

Biblical + Practical Guide to Communication in Marriage

Adapted from: "Communication in Marriage" (Apostolic Christian Counseling and Family Services, 2008–2025).

1) The Big Idea

Your communication can determine the course of your marriage by strengthening or weakening it. Closely watch your words and the way you communicate. Choose words that support love, grace, and life—not harm.

- Effective listening communicates respect, honor, and love—and prevents misunderstandings.
- Words can build up and bless or tear down and hurt. Avoid critical, hurtful, or demeaning speech.

2) The "When We're Stuck" Tool: Speaker-Listener Technique

Use this structured approach when an issue is important, difficult, or sensitive—especially when the conversation feels like it's spiraling. The goal is open communication and understanding; solutions may come later.

Rules for both of you

- Only one Speaker at a time: the Speaker "has the floor." The Listener listens and paraphrases.
- Use an object (paper, pen, etc.) as a visual reminder: whoever holds it is the Speaker.
- After the Speaker shares, pass the floor to your spouse and switch roles.
- If communication isn't going well, call a "time-out" and implement this technique.

Rules for the Speaker

- Speak for yourself using "I" statements (your thoughts, feelings, perspective).
- Speak in smaller chunks—your spouse can only take in so much at a time.
- Stop after a sentence or two and let the Listener paraphrase.
- If the paraphrase isn't accurate, restate your point more clearly.
- Remember communication is more than words: timing matters; don't expect mind-reading; don't switch topics mid-conversation.

Rules for the Listener

- Listening is a gift and a practical way to show honor.
- Paraphrase what you hear: "What I'm hearing you say is..." / "It sounds like..."
- Don't refute, argue, or offer your opinions while you're in Listener role.

- Attempt to understand your spouse's perspective before responding or solving.

3) Speak Clearly: Simple Formats That Reduce Defensiveness

Use formats that keep communication specific, clear, and less accusatory.

X-Y-Z format

"In situation X, when Y occurred, I felt Z."

Example: "When you don't call to say you'll be late, I feel frustrated."

Use "I" statements; avoid "You" statements

- "I" statements help you take responsibility for your thoughts and emotions.
- "You" statements often put your spouse on the defensive (e.g., "You never...", "You always...").

4) Choose the Right Time (Timing + Filters)

Timing is essential. Ask for an appropriate time rather than launching into a heavy topic in the wrong moment.

Suggested opener: "I would like to talk to you about _____ sometime. When is a good time to talk?"

Be aware of filters

- Environmental filters: noise, children, phones, being in different rooms, distractions.
- Internal filters: tiredness, frustration, headache, sickness, stress.
- If a filter is interfering, name it and decide whether to move to a better setting or schedule another time.

5) "How You Say It" Matters: Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication often carries the emotional meaning of your message. Tone, posture, eye contact, and facial expressions can help or hinder your ability to communicate.

Quick self-check

- Tone of voice: aim for warmth, care, and calm—especially in disagreement.
- Body language/posture: face your spouse; keep arms uncrossed; lean forward; keep hands relaxed.
- Eye contact: look at your spouse while listening and speaking.
- Facial expression: aim for a relaxed, inviting expression; beware unintentional frowns/scowls.

6) Listen Like Love: 3 Listening Skills

- Treat listening as honor: listen to words, tone, and body language.
- Paraphrase: “What I’m hearing you say is...”
- Listen for feelings: try to name the emotion beneath the words and reflect it back.

7) Grow Emotional Intimacy: 5 Levels of Communication

Communication occurs on different levels. As levels deepen, trust, vulnerability, and intimacy increase. Healthy marriages don’t only talk logistics; they also share the heart.

- Level 1 — “Just the facts”: schedules, logistics, surface information.
- Level 2 — “I think”: your opinions about ideas or others.
- Level 3 — “Sharing”: your own thoughts/struggles; asking for advice.
- Level 4 — “Mutual sharing”: both share preferences, concerns, experiences; work together.
- Level 5 — “This is me”: inner feelings, fears, deep preferences; heart-level honesty.

Simple weekly practice: aim for at least one short Level 4–5 conversation each week (even 10–20 minutes).

8) Understand Your Style: Expander vs Condenser

Many couples clash on the quantity of words—not just the content. Recognize your default style and bridge it.

- Expander: talks more, elaborates, dislikes silence; may feel frustrated by low detail.
- Condenser: uses fewer words, prefers efficiency and bottom-line; may feel overwhelmed by long detail.

Bridge it (mutual compromise)

- If you’re a Condenser: include more detail; build tolerance for listening.
- If you’re an Expander: shorten where possible; leave out extra details; build tolerance for silence; accept less detail.

9) Things to Avoid (Because They Destroy Trust)

- Criticizing, nagging, quarreling, fault-finding.
- Comparing your spouse to others.
- Being defensive.
- Being emotionally withholding or lying.
- Using the silent treatment when angry (hurtful and can be emotionally abusive).
- Interrupting; accumulating grievances.

10) Public Honor + Private Discretion

- Praise your spouse publicly; avoid criticizing or tearing them down in public—even as “jokes.”
- Avoid sharing private personal information about your marriage with others, except when professional help is needed.

11) A One-Page Script You Can Use Tonight

Start well

“Is now a good time to talk about ___?”

Speak clearly (X-Y-Z)

“In situation X, when Y happened, I felt Z.”

Listener mirrors

“What I’m hearing you say is ___.”

Name feelings

“It sounds like you’re feeling ___.”

If it escalates

“Timeout—let’s use Speaker-Listener.”

12) When to Get Help

If communication repeatedly breaks down or becomes harmful, don’t isolate. Discuss in advance who you would seek counsel from (elder, counselor, mentor, etc.) and when you would do so.