

Communication Styles Between Men & Women

Have you ever listened to children playing in a sandbox? If you go by a sandbox filled with five-year old girls, what will you hear? Probably the sounds of chattering as the little girls engage each other in animated conversation. If you go by a sandbox filled with five-year old boys, what will you hear? Probably the sounds of grunting and groaning as the little boys push their trucks through the sand.

The verbal skills of five year-old girls usually surpass those of five year-old boys. Unfortunately for men, this lack of verbal expertise seems to follow us through life. We constantly lag behind women in our ability to communicate. This communication difference between men and women becomes even more pronounced in marriage.

You've probably heard that men are from Mars and women are from Venus. However, the problem is much worse than that. Women are from Venus, but men are from deep outer space. How can men come back into orbit with their wives? The secret to the mutual planetary attraction of spouses is for men to learn how to communicate with their wives so that they don't live, emotionally speaking, in another galaxy. This one little secret can transform a marriage almost overnight.

A healthy marriage is like a strong threefold cord.¹ It has three indispensable ties: a physical bond, a spiritual bond, and an emotional bond. Men generally focus on the physical bond, while women typically concentrate on the emotional. The emotional bond is nourished and strengthened by communication. For wives, verbal communication is one of the most significant ways husbands can show their love. At the same time, many husbands are nearly oblivious to the verbal needs of their wives. A wife will never feel truly fulfilled in marriage if her husband does not strengthen the emotional bond by communicating frequently. In stark contrast, a husband from outer space says to his wife, "I told you twenty years ago that I loved you and if I ever change my mind I'll let you know."

The natural difference in communication styles between men and women is difficult for most husbands to overcome. Yet something else has happened over the past thirty years that has aggravated this natural difference, causing men to be lost in space when it comes to communicating with their wives. I am referring to the common occurrence over the past thirty years for couples to have premarital sexual relations. Premarital sex weakens two of the three marital bonds. How?

When a couple has pre-marital sexual relations they know that they are

breaking God's commandments. As a result, their spiritual bond is broken at the very time their spiritual relationship should be maturing.

Deep interpersonal communication takes place in all sexual relations. It is very easy for a man to feel like he is building the emotional bond with his wife-to-be during pre-marital sexual relations. A man thinks that he is fully sharing his feelings in the sexual embrace: "Boy, are we ever communicating!" The problem for the man is that his verbal communication skills become fast-frozen at the point pre-marital sex begins. Physical bonding replaces emotional bonding. During the critically important months before marriage, a man should be learning how to express himself in non-physical ways to his fiancée. Instead, the intensity of the physical communication eclipses the verbal. The husband enters marriage with frozen emotional skills. As a result, many marriages shatter.

In 1988 the average length of marriages in the U.S. that ended in divorce was seven years. Twenty percent of these divorcing couples ended their marriage before their third anniversary.² In the typical county courthouse in the U.S., the majority of the filings for the dissolution of marriage are made by women. This is surprising since women are usually trying the hardest to hold a marriage together. What makes so many wives, after a few years of marriage, willing to throw in the towel?

A 1989 study done by the *National Survey of Families and Households* found that "unions begun by cohabitation are almost twice as likely to dissolve within ten years."³ Another study reported in 1991 in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* found that "non-virgins have a divorce rate that is 53% to 71% higher than virgins."⁴ A third study by the National Council on Family Relations found that newlyweds who had pre-marital relations were less happy and that the wives complained about poor communication after the wedding.

All three of these studies confirm that premarital sex puts a huge (and unnecessary) stress upon a marriage. It shatters two of the three bonds of marriage. Not only does it sever the spiritual bond, but premarital sex also freezes a man's already puny communication skills. After enough years of emotional neglect, the wife finally feels frozen out. She marches down to the courthouse and files for divorce.

How do couples who have started their marriages on the wrong foot renew their spiritual and emotional bonds? First, honestly acknowledge that God knew what he was doing in commanding us to save the sexual embrace for marriage. God graciously gave us the prescription for a lasting marriage three thousand years before our contemporary sociologists. Second, if the

pre-marital relations have not been confessed, go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Third, for spouses who have never developed their spiritual bond, begin by taking a little time to pray together. Fourth, for husbands who have allowed their verbal skills to lie dormant, attend spring training in marital communication! Put in a little extra effort to strengthen the emotional bond with your wife.

How well does this little effort at communication work? Our office received a long-distance call from Virginia on a Monday following one of our weekend St. Joseph's Covenant Keepers conferences. It seems that one of the Navy men attending the conference turned to his wife as he was leaving for duty on Monday morning and said something like, "I just want you to know that I am grateful you are my wife and that I love you." These simple words put a spark in the heart of this sailor's wife. She enthusiastically called her friends to share the excitement of her husband's declaration. Her friends called others including us at the Family Life Center. We were amazed to hear the joy created by twenty seconds of emotional communication.

After a men's conference in Cincinnati, another man decided to listen more carefully to his wife and to share with her not only his thoughts but also his feelings. When he shared this decision with his wife, she took him to see their marriage counselor. Previously, this couple had been near the brink of divorce and gone to marital therapy for years. After hearing the husband's intentions to communicate with his wife on a more sensitive level, the therapist gave his opinion that they would no longer need his services. This miracle in Cincinnati demonstrates the incredible power of verbal communication to strengthen a marriage.

The secret to loving your spouse is giving yourself. Communication is a gift of yourself to your wife. Even more than gifts of jewelry or flowers, your wife loves to hear of your affection for her.

It only takes a few seconds, but this simple secret of communicating can literally transform your marriage. Take a few moments and tell your wife how much she means to you. Tell her why you married her and why you'd marry her again. Praise her for all she does to make your house a home. Thank her for being the mother of your children. Affirm how much richer she has made your life. Share your hopes and dreams. Pray with her, and pray for her. Ask her what she is thinking. And then really listen!

When it comes to loving our wives, we don't have to be in outer space. If we carefully build the spiritual, emotional, and physical bonds with our covenant partner, we will preserve a strong planetary attraction and a healthy

marriage.

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Endnotes

1 Ecclesiastes 4:12

2 Michael J. McManus, *Marriage Savers: Helping Your Friends and Family Avoid Divorce*, Zondervan (Grand Rapids, MI, 1993, p.105.

3 *Marriage Savers*, p.91.

4 *Marriage Savers*, p.92

5 *Marriage Savers*, p.91.