



topic 2

COMMUNICATION

Relationship Skills
for Marriage:
Practicing TLC

“... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace.”

EPHESIANS 4:2-3



GOALS

- To introduce communication skills and principles to help you grow in intimacy throughout marriage
- To understand how your communication as husband and wife can reflect the love and respect you have for one another as intended by God

"I VALUE YOUR AFFECTION ABOVE ALL THINGS, AND NOTHING IS SO BITTER OR SO PAINFUL TO ME, AS EVER TO BE AT VARIANCE WITH YOU."

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Good communication is a learned skill that requires intention, effort, and practice. It is the cornerstone for effective decision-making in marriage, which is why approaching one another with sensitivity, thoughtfulness, and self-awareness is important.

Effective Communication Involves Three Basic Steps, Known as TLC:

Effective **T**alking

Effective **L**istening

Effective **C**hecking

EFFECTIVE TALKING

Make a complaint, not a criticism.

"I am overwhelmed by the amount of laundry that needs folding here. Will you help?"

Begin with an underlying positive.

"I love that you want us to stay healthy. Can we revisit the diet conversation after I've finished this buffalo chicken calzone?"

Avoid generalizations.

"You always come home late." Or, "You never pick up your socks."

Stick to the topic. Don't pile on.

"You didn't pick up the dry cleaning like you said you would, and I told you I hate that old shirt. By the way, I hate manicotti."

Use "I" statements.

"I feel frustrated when you aren't home at the time you said that you would be. I was hoping we'd have dinner together tonight before it got too late."

Use the 1-2-3 formula. "I feel 1, when 2, because of 3."

Here's an example of more effective talking, using some elements from above:

"What you have to say matters to me. I feel hurt when you make sarcastic comments about me in front of others because it embarrasses me. I know that you love me so I'm asking you not to do that anymore."

EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Listen to understand, not to respond. Active listening is about hearing what your spouse has to say simply for understanding. Preparing your response in advance as another person explains his/her perspective puts you in reactive/offensive mode.

Be empathetic. Try to see things from the other person's perspective. Things to consider: We're all shaped by our families of origin, past relationships, and life experiences. When listening, try to put yourself in your spouse's position.

Understanding is not agreement. You do not need to agree with your spouse's perspective. Your job is to let your spouse know they've been heard and understood.

EFFECTIVE CHECKING

Articulate understanding. Don't say that you understand; demonstrate it.

The listener asks the talker if he or she understood correctly.

"I want to be sure I'm understanding you ... are you saying that you're upset because you wanted us to do the planting project together, or are you upset that it is not done the way you'd envisioned it would be?"

Be open to correction. When you describe what you think your spouse is expressing, be open to him or her clarifying or even gently correcting you. Your attitude needs to be a genuine desire to understand your spouse's perspective (even if you end up disagreeing with it.)

The talker should clarify to help the listener "get it."

"Yes, you are correct. I was upset that you went ahead and planted before talking it through with me. I had hoped we could plant them together because it didn't come out the way I had envisioned it."

"SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND."

ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION TO REMEMBER

- 1 Listen willingly and express yourself effectively.
- 2 Be curious rather than judgmental.
- 3 Be thoughtfully responsive rather than emotionally reactive.
- 4 Be aware that your interpretation does not necessarily reflect your spouse's intent.

- 5 Be aware of interactive patterns in your relationship.
- 6 Be sensitive about your timing, tone, and body language.
- 7 Persevere.

Ok, here's an eighth principle. Always try to see Christ in your spouse and let them see Christ in you – it will change how you approach the other person.

"THE PLEASURE OF BELONGING TO ONE ANOTHER LEADS TO SEEING LIFE AS A COMMON PROJECT, PUTTING THE OTHER'S HAPPINESS AHEAD OF MY OWN, AND REALIZING WITH JOY THAT THIS MARRIAGE ENRICHES SOCIETY. AS LOVE MATURES, IT ALSO LEARNS TO NEGOTIATE ... AN INTERPLAY OF GIVE AND TAKE FOR THE GOOD OF THE [OTHER]."

POPE FRANCIS, *AMORIS LAETITIA*, 220

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

When communication isn't intentional and residual problems persist, marriages can suffer "death by a million paper cuts." Developing **TLC** skills from the onset can strengthen your marriage. You and your spouse grow closer when you communicate more intentionally about the positive and the negative. This way of communicating builds intimacy between the two of you over time and eventually becomes second nature.

An individual who has honed these skills will strengthen his/her ability to communicate with others at work, family members, children, and in most conflict situations. You can start small and build upon the talking, listening, and checking over time. Practice and perseverance are the goals here.

"...bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also do."

COLOSSIANS 3:13

PERSONAL TAKEAWAY

What is one thing that stood out or one action you want to take after reviewing this topic?

COUPLE REFLECTION

What topics do you communicate really well with one another? What topics do you struggle with? How will you work as a couple to overcome the difficult topics?

ACTIVITY

COMMUNICATION SKILLS PRACTICE

1. TALKING: One person is the talker. Choose an issue that has some emotion for you, but is not volatile. Here is a possibility:

How do you feel about how we communicate as a couple?

2. LISTENING: The other person is the listener and empathically responds. To get you oriented in the right direction, you may want to begin your response with:

"It sounds like you feel _____ because _____."

"It seems that you feel _____ because _____."

"You feel _____ because _____."

Or think to yourself (but preferably don't say out loud): "What I hear you saying is . . .," and then summarize the thoughts and feelings that were expressed.

3. CHECKING: Check to see if the response was accurate. For example, *"Did I get that right?"* or *"Did I understand you correctly?"* Make adjustments to the empathic response as needed.
4. SWITCH ROLES: The talker now listens and the listener becomes the talker, again checking to see if the empathic response was accurate. You can continue going back and forth multiple times, as needed or desired.

RESOURCE

DECISION-MAKING

Below is a common decision-making process that incorporates some of St. Ignatius of Loyola's writings on discerning which decision to make.

- 1 **Frame the issue-at-hand as a question.**
For example, "Should we send our kids to Catholic school?"
- 2 **In prayer, present the question to God.**
Pray that God will direct you and reveal his will for you. There are three ways we can know God's will:
 - **Church teaching:** Does Church teaching provide an answer for the decision you need to make?
 - **Clarity without doubt:** There are some things that God clearly reveals to us so that we do not doubt and we know a specific course of action we are to follow.
 - **Clarity over time:** God may reveal his will through many different experiences over time. You may not get an instant answer, but a pattern of experiences that consistently draw us to one option.
- 3 **If it's not clearly answered in the above ways, then brainstorm possible solutions to the question you have asked.**
- 4 **Review the brainstormed options, and remove the options that appear unrealistic.**
- 5 **Create a pro/con list with the remaining options and discuss using TLC.**
- 6 **Make a decision and write it down.**
- 7 **Decide each of your roles in bringing this decision to fruition.**
- 8 **Seek confirmation from God and plan a specific date to follow-up with one another on this decision after some time has passed.**

STILL STUCK? A FEW MORE IDEAS

1. Imagine that a friend or family member approached you with this same dilemma. What advice would you give them? This may be the advice you yourself should follow.
2. Pretend as though you have made a decision. Choose one and live into the reality of it for a few days. Review how you feel by asking yourself: Am I at peace? Does it feel right? Am I comfortable/uncomfortable with this choice?
3. Imagine yourself from the perspective of your death and ask yourself what decision you would look back on and hope you had made during this point in your life. Though it may seem a bit scary, reviewing our life from its end can help us decide what is of utmost importance to us.
4. Seek advice from individuals who know you, love you, and have your ultimate good in mind. This may mean a friend or family member, but sometimes an objective third party is more ideal. A person who would not necessarily be impacted by your decision may be able to help you interpret the movements of your heart more clearly.
5. Envision yourself living out each option in detail. Invite God to participate in this imaginative experiment with you. Present each option to God and pay attention to how you feel and what stirs in you.

LEARN MORE:

Father Timothy Gallagher, OMV,

Discerning the Will of God: An Ignatian Guide to Christian Decision Making

**"IT IS THE LORD
WHO GOES BEFORE
YOU; HE WILL BE
WITH YOU AND WILL
NEVER FAIL YOU OR
FORSAKE YOU. SO
DO NOT FEAR OR BE
DISMAYED."**

DEUTERONOMY 31:8