



Keys to Happy Family Living

Christian Living Series

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Lesson 8 – Keeping in Step by Communication

*"Then those who feared the LORD **spoke to one another**, and the LORD gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who esteem His name." (Malachi 3:16, NASB, emphasis added)*

Preceding lessons have stressed the fact that marriage involves an ever-changing relationship between husband, wife and children. Some of the changing events which demand constant adjustments (as noted in Lesson 7) are pregnancies, the arrival of each child, illness, death, job changes, promotions, moving, neighborhood changes.

To illustrate, a husband who had to be away from home for an extended period received a glowing letter from his wife. She was getting along beautifully with the children. They were cooperative, considerate, and helpful. A week later he got another letter. This time there was a different note. It had been raining most of the week; the children were quarreling with each other and were refusing to cooperate with their mother. It had been necessary to punish them. Yes, parenthood is an ever-changing experience. Variety is the order of the day.

Preceding lessons have also stressed the importance of unity and submission for a happy marriage. How can ever-changing people remain united? How do people develop and maintain a way of life in which they are submissive one to another? Given the desire to be united and submissive, constant communication is required in order to keep up to date with changes that occur among members of a family. This lesson will define what is meant by communication.

Attitude

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul says:

"For our proud confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially toward you" (2 Corinthians 1:12).

Husband and wife ought to approach each other in like manner--out of a good conscience, in simplicity and godly sincerity, by the grace of God. This is the attitude that paves the way for letting your partner know what is really on your heart.

Again, Paul says: "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25). Unity is based on "the testimony of our conscience," on being thoroughly and completely truthful with one another.

Note Ephesians 4:1-16. Here Paul speaks of the aids given to us in order that we may become perfect in our relationships one to another. Verse 15 stands out: "... but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." Speaking the truth is not enough. It must be done in love, not with a vindictive spirit. We must keep the headship of Christ ever before us.

A review of the section on proper speech in Lesson 1 would be helpful here.

Praise

Proper appreciation one for another is also a part of communication. Consider the introductions to Paul's letters. For example:

"We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints" (Colossians 1:3-4).

What a positive note! The apostle expresses his appreciation of what these people are. All of us need appreciation. Wives, husbands, and children need to know that they are appreciated. A counselor often hears a statement like this: "My mate surely realizes my appreciation!" Your mate needs to hear you say it. This is important to each of us--a sincere, truthful declaration of appreciation.

Note the introduction to 1 Thessalonians:

"We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father" (1 Thessalonians 1:2-3).

Paul made known his appreciation of the good qualities of these people.

It is important to note that communication involves more than verbal declarations. Paul recognizes the Thessalonians' work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is the wife who has very little to say. It is her tender glance that speaks of her love. To cook the meals as her husband likes them is her way of expressing her devotion. Her husband recognizes these acts as her way of communicating. To seek to understand the meaning of each other's words and deeds and to accept them for what they mean is to be truly united.

How much have you done about letting your partner know of your appreciation of him or her? Such communication is fundamental to a good marriage. What do you appreciate about your partner? Be sure that you know. Then let your partner know. What can you do for each other? How wholesome it is to do it!

Reconciliation

The time comes in a marriage when differences arise. The conversation, action, or attitude of your partner is not appreciated. Your partner will be grateful to know about this if the basic relationship between you is a healthy one. Paul wrote to the Romans, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another" (Romans 15:14). Partners dedicated to building a united marriage can each assume that the other will appreciate an admonition and will be willing to consider revising his behavior in a way that is mutually acceptable. There is a great difference between peace and the kind of cold, brittle silence that develops when partners have unspoken, unrevealed differences between them. The "silent treatment" is a far cry from unity and peace.

Take the initiative in restoring unity

It is well to review the order of our loyalties. Our first duty is to love God with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our mind. If we wish to please Him, we will be careful to maintain unity with the brethren. The Lord Jesus gave us the basis for maintaining good relations. Note Matthew 5:23-24. If your partner has anything against you, it is your move to be reconciled. It is inconceivable to think of quarreling and divisions as a part of the lives of a Christian couple. Christianity and quarreling do not go together. If you are conscious of doing something that is offensive to your partner, it is your responsibility to go to him or her and be reconciled. This is one principle of good Christian living. Otherwise, your service to God is unacceptable.

Jesus gave another principle in Matthew 18:15-17. Here the shoe is on the other foot. Now your partner is at fault. It is still your move. A Christian ought to be so desirous of achieving unity that, failing to find a basis of reconciliation alone, an attempt will be made to seek help from one or two others. Failing this, the Christian ought to turn to the Church. This is going a long, long way to be reconciled.

"You who are spiritual" – a necessary caution

There is a caution, however, stated by Paul:

"Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (Galatians 6:1)

Who is it that is to go to a man taken in a fault? "You who are spiritual." A man who has the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) operative in his life is qualified to go to one

taken in a fault and to deal with it.

This principle applies to partners also. Why must this be so? You may have the best of intentions in approaching your partner about some fault. However, it is possible that your partner will be sensitive about it--or resent your approach, try to argue, or say things that aren't complimentary. If your response is in anger or if your good intentions result in your becoming embroiled in an argument, then no progress has been made toward unity. If you match malice with malice--if you are satisfying the flesh yourself--your reaction will be fleshly if you are faced by a partner who is not in the best of spirits.

It is the spiritual person who can take a tongue lashing in the right way. An individual with faults of his own should look after his own and not after those his partner may have. You must approach your partner "looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted."

You will save yourself many tensions, troubles, and difficulties if you follow through on the Biblical rules for getting along together. Your approach should be with the assumption that your partner is "full of goodness" and happy for any admonition that will aid in the clearer understanding between you. Your approach should be with the purpose that "if possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men" (Romans 12:18).

Your approach should be with the intent of being reconciled and not to give vent to pent-up, negative emotions. If your partner's response is in anger, it is your good spirit that is important.

When differences come, there is the tendency to leave your first love for God, to forsake prayer, to turn to the arm of the flesh for a solution. To win your point becomes the important goal. The effort at reconciliation, carried out in the flesh, will result in failure to adjust to change. Partners may turn away from making an adjustment. Or they may try and fail. When they realize that an adjustment cannot be made, this is a red light. If neglected, this will destroy the marriage. This is called the incipient stage. It is at this point that the partners ought to turn to someone qualified to give counsel, before deep hostility and tensions develop. Otherwise, they will attempt to evade or forget the area of conflict. They may try to insulate it by ignoring it. They may treat the conflict as a sensitive spot that they try not to touch. Conflicts or differences may not arise over such matters as extreme cruelty or immorality. They can be differences over such things as neatness, cleanliness, clothing, and friends. One young couple agreed to buy the most expensive car, but disagreed violently over keeping candy or peanuts in a dish in the living room. There is a limit to the number of conflicts so treated. This is not a happy marriage. Both husband and wife feel hostility that cannot be released; they feel upset or disappointed.

Soon one of them begins to lose heart and hope. Marriage is not meeting his or her basic needs. A partner will soon begin to wonder how else these needs can be met and will look for outlets outside the marriage. Willingness to work for the marriage dies out. This is called the chronic stage. The road back to unity and peace is mapped for you in Lesson 4.

"Be kind one to another..."

However, there is a more positive note. Your marriage will be a happy, mutually satisfactory one if both of you set your sights on unity, ministering to each other, and communicating with each other in the proper spirit, which is given by God. As Christians, you will find strength to do this as you pray and as you remember the exhortation of Ephesians 4:32:

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."

Information and inspiration

Partners can be drawn closer together through sharing with each other their experiences, thoughts, desires, longings, plans, and weaknesses. Acts 14:27; Philippians 4:8; Hebrews 3:13; James 5:16; and Isaiah 50:4 suggest ways in which husband and wife can inspire, challenge, and inform each other.

Partners need to move through life hand in hand. Otherwise, the difference in the nature of the task of being a wife and that of being a husband can easily cause them to grow apart.

To illustrate, a wealthy automobile dealer tells his unhappy story. Twenty-five years ago he and his wife were delighted when they received a profitable dealership. He worked hard day and night to build up the business. His wife was busy with the three children. The dealership prospered. As it grew in size, he became busier and busier. Soon he became interested in civic affairs, and for business reasons joined various clubs. As he prospered, his wife was able to have help in the house. She joined her own clubs and various women's activities.

Husband and wife, in their prosperity, developed their own separate worlds. He had very little to do with rearing the family, apart from providing a very comfortable home and plenty of money. Today, twenty-five years later, this gentleman is growing old; his children are gone; and he and his wife have nothing in common. He is a very lonely man, even though he lives in luxurious surroundings.

This need not happen to any marriage. Be sure to take the time to have fellowship together as partners and as a family. You can maintain common interests. You can share reading materials. You can share church activities. You can share the task of parenthood. This is a mutual task, not the wife's exclusive area. As partners who have a mind to keep in step, you will find ways to accomplish this. Remember that the tendency to build separate worlds is a natural one. To prevent this from happening, you must deliberately and consciously have a plan and make it work.

This lesson closes the section on *The Adequate Partner*. Our emphasis has been on helps for partners who are purposed in their hearts to establish a sound marriage. These principles will produce few results for those who use them in an attempt to get their

own way. They will be truly effective for those who seek a mutual, united, like-minded partnership.

Study Assignment for Lesson 8

This assignment is intended to help you fully understand and remember what this lesson teaches.

1. Describe the basic quality for adequate communication.
2. Describe other characteristics of good communication.
3. Understand and list the rules of reconciliation.
4. Why are information and inspiration between partners important?
5. Read all the Scripture passages quoted or mentioned in this unit.

Review Lessons 1-8 to remind yourself of truths you need to apply in order to be an adequate person and an adequate partner. This review will help prepare you for Section III, *The Adequate Parent*.

PERSONAL EVALUATION TEST 4

Check Up with Your Partner

Both husband and wife mark the statements that apply to you yourself. Leave a blank space where you cannot honestly answer yes.

Husband / Wife

____ / ____ 1. I am reading the Bible and seeking God's blessing in my life.

____ / ____ 2. I use kind, pleasant words.

____ / ____ 3. I can take ill-treatment patiently.

____ / ____ 4. I minister to those who need help.

____ / ____ 5. I realize that only God can give me victory.

- ____ / ____ 6. I am married not to be served, but to serve.
- ____ / ____ 7. I seek to create an atmosphere of love in my home.
- ____ / ____ 8. I agree to agree with my partner.
- ____ / ____ 9. I have accepted the fact that time brings changes.
- ____ / ____ 10. I make a point of understanding my partner.
- ____ / ____ 11. I praise my partner.
- ____ / ____ 12. I can discuss areas of difference candidly with my partner.
- ____ / ____ 13. I am willing to make the first move toward reconciliation.
- ____ / ____ 14. I share experiences with my partner.
- ____ / ____ 15. I am checking to see that we are not growing apart.

The spaces you left blank indicate the parts of the course you need to study again. They represent problems that could develop into very real trouble spots.

Visit <http://biblicalcounselinginsights.com/keys-to-happy-family-living-series/answers/> for the answers to these questions.

Self-Check Test 8

How much do you remember?

In the space provided, mark the following statements "True" or "False."

- ____ 1. There must be constant communication to keep abreast of the changes that occur among members of a family.
- ____ 2. Speaking the truth is all that is necessary in order to maintain effective family communication.
- ____ 3. So long as one's partner realizes that he or she is appreciated, that should suffice.
- ____ 4. The "silent treatment" is an effective way of keeping unity and peace when differences arise between marriage partners.
- ____ 5. The person who is at fault must always make the first move in adjusting

strained marriage relations.

- _____ 6. It is the spiritual person who can take a tongue lashing in the right way.
- _____ 7. When differences arise, too often winning one's point becomes the important goal.
- _____ 8. The chronic stage of marital unhappiness is reached when willingness to work for the marriage dies out.
- _____ 9. Maintaining common interests is a vital part of preserving a marriage.
- _____ 10. The tendency to build separate worlds is a natural one.

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