**Effective Family Communication**

The question is often asked … “What is the greatest cause of trouble in marriages and families today?” This question can be answered on two levels –

The Ultimate Cause Level: It is a matter of sinful selfishness and a lack of Biblical love. Ultimately, all problems in relationships can be traced to a lack of love for God and a failure to love others as Christ has loved us.

The Functional Level: It is a matter of poor communication. Any family having problems is usually not communicating effectively.

Wherever you find people who are experiencing harmonious relationships you will find people who *are* communicating effectively. And wherever you find people who are experiencing severe difficulties in their relationship you will find people who *are not* communicating effectively. **Good relationships are built and sustained by *effective communication*.**

Communication is a key to building strong marriages, families, and relationships. While some communicate better than others, we all must be growing in the area of communication – in both words and actions.

**I. Introductory Principles**

**A.** Defining **Effective** Communication

1. “The process of sharing information with another person in such a way that the sender’s message is understood as he intended it. Unless the sender and receiver have come to a common meaning, they haven’t communicated effectively.”

2. The art of conveying information and meaning in order to come to a common understanding.

3. A process of sharing information with another person in such a way that the people involved experience harmony, unity, and relational closeness (Eph. 4:25)

**B.** How a person communicates reflects the **inner person** (i.e. what is in his/ her heart).

*“For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.”* Matthew 12:34

*“The things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart.”* Matthew 15:18

What might a person be thinking who speaks in the following ways?

Harshly/ Unkind: anger, self-protection, bitterness, resentment …

Gossips: jealousy, pride, puffing up self (self-exaltation – I’m better) …

Curses/ inappropriate language: anger, loss of self-control, show-off

Unwilling to express love: selfish, controlling

Graciously; tenderhearted; forgiving: fruit of the Spirit’s work

**C.** Communication problems are a result of **the curse**.

Adam/Eve’s communication with God went from openness and honesty to some of the following ways of communicating: (Please complete the following statements by using the verses provided in Genesis 3.)

Genesis 3:7: *“Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loin coverings.”*

* Instead of being honest, they **tried to corrupt the truth**.

Genesis 3:8: *“They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.”*

* Instead of being honest, they **hid themselves from the Lord (avoidance).**

Genesis 3:10: *“And he said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."*

* Instead of being honest, they **gave in to fear.**

Genesis 3:12-13: *“The man said, ‘The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.’ Then the LORD God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ And the woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’”*

* Instead of being honest, they **shifted the blame for their sin (Adam to God; Eve to satan)**

**D.** Thankfully, the Word of God provides many **answers** to communication problems.

God has given us hope concerning our ability to grow in communicating biblically.

2 Corinthians 5:17: *“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”*

2 Timothy 3:16: *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

**II. Principles for Effective Communication**

**A.** Effective Communication Begins by Recognizing the Great **Potential**  of Words.

*“Death and life are in the power of the tongue.”* Proverbs 18:21

I. According to the following verses, what are some *NEGATIVE* uses of our words or speech?

* *“With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor . . .”* Prov. 11:9
* *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”* Prov. 15:1

* *“A soothing tongue is a tree of life, but perversion in it crushes the spirit.”*

Proverbs 15:4

II. According to the following verses, what are some *POSITIVE* uses of our words or speech?

* *“A gentle answer turns away wrath . . .”* Proverbs 15:1

* *“Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.”* Proverbs 16:24

* *“Therefore comfort one another with these words.”* 1 Thessalonians 4:18

**B.** Four helpful principles of Effective Communication (Ephesians 4:25-32)

Our speech is important. Ephesians 4:25 points out that we have no choice but to speak … the term in vs. 25 is a command.

Why? Because people can’t read our minds.

Illustration: One partner senses something and asks the other, “What’s wrong?” All too often, the reply comes back, “Nothing.” They’re not speaking … and the other person has no idea what to think, or how to understand what’s going on.

Since, “Speaking,” is a command, clamming up is not an option for the Christian. To not communicate (speak) is sin. And practically speaking, problems aren’t resolved this way.

Ephesians 4:25-32 gives us four principles to keep in mind as we examine our speech:

I. Speak **Honestly!**

*“Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.”* (vs. 25)

Guard against:

a. **Deceit**: what you say is true, but there is more truth you are not telling; trying to give a dishonest impression of yourself or a situation; manipulating through this kind of dishonesty.

b. **Exaggeration**: embellishing the truth – “never” and “always” are an extreme exaggeration, and seldom true

c. **Evasion**: not really answering the question – changing the subject to avoid the real issue. (Cain – Genesis 4:9)

d. **Disguising** the real message: this is also deceitful; hiding the real truth; dropping hints instead of saying what you are really thinking.

e. **Conflict** between “non-verbal” communication and the content: saying one thing, but your tone of voice, etc., says another. Which one should the person believe?

2. Speak **Regularly!**

By communication with your partner on a regular basis you will:

a. Avoid **sinful** anger (vs. 26-27)

*“BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27and do not give the devil an opportunity.”*

i. There is an anger that is not sinful (see John 2:13 ff.)

**Righteous anger** is getting angry at the things God gets angry at.

* sin, injustice, the glory of God being defamed, unrighteousness, immorality, ungodliness, irreverence, etc. … in summary – anger which is at evil or at that which is done against 1) the person of the Lord, and 2) against His will

Anger in this sense is passion … an energy that moves you to seek solutions to problems out of a motive to please and honour God and to show love to others.

ii. Sinful anger

*“Do not associate with a man given to anger; or go with a hot-tempered man …”* Proverbs 22:24

*“Everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court” … liable to punishment*  Matthew 5:22

Basically, anger is sinful when it is:

a) **selfishly motivated** … your own *perceived* rights have been violated … life is not the way YOU want it.

b) **sinfully handled** … blowing up or clamming up (includes refusing to talk, changing the subject, cold shoulder, having a big pity party, being irritable and thus poor company).

iii. How to avoid sinful anger

a) **recognize** the truth about anger … the difference between what is sinful and what God allows

b) **pray** daily for God’s help to be angry only at what angers Him

c) **examine** your heart motivation for your anger … your passion … are you just wanting your own way?

d) **confess** and **repent** … i.e. put off

e) but also **put on** … CONTINUOUS, REGULAR, BIBLICAL COMMUNICATION

This will help you:

b. Resolve issues and keep you from giving the devil an opportunity

*“… and do not give the devil an opportunity.” (vs. 27)*

Literally – “a foothold” The devil will quickly seize the opportunity of changing your anger, whether righteous or unrighteous, into a grudge, wrath, or an unwillingness to forgive.

So, from the very start, the devil must be resisted … James 4:7

No place whatsoever must be given to him … no room to enter. You must not yield to or compromise with him. Rather …

i. Speak the truth **lovingly** (Eph. 4:15)

a) Be concerned with what you say

b) Be concerned with how you say it

c) Be concerned with when you say it

d) Be concerned with how much you say

ii. 7 question to ask and answer before bringing up an issue:

a) Do I have all the facts? (Prov. 18:13, 15)

b) What is my motive or reason for bringing it up? (Prov. 27:6; Matthew 12:34b)

c) Have I dealt with my own “log” first? (Matt. 7:1-5)

d) Is this something my love should bear? (1 Cor. 13:7)

e) Are my words loving? (Eph. 4:15; Prov. 15:1)

f) Is my timing right? (Prov. 15:23b; 25:11)

g) Have I prayed and asked God for wisdom and understanding? (Prov. 3:5; Phil. 4:6,7; 1 Thess. 5:17)

3. Speak **Purposefully** (Eph. 4:29-30)

*“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”*

a. “Unwholesome word”

i. Words that tear down

ii. Words that avoid the real issues

iii. Words that grieve the Holy Spirit

b. “Good for edification”

i. Words that encourage and build another up

ii. Words that deal with what the person says or does (reality)

iii. Words that help reach a solution

**Our choice of words will reveal whether we are attacking the problem, or attacking the person.**

4. Speak **Carefully** (Eph. 4: 31-32)

*“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*

We are called to act, not react!

a. Reactions (vs. 31)

i. Bitterness – reflects smoldering resentment that leads to hatred

ii. Wrath – has to do with rage; the passion of the moment

iii. Anger – internal, deep, hostility

iv. Clamor – the outcry of strife out of control

v. Slander – speaking evil of another; to speak against

vi. Malice – evil in general; a malicious, vicious character

b. Actions (vs. 32)

i. Kindness – generous in goodness; gracious as opposed to harsh and bitter (see Luke 6:35)

ii. Tender-heartedness - compassionate

iii. Forgiveness – graciously to restore one another; preserve or deliver another from harm (see also Col. 2:13 & 3:13)

c. Conflicts are resolved when we act and don’t react.

d. It is only through The Holy Spirit that we can learn to be this way.