

Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

Marital Communication

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I. Biblical References

“Now if you have known anything of Christ's encouragement and of his reassuring love; if you have known something of the fellowship of his Spirit, and of compassion and deep sympathy, do make my joy complete -- live together in harmony, live together in love, as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you. Never act from motives of rivalry or personal vanity, but in humility think more of each other than you do of yourself. None of you should think only of his own affairs, but consider other people's interests also" (Phil. 2:1-4).

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things” (Phil. 4:8).

II. Introduction

The study of communication is fascinating. We've all had the experience of saying something that was completely misinterpreted. And we all know that it's possible to say something verbally but imply something completely different through our nonverbal actions. For example, a man may look at his wife and say, “Nice dress.” But what does he mean? Does he like the dress, or does he hate the dress? Is he seeing his wife as trying to please him, or as spending too much money? His tone of voice and body language tell the “rest” of the story after the words leave his mouth.

The true intent of our words is interpreted more by how we say them, than by what we say. In fact, research has found that between 70 – 90% of all human communication is nonverbal. Our words are tempered by our body language, facial expression, tone of voice, gestures, attitude, choice of words, and many other factors. A cool and silent response often speaks more than words could express. A hug and a kiss often overcome even the most difficult and badly expressed concern.

The total process of communication is actually enormously complex. Much of it boils down to the quality of the relationship between the communicating parties. If the relationship is basically happy, trusting, positive and caring, then almost no matter what we say, it will be given the benefit of the doubt and a positive “spin” will be added through interpretation of the words. Conversely, if the relationship is basically conflicted, untrusting, negative and cold, then almost

no matter what we may say, it will be interpreted as badly as possible and a negative “spin” will be overlaid upon the actual words. The words could be identical in both cases, but the message given and the message received will vary dramatically.

So when a couple comes into a therapist’s office complaining that they just don’t seem to be able to communicate very well any more, the therapist knows that “communication” per se is not the problem. In fact, it’s likely that both parties are communicating exactly what they wish to say to each other, but neither likes what they’re hearing, and both are seeking some way to overcome the resistance they feel in one another. Yet communication is blamed for the painful or dysfunctional relational dynamics.

This chapter will focus on “how to communicate.” The information will be well thought through and professional. However, if what you read in this chapter isn’t helpful in some particular relationship, don’t blame communication. Look at the heart of the relationship.

III. The Nunally Model

In 1991 Nunally published a model of understanding communication. The name of the book was *“The Awareness Wheel.”* In this model he studied five components of communication.

A. Facts

Most people believe that they function primarily in the world of “facts.” A simple reporting of “facts” might include thoughts such as: It is -40 degrees below zero Fahrenheit. Unless it is cloudy, the sky is blue. Hot air rises. Two plus two equals four. Sunburn hurts. My dog weighs 90 pounds.

B. Interpretations, thoughts, perceptions

Facts are almost always overlaid with interpretations, thoughts and perceptions. So when a person says, “It’s a lovely day,” they’re expressing their perspective on lovely days, and assume that they are stating a fact. If this person is an Eskimo in the middle of January, and they just love those -40 below zero clear days on the tundra, then not everyone is likely to agree with their assessment of “facts.”

This dynamic is true more frequently than we might imagine. Two people work in the same office doing the same job ~ one has “a lovely” job; the other has “a rotten” job. Same office, same job, two different sets of interpretations, thoughts or perceptions.

Interpretations, thoughts and perceptions often provide different “meanings” to facts, and they frequently also imply motive. For example, if you stepped on my toes I might think you’re clumsy. But I might just as easily think you’re an insensitive person. I might begin to wonder how you could be so insensitive, and ponder your relationship with your....