

MAN IN THE MIRROR BIBLE STUDY
COMMUNICATE WITH CONFIDENCE
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This morning I want to talk to you about communication. I want to talk to you about communicating with confidence in your marriage.

I was talking to my wife, Patsy, yesterday, and I said, “You know I don’t have enough illustrations for tomorrow, so why don’t you and I go ahead and have one of our arguments. Then, hopefully, we can kiss and make up so I’ll be able to talk about it tomorrow morning.” Unfortunately, I don’t have one for you. I’m not going to say that we didn’t have one, but actually, we didn’t.

True or false – men are good communicators? Hold your answer on that for a moment. Today we want to talk about communicating with confidence. Let’s explore communication in business for a few minutes. What makes good business communication? What are the things that make communication work in business? Clarity; be a good listener; illustrations, charts and diagrams, things that women love, of course; echoing; and giving feed back, is that the idea? Brevity, knowing your audience, simplicity, put it on paper, timeliness of response, eye contact, and body language. All of these things make good business communications. They have to be clear, concise, open, and there has to be integrity – all of these things play into good business communications.

You are either a boss or an employee, you’re having that conversation, or you’re a salesman, or a customer, and you’re having that conversation, what makes communication break down? When does communication not work? First of all, when you’re not listening, when you’re not paying attention to the conversation, if there is not a completely truthful communication taking place, poor relationships, different agenda’s, ego’s, lack of sincerity, and, often times, you can’t really get with the other person because they’re too busy. You can’t the answer that you’re looking for. I’ve said throughout my business career that the inevitable result of communication is misunderstanding. That’s what happens when we’re talking to each other. Communication is extremely difficult in all situations, and even when the parties are talking, it is inevitable that misunderstandings take place. There can’t be a meeting of the minds if the minds don’t meet. Make sense? Yes.

So, now, men are good communicators – true or false? In business, in the market place, if you want to compliment a man you would say he gets things done. How does he get things done? Well, he works very hard. How does that work? How does he work hard? How does he get things done? He’s articulate. What do you mean, he’s articulate? Well, you know, he just expresses himself clearly. You can understand what he’s trying to say. You can talk to him. If you have a problem, you can take your problem to him, and he’ll listen to you. So, are men good communicators? You’re darn right, they’re good communicators.

Here’s the big idea. Everyone is good at communicating about what is interesting to them. My younger brother, Bill, is not much of a talker. He’s very quiet. He’s the baby in the family, and the next older brother, the third in the line, there are four of us – myself, Robert, Pete and Bill. Pete is a talker. Pete talks a lot, and over the years you can kind of see the dynamics. My younger brother, Bill, by personality is not one who will compete for airtime, so he became a very quiet person. However, in the last three years, he’s gotten interested in flying small planes. He bought a little Piper Cub, or whatever they call them these days. He is fascinated by aviation. In fact, in November, he flew all the way out to California and back, the Grand Canyon, in this little small plane that is not even big enough for his older brother to get into because Pete weighs about 270 pounds. He flew it all the way to California, and he loves aviation. Guess what? He has become an incessant talker about aviation because everyone is a good communicator about what is interesting to them.

So, what I want to do this morning is maybe just think about the possibility that you really can be a great communicator in your marriage. Think about the possibility that you can communicate with confidence in your marriage. We'll look at a few biblical ideas about what makes good communication, and then give you some ways you might think about applying that.

You should be open to James Chapter 1, Verse 19. So, we're on the second point, "What makes good communication, biblically speaking?" Verse 19 "My dear brothers, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." So quick to listen, yes? Slow to speak, yes? Slow to become angry, yes? Three core principles of good communication.

Turn to Proverbs Chapter 16, Verse 13. So the things we talked about when I asked you what makes good communication, what makes bad communication, and the importance of being a good listener. I don't think anyone said not to lose your temper, but that would be tantamount to failure in business, if you went off on somebody who's going to ruin the business deal that you're working on. Then we see in Proverbs Chapter 16, Verse 13, "Kings take pleasure in honest lips. They value a man who speaks the truth. So speak with integrity." Again, another core foundational idea of good communication. Several of you mentioned things about honesty.

Turn to Proverbs 29:20. This is just another way of looking at the speech issue. The Bible has all kinds of verses on speech. "Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him." The ability to restrain yourself in conversation and think more deeply about what you're doing.

The final verse we're going to look at is Luke Chapter 6, Verse 45. This is something that the Lord, Jesus, said, and I suppose this is even more foundational than the words themselves that come out of our mouths. In the Matthew passage where he talks about this, it is attributed to Jesus. In this passage, it is not. "For the good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart, his mouth speaks."

Dr. Henry Brandt used to say, "Other people don't create your spirit, they reveal it." In other words, if someone makes you angry, they're not creating your anger, they're just revealing your spirit because out of the "overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks." That's the idea here.

These are some of the Biblical principles that we could be talking about. The point I want to make this morning is that everyone is good at communicating about things that are important to them. I kind of want to give you five no-nos, things you absolutely do not want to do, and five things you absolutely do want to do in your communications with your spouse. These are some applications, there are many more we could make, and these might not be the best ones for you, but pick out the ones that you like, and see if you can't develop more confidence in your communication with your wife. Because all men are good communicators – true or false? Hey, it depends upon what is interesting to you and how much confidence you have in speaking about it.

The first things I want to talk about are the differences between men and women. We had our annual faculty conference on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. You're not going to believe this, but Man in the Mirror has 80 full and part-time staff. Amazing? About 20 of them are faculty. Every year we have a faculty conference. This year we decided to go go-cart racing for team building. On Monday night there was a dinner, and I made the mistake, when I announced that the next afternoon we were going to be going go-cart racing, that I intended to lap everybody in the room at least once. Now, I did intend to lap everybody, but I should have kept it to myself because the next day, instead of go-carts, it was bumper cars. Even those men who are the most mild-mannered came out and attacked me with the cunning of a coyote. It was unbelievable. Blocking motions, ramming motions, spinning me out. I have at least five bone bruises. The bruises are so deep on my hips and shins, there are no black and blue marks on my skin. It's deep in the bone. And these two laughing were the worst guys out there; in fact, this used to be a pocket PC, and now you can see that this little wobbly cover on it with the smashed lens, used to be a pocket PC. I don't know whom to blame because I have six guys claiming credit for breaking this.

Could you picture women doing that? The truth is a couple of weeks before, I went out to check this place out, and there were a couple of high school girls on the course. One of them was about 15 or 16 years old, so I kept bumping her and nudging her to give her a signal to speed up or get out of the way, and she kept going, "Stop, stop, stop." Finally, she said, "Okay, well go ahead then." I said, "Thank you very much. This is a race track."

Men and women are different! Duh!! When men communicate, we communicate to transfer information. Women communicate to express feelings. These are over generalizations because men sometimes communicate to express feelings. Do women sometimes communicate to transfer information, of course? But, as a general rule, the baseline for a man's communication is the transfer of information. We operate out of reason. We're trying to get things done.

Why does your wife keep saying the same thing over and over and over again? "Honey, I heard you." "But do you really think it's okay for Billy to spend the night at Jay's house?" "Yes, honey, it's okay." An hour later, "Honey, are you sure it's okay for Billy to spend the night at Jay's house?" "Honey, how many times do we have to talk about this? YES, IT'S OKAY, LET HIM GO. HE'S 18 YEARS OLD."

Well, what's going on there? It's the difference in the way that husbands and wives communicate. So, in regard to the differences, don't shut down your wife's opportunity to unburden her heart in communication. A woman has emotional tension that builds up in her heart, and the way she discharges that emotional tension is by expressing feelings through her robot communication. That's one of the ways. So don't shut your wife down. Do take the time to understand the differences between men and women.

I am going to mention two books this morning. The first is Paul Tournier's book, "*To Understand Each Other*" which is an excellent book for understanding the difference between men and women. Then I'm going to mention, "*Devotions for Couples*," which is my book. We have some extras if you want. There is a whole section, Part II, *The Delicate Art of Communication*. These are little two-page chapters, but it looks like, I'm guessing, 14 or 15 chapters that are each an idea on being better at communicating with your wife and understanding these differences is a big part of it.

The second area to talk about is the area of interests. Let's just say that you go on one of your business appointments, and you're trying to build a relationship. You're talking about your company, and the other person is talking about their company, and you're going back and forth and sharing information. You kind of have that, so then you're trying to build a relationship. You say, "What do you do in your spare time?" And he says, "Well, I love the ballet." And you're thinking, "What?" But you say, "That's fascinating, tell me more." So he takes that as a signal that you're really interested so he launches into a 15-minute explanation of all the intricacies of the ballet. He goes back to the history of the ballet, and you're doing everything you can to keep your eyelids from closing. What's the problem here? Remember, everyone is good at talking about things that are interesting to them.

One of the big things not to do with our spouses is to dismiss their interests. Our interests are different. This has been one of the big areas of struggle for me because in an ideal world, my love language is quality time. So I want to spend every waking moment that I can with Patsy. The problem is that most of the things that I like, she doesn't like, and most of the things that she likes, I don't like. So we have had to do two things: 1) I've really had to work to not put unfair expectations and demands on her. Don't put unfair expectations on your wife to either be interested in the things that you're naturally interested in. That is the thing to especially not do.

The thing I would encourage you to consider doing, the thing that will help you communicate with more confidence with your wife, is to sit down with her, and explore her interests. You know how on the game shows they say, "What are the three things your wife enjoys doing the most?" Can you answer that question? Maybe or maybe not. But, if you want to speak with confidence with you wife, and you want to have a better relationship, find out what interests her and then talk to her about that and ask her about that. See if she's doing something that where you can join in. Vice versa, do, by all means, share with her what your interests are.

When I got my Harley Davidson – do you all know that I have a new-used Harley Davidson – a second one? The first one I bought was a cruiser. I wanted to do more distance driving, so I traded that in on a used, touring bike. Somebody called it a “geezer” bike, and that’s okay with me because it has a high performance kit on it so it will dust anybody who says that it’s a “geezer” bike. But, after I bought it, and I bought it used, and it was already souped up. There were a couple little doo-dads, and a couple little pieces of chrome that I wanted to put on the thing. I wanted to put on some highway pegs. A couple of guys in the room here ride together, so I wanted the highway pegs because you get jealous of the other guy who’s got something you don’t have, and you want to have it. I wanted those highway pegs, too. It’s expensive to put on highway pegs because of all the other things you have to put on first. Anyway, I finally got a few shekels saved up, so I went down and had the highway pegs put on. I’m great at communicating about what’s interesting to me, so I was telling Patsy all about these highway pegs, and I said, “Come on out in the garage. Let me show you.” You know what she did? She said, “Great, let’s do it!” So she, with great enthusiasm, ran ahead of me out to the garage to see these highway pegs on my motorcycle. I’ll tell you what, points, buddy, lots of points! Yes, Jim, what is it? A highway peg? That’s a good question. You’re kind of showing your cultural illiteracy, but that’s okay.

When you’re driving down the highway and you see a guy sitting like this that means he has normal pegs. The highway pegs are a couple of pegs that come off the engine guards (the little railing) so you can put your feet up here like this and drive down the road like that. That’s probably the best thing you’re going to get out of this talk today.

The third is burdens. The idea here is to learn how to be a consoler, not a consultant. Everybody has burdens, and we need people we can share these with, so the thing to do is to listen without feeling the need to give advice. I think I said it earlier in this series that the fear of receiving advice is one of the greatest fears that all people have. What happens when you get unwanted advice, you begin to shut down. If you get unwanted advice repetitively, then you won’t share the burdens of your heart. That’s the same way with your wife.

Instead, the thing to do here, with regard to burdens, is to listen and to console, to nod your head, to send a message with your eyes. Communication is not all voice, right? Some would say the word is a very small part, but by communicating with your eyes and body language that you love this person unconditionally, you accept them, and you want to be the person with whom they can share their burdens.

The fourth is conflict. This probably should be a whole talk. Anyway, there are two dysfunctional responses to a conflict. One is anger, and one is withdrawal. These are the two primary ways that when we don’t respond to conflict in an appropriate way, we either lash out with angry words or we withdraw from the relationship. So, the thing not to do is not to become angry, not to withdraw. The thing to do when you have conflict is to develop the habit of being completely frank with each other. Sometimes emotions run hot, so it would be better to say, “You know we really do need to deal with this constructively. I am a little more angry than I feel I should be right now, so why don’t we have a cooling off period? Then maybe, after dinner tonight, we could sit down and talk this through in complete candor and frankness.”

Paul Tournier says, “That a lack of complete frankness is the greatest problem in communication.” What happens he says, “Over a period of years, certain areas become sort of off limits because you know how your wife will respond if you bring up this particular issue.” So, there are these whole different areas of the relationship that are in a state of disrepair and that creates a dysfunctional relationship because you don’t have the honesty and the frankness – “the honest lips” that the Scriptures were talking about.

The final one here is criticism, and the thing with criticism is to separate the problem and the person. That’s the way I would put it. My son-in-law, over the holidays, had an interesting way of putting it. He said, “The idea is when you see your spouse doing something you don’t like or something in the case he was talking about, that is sinful, that you don’t see her as a sinner. You see the sin in her that is doing it.” That is out of Romans: 7, I would think. So separate the person and the problem itself so you are not attaching the problem you are having to her personality. That’s probably another message, too.

One way to do this is not to make “you” statements. “You” statements always come off as criticism. “You” don’t keep a very clean house. “You” drive too fast. “You” don’t discipline the children properly. But statements we should make are to express feelings about ourselves. Instead of saying, “You” don’t keep a very clean house, instead say, “When the house is dirty, it really makes me feel depressed and uncomfortable.” So, you’re talking about the condition of the house and how it makes you feel. It lowers the temperature, you see. Or “you” drive too fast. Instead of saying, “you,” say, “When I see you driving too fast, it makes me afraid because I know the children are in the car, and if there were an accident, it would be devastating to me.” Do you see what I’m saying? So, the way to handle situations is not to criticize the “you,” but separate the problem from the person and express how you feel about it.

These are a few ideas on communication. If you will get real and get honest this has the potential to have a tremendous impact. One of the men I work with was working too hard and called home and told his wife and said, “Honey, I’m sorry, but I’m going to have to be out of town for three nights. I’m sorry but I’m going to come home, pack a bag, then I need to leave.” She said, “That’s okay. It’s really easier when you’re gone. At least then I don’t have to worry about what time you’re going to be home.” She said this without rancor. It was kind of his wake-up call, and he realized that he was not paying enough attention to her. But instead of getting angry about it, or instead of withdrawing from it, he used that to have an honest with his wife and made some rearrangements in his personal schedule. He would say today that because he responded to his wife this way, and had an honest communication, it saved his marriage.

Who doesn’t want to end his days in a rocking chair next to a woman who you have been through all the highs and lows of life, sitting there with a very confident feeling that you’ve done this together? That’s what it’s all about.

After God, but before all others, make her your top priority, and one of the ways to do that is through communication. It’s important to remember that everyone is good at communicating about what is interesting to them.

Let’s pray:

Heavenly Father, thank you for the gift you have given each of us of being able to communicate. Not all of us in this room are married. Most of us will be at some point. Some of us won’t, but, Lord, help us to use these principles especially in the relationships we have with our wives, but also in our other relationships, too. We thank you, and ask you to apply this to each of our hearts in the way you would find most pleasing. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

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