REFLECTION Why is it important for me to accept influence from my spouse?

ACTIVELY SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND, RATHER THAN INSISTING ON GETTING YOUR WAY.

WATCH

[You Can Never Win an Argument with your Wife.](#)

(Credit: wiselessons3042)

"WINNING" ARGUMENTS, MEANS DEFEATING YOUR SPOUSE.

Husbands

- Accepting your wife's influence strengthens your _____.
- **Explain** how this is similar to a good manager.

BE A GOOD "MANAGER"; NOT A TYRANT.

Wives

- Do not _____ of your husband's willingness to yield at times.
- Respect him; hold him in the highest regard; and let him lead.
-

*It's better to live alone in the corner of an attic
than with a quarrelsome wife in a lovely home.*

- Proverbs 21:9 (NLT)



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Wrap-Up

- We defined the second two of Gottman's Four Horsemen: defensiveness and stonewalling.
- We learned the importance of posture and "turning toward" our partner – showing that we're **for** them, and not **against** them.
- We learned about marital "bids" for attention.
- We covered the importance of daily communication; creating an environment conducive to communication; and allowing ourselves to be influence by our spouse.

Follow-Through

Meditate

Ephesians 4:29

Consider

How can I short-circuit any defensiveness in my reception of my spouse's communication?

It is better to be right, or to be at peace?

How can I better communicate my "bids" to my spouse? And better receive theirs?

Act

- Set aside 20-30 minutes each day to discuss the day's events with your spouse.
- Turn toward your partner when they ask for help or attention.
- Look for "bids" from your spouse – even if they're disguised as criticism.

References

1. The Body Language Myth, Psychology Today:
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/surprise/202003/the-body-language-myth>
2. Adapted from *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*, John Gottman, 2015



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Supplemental Materials²

The Daily Check-In

A 20-30-minute daily check-in with your spouse is one of the most effective ways to not only add to your “emotional bank account” as a couple, but also to relieve stress (when done well). After considering the **best timing** and **setting** for this conversation, engage in the following exercise together.

Remember: the **cardinal rule** is that you discuss whatever’s on your mind outside of your marriage – it’s not the time to discuss conflicts within; this is an opportunity to support each other emotionally concerning other areas in your lives.

Instructions for Active Listening During the Check-In

1. **Take turns.** Each partner gets to be the “complainer” for 15 minutes.
2. **Show genuine interest.** Stay focused on your partner. Make eye contact. Provide non-verbal and verbal cues to show you’re engaged (nodding, “uh-huh,” etc.).
3. **Don’t give unsolicited advice!** This is a biggie. Your goal during this conversation is not to fix things for your spouse, but to simply listen to them. There are some exceptions, like if they explicitly ask for your help in problem-solving. Ensure you have a firm understanding of the issue or problem first, though, and, again, approach this conversation from a perspective of support, rather than solution.
4. **Communicate your understanding.** Let your spouse know that you empathize. This can be as simple as phrases like:
 - a. What a bummer.
 - b. I’d be stressed out, too.
 - c. I get it.
 - d. I can see that.
 - e. I’m on your side.
 - f. Totally agree.
5. **Take your partner’s side.**
 - a. Express support, even if you think they’re being unreasonable. They’re venting right now, and will often reel themselves in later.
 - b. You do not have to be dishonest – but you should be mindful of your timing.
 - c. The goal, again, is to express empathy, not judgment.



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6. **Express a “we against the world” attitude.** Express solidarity with your spouse – let them know that you’re in it with them, and you’re for them, against all odds and anything the world can throw at you!
7. **Show affection.** Hold them, put an arm around them, hold their hand, or just tell them that you love them.
8. **Validate emotions.** Let your spouse know that their emotions make sense to you, and you empathize with what they’re feeling (even if you’re not sure or don’t agree with *why* they’re feeling it).

Coping with Your Spouse’s Sadness, Fear, and Anger

It is an invaluable gift to your spouse to be there for them when they’re upset. It benefits both partners to take the attitude of, *“When you’re in pain, the world stops and I listen.”*

Empathizing, and seeing things from your spouse’s perspective, helps solidify deeper intimacy with them and can bring a couple together. The following tips may help you engage in these conversations in a meaningful way.

1. **Acknowledge the difficulty.** If you have difficulty responding to negative emotions, admitting this to your partner brings them alongside you, gives them understanding, and recruits their help.
2. **Remember: the goal is understanding.** Don’t try to problem-solve or minimize your spouse’s feelings. Simply *tune in* to what they’re expressing.
3. **Use exploratory statements and open-ended questions.** You want your spouse to talk. It’s helpful to frame your reactions as exploration for deeper understanding.

Example Exploratory Statements

- Tell me the story of that.
- I want to know everything you’re feeling/tell me your feelings about...
- Talk to me about...
- Help me understand this better.

Example Exploratory Questions

- What are your concerns?
- How are you feeling? How did that make you feel?
- What do you need from me right now?
- What are the most important points for you?



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4. **Don't ask "Why?"** This is the major exception to open ended statements and questions. In a discussion about your spouse's feeling, asking "Why?" questions will almost always sound like criticism.
 - a. "Why do you think that?" is more likely to be received as "Stop thinking that, you're wrong."
 - b. A better approach would be, "What leads you to think that? Or to that conclusion?" As a statement: "Help me understand what brought you to that."
5. **Bear witness.** When someone's upset, they want to know their experience matters and that they're not alone. This can be done by making it clear you're for them and understand their experience.
 - a. A good method to do this is to summarize and repeat back what they've said to you in your own words, and ask if you got it right.
 - b. This should be done in good faith, never sarcasm.

