

“Deepening Communication in All Relationships.”

Whether you read John Gray’s *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* or Gary Chapman’s *The Five Love Languages*. Or just know from personal experience, communication in relationships is so very important and yet we often fail at it. We say one thing and the other person hears something completely different. In fact, we’ve got a few examples to consider right now. Things that men and women say, but are heard completely differently.

[VIDEO: What is said vs. what is heard]

Communication. This is what we’re going to address today as we continue this series of messages called *Biblical Perspectives on Love, Marriage and Sex*. We started off by looking at the foundation of marriages being a calling from God. How we are called to be helpers and companions to each other. We’ve looked at fine tuning the male role and the female role in relationships by looking at the needs of our spouses and then finding ways to meet those needs. Now we need to look at ways to truly share in the ministry of communication because communication that builds others up, rather than tear them down, is at the heart of Christian marriage and at the heart of all relationships.

Now, I want to be clear, that this series is not just for married people. Some of you are called by God to be single but you need to hear these messages too because the principles that make for a good marriage make for good relationships in every other area of life. Communication is a key element in every relationship.

There have been lots and lots of studies done on the communication in marriage and one of the key elements in healthy relationships is communication. Over and over men and women both indicate that the times they feel closest to their spouse are the times when they are sharing from the heart with one another; the times they are communicating.

Gary Smalley is a relationship expert and he says that communication is the bridge that connects two people together in a covenant relationship. Think about that for a second. If you’ve ever been to the Royal Gorge **[PICTURES: Royal Gorge]** in Canyon City, CO you’ve seen this place with two sheer cliffs that are spanned hundreds of feet above by a bridge. That bridge links both sides.

You see, in relationships, that bridge is communication. In marriage you have two separate people, two sheer cliffs, with a gulf in between them. That gulf is the differences between men and women, the ways we perceive and process the world differently. That chasm between us has to be bridged and it’s bridged through communication. This is nothing new to you! You know all this already. Through communication we connect with another person. Communication is revealing your inner self to someone and them doing the same for you. That’s how we find intimacy with anyone. That’s how we develop friends, by sharing the deep parts of ourselves with one another. A strong relationship with God happens when we communicate with him, when we spend time connecting with him, bridging the gap between us and him by really sharing the deep stuff that’s on our minds and in our hearts.

So there’s the bridge of the Royal Gorge and then there are bridges like this **[PICTURE: Dangerous Bridge]**. Some look like the one in that Indian Jones movie. It’s just barely there! You know the one I’m talking about. The ropes are frayed and the planks of the bridge are rotting. It looks like the link from one side of the chasm to the other isn’t going to last any longer! For some couples that’s more like what the bridge looks like between the wife and the husband. Maybe that’s what the bridge of communication looks like in your marriage. You’ve forgotten to maintain it and strengthen it over the years. When this happens you start to feel distant from your spouse. Over time the level of communication starts to dwindle until you get to the point where you don’t feel in love with your spouse anymore. All you see is the chasm in between you and no way to cross it. This is what happens in a relationship if two people don’t work to reinforce and maintain and strengthen it. You may be at a place where there is no bridge left. It may be completely gone and you’ve got the difficult task of rebuilding that bridge. But the great thing is that it can be done.

What I'd like to do now is to focus on the differences in men and women in how they communicate. Because knowing the differences in how we communicate can help us with some of the communication problems we have.

The book *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* by Dr. John Gray is all about communication. If you are having major communication problems in your marriage I would encourage you to see a counselor. But if you have minor problems or just want to improve your communication skills in your marriage I would encourage you to pick up a book like this or the book *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman that can go into a lot more detail than I can here today.

John Gray points out some important ways that men and women are different in the area of communication. It's important to recognize this. First of all, Gray says that women have a fundamental need to talk, and men have a need to think. **[SLIDE... "1. Women have the need to talk, men have the need to think"]** It's important that we realize this, because these aren't **wants**, these are **needs**, they're a fundamental part of how a person is wired. Now, of course there are exceptions. There are some women who are very quiet and there are some men who don't care to think much. But, for most women it's important to have somebody to communicate with, to talk to so that they can express their feelings.

One expert says that the average woman has the need to say 10,000 words a day. The average man has the need to speak 2,000 words a day. At 6:00 p.m. when this man and woman arrive home from work the man has totally used up his minimum daily requirement of speaking! But the woman is just getting fired up and ready to go! This can create conflict, so husbands we need to recognize that this isn't a want in our wives, this is a need. And if this need is going to be met, don't you want to be one of the people to meet that need? And wives, remember that husband needs a little space before you start conversing with him. He needs to prepare himself for more talking so take it easy on him!

The **second** point that Gray makes is that women are more interested feelings while men are more interested in actions. **[SLIDE: add to previous "2. Women are more interested in feelings, men are more interested in actions"]**. Just listen to how guys talk to one another. If they haven't seen each other in a long time, maybe months, when they talk they ask each other **what** they're doing. "What have you been up to?" "What have you been doing?" "What's been happening in your life?" "What's been happening in yours?" That's the biggest part of the conversation. Maybe toward the end of the conversation we'll talk a little bit about our feelings.

But when you listen to women converse they say things like, "How have you been feeling?" "How are your relationships?" "Tell me about your kids...about your family." These are the things that are valued by women. Men tend to value **doing** the most, women tend to value **feelings** the most.

What this means is that when husbands and wives sit down, we men want to tell them what we did, but our wives want to know what we're feeling. We want to ask them what they did that day, but they want to tell us what they felt. It's important that we know these needs and find ways to meet these needs in one another. We need to find the middle ground here.

The **third** difference Gray points out is that women need to talk about problems, men need to solve problems. **[SLIDE: add to previous, "3. Women need to talk about problems, men need to solve problems."]** This one difference is the source of an incredible amount of marital problems. Gray believes that women solve their problems by talking about them out loud. They process problems by talking about them to their friends and their spouses. When they share like this they don't necessarily want answers, they want empathy. But here's the problem: men are wired in a way that makes them want to fix things. We think that a fundamental part of our job as men is to fix stuff that's broken—the lawn mower, the car and the people around us! So when our wife talks to us about the problems she has, something clicks inside of us and we say to ourselves, "Well, I know what I'm supposed to do now, I'm supposed to fix this problem." So before our wives are even done talking about it we've already given them an answer. But that's not what the wife wanted and so she's not happy! And then we're not happy because she doesn't like our fix-it job!

Husbands, realize that your wives don't so much want your answers as much as they want you to listen, to genuinely be interested! And wives, listen to your husband's response, because he may actually have some good advice.

The **fourth** difference is that men need to think before they respond, women like an immediate response. **[SLIDE: add to previous, "4. Men need to think before they respond, women like an immediate response"]** For the man, John Gray calls this retreating into his cave. The cave is the place where he can go and think about things. A wife shares a concern with her husband, "Honey I'm really concerned about this issue." But he doesn't say anything. That's frustrating for the wife and she thinks, "Well, that insensitive oaf! Why doesn't he say something? Did he not hear me? Does he not understand what I'm saying? Is this not important to him?! Why won't he answer me?!" Well, he won't answer because he has to think about it. Men have a hard time listening and thinking and conversing at the same time! They need time to process that information. It may take 5 or 10 minutes, to process it, or it may take 20 minutes or even days. And if wives can understand that and give husbands a chance to process it, it can be very helpful.

If men are given the time they can address the issue, but if wives pressure them it makes them resistant and resentful. Gray's suggestion to men is when they need that space to think or to go into their cave they need to say something like, "I need some time to think about this. So give me a while and **I'll be back.**" Gray says those are the magic words, "I'll be back" that give women a sense of security so that they don't think you're mad, or abandoning them or rejecting them.

In the book *The Five Languages of Love*, Gary Chapman says that not only do we need to know the differences between how men and women communicate, but we also need to take the next step and see how individuals receive love which is very important to how we communicate with those close to us. He says that that truly connecting with a loved one comes down to one simple fact: you need to know and speak his or her love language. A love language is the way we express our devotion and commitment, and it can be learned or changed to touch the hearts of our significant others. Whether you're a spouse, a parent, or single, the five love languages are the same: **1. Words of Affirmation. 2. Receiving Gifts. 3. Quality Time. 4. Acts of Service.**

5. Physical Touch. I highly recommend reading this book or at least taking an on-line survey to see what your love language is, so that you can give and receive love in the way that you are wired. Chapman says, "Though we have a primary love language, we can learn a second language so that our spouse's needs are met. It's all about giving a little here and there, and accepting that our spouse's preferred channel may be different from ours."

Knowing these differences helps us to see two important things about the calling of marriage. If we are to ever have the kinds of marriages that God wants for us we need to address these two ministries to one another. The first one is the ministry of listening. **[SLIDE: "The Ministry of Listening"]** James 1:19 says this, **[SLIDE...]** **"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (James 1:19, NIV).** That's a passage of scripture that we should lock into our memories and live out in our marriages and every single relationship we have! Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. It's easy to remember and it teaches us the fundamental truth about how we connect with one another. There is a ministry of listening.

Have you ever been talking and yet nobody's listening? You're there trying to say something and everybody else is doing their own thing, talking, carrying on. When that happens it feels like what you're saying is not important. It can even make you think that you yourself are not important!

In a relationship between a man and a woman it's very important that we live out this ministry of listening. How do we do that? A lot of has to do with your body language: when somebody is speaking lean forward, look them in the eyes, nod your head. Some of it is verbal: you ask questions about what they said to go deeper. That shows that you're listening. When you do that to another person it says, "What you are saying is important to me, and even more than that, **you** are important to me." Can you imagine what it would

be like in your marriage if both of you were trying to make the other person feel important? Unfortunately, we often give signals that say that the other person is not important. We need the ministry of listening.

The second ministry is the ministry of speaking. [SLIDE: “The Ministry of Speaking”] This takes us to the next scripture in your program today. [SLIDE...] **“The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be” (James 3:6-10, NIV).**

Remember that you have tremendous power in your words. You can tear people apart with them by back-stabbing and gossip. You can destroy somebody’s character, you can wound their spirit, you can break them with the power of your words. Or...you can bless them and build them up and feed their soul. Proverbs 16:24 shows us the power of words. [SLIDE...] **“Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Prov 16:24, NIV).**

In marriage, God intends for us to use our words to build each other up, feed each other’s souls and bless each other. That’s important stuff! But sometimes we find it hard to bless each other. It’s a tragedy that about the only people who say mean, insulting, wounding things to our faces are our own family members. It’s so easy to criticize and cut down our spouses. We start to think that just because we’re married to this person that we have the right to say things to them that we wouldn’t dream of saying to anybody else! But we’ll say them to the person that God has asked us to treasure and cherish above everybody else?!

How do we change this? Well this is where the Good News does its thing! We allow God to change our hearts. By allowing the Holy Spirit to come into our lives everyday and reshape us and remold and make us into loving people. We allow the Holy Spirit to take away the negativity and replace it with something positive. We invite God to use us as a minister of blessing to other people. We say, “God help me to really, truly, be a blessing to this person.” And the truth is that if we’re really doing that is hard to mess up this marriage thing.

I’ve never met anybody who doesn’t like to hear those words that build up. What wife wouldn’t like to hear her husband say, “Honey, I love you so much and I love your beautiful eyes, I could just get lost in your eyes.” What husband wouldn’t like to hear his wife tell him, “Honey, I’m proud of you and who you are. I do love you and I love being with you.” There may be times when you’re not totally convinced of these things when you say them, but saying them helps them to become a reality for both of you. Find those things about your spouse that you love and let those be a beginning place for strengthening your marriage. This is the ministry of speaking.

Some of you may have known Arthur and Marge Hinnah. Arthur was a pastor for over 50 years and was even a pastor here Saint Paul’s at one point. He and Marge died several years ago. But if you knew them as a couple, you were blessed. If you ever had the chance to visit with them together you had the chance to see a world of love and respect. When I visited with them in their home I almost always left in a sense of awe. Every time I was with them they flattered each other. They would look at each other with a love and joy that sometimes I don’t see in the eyes of people who’ve been married just a few years.

Marge died after Arthur did and shortly after that their son John dropped off a big box of sermons and letters from Arthur that he thought I should have. That box sat in my office for quite a while and then I took a couple of hours one day and began to go through it. Along with the sermons, there were decades of anniversary cards, birthday cards and letters that Marge and Arthur gave to each other. It was mesmerizing to read. Over and over they wrote about how much they loved each other, and cherished each other as friends, confidants, lovers, supporters and companions. Those were very moving moments as I read through those cards and letters.

Arthur and Marge were married over 60 years and they faced trials and challenges together, but they were always there for each other. They were there to hold each other up and cheer each other on. When you were with them you sensed that they were each other's biggest cheerleaders. They always walked hand in hand when I saw them. They may have said it was to help each other along, but you could tell they just liked the feel each other hands.

They were a couple who talked, who shared, who were gentle in their words. In their relationship they lived out James 1:19. They were role models for all of us. The ministry of communication is at the heart of what God intends for us in our relationships.

When you leave today, whether you're married or single, I'd like for you to take these words with you and invite God to give you the strength to live them out. Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry. And for today that is the Good News. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I thank Rev. Adam Hamilton for his sermon and on these texts and his book Making Love Last a Lifetime. I am also thankful for Gary Smalley and his book Hidden Keys of a Loving, Lasting Marriage, and Dr. John Gray for his book, Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus. I have also drawn from Gary Chapman's book The Five Love Languages.