

THE GIFT OF LISTENING

From *More Communication Keys for Your Marriage* by H. Norman Wright

One of the greatest gifts one person can give to another is the gift of listening. It can be an act of love and caring. Too often conversations today between married couples are dialogues of the deaf. If a husband listens to his wife, she feels, "I must be worth hearing." If a wife ignores her husband, he thinks, "I must be dull and boring." Have you had the experience of being really listened to?

Look at these verses from the Word of God that talk about how God listens:

"The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open to their cry. The face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. The righteous cry and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (Ps. 34:15-18).

"I love the Lord, because He hears my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I shall call upon Him as long as I live" (Ps. 116:1-2).

"Call to Me, and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know" (Jer. 33:3).

The Word of God also gives us directives concerning how we are to listen:

"He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13).

"Any story sounds true until someone tells the other side and sets the record straight" (Prov. 18:17, *TLB*).

"The wise man learns by listening; the simpleton can learn only by seeing scorners punished" (Prov. 21:11, *TLB*).

"Let every man be quick to hear (a ready listener)" (Jas. 1:19, *AMP*).

What do we mean by listening? What do we mean by hearing? Is there a difference? Hearing is basically to gain content or information for your own purposes. Listening is caring for and being empathic toward the person who is talking. Hearing means that you are concerned about what is going on inside you during the conversation. Listening means you are trying to understand the feelings of the other person and are listening for his sake.

Let me give you a threefold definition of listening. Listening means that when your spouse is talking to you:

1. You are not thinking about what you are going to say when he/she stops talking. You are not busy formulating your response. You are concentrating on what is being said and are putting into practice Proverbs 18:13.
2. You are completely accepting what is being said without judging what he/she is saying or how he/she says it. You may fail to hear the message if you are thinking that you don't like your Spouse's tone of voice or the words he/she is using. You may react on the spot to the tone and content and miss the meaning. Perhaps he/she hasn't said it in the best way, but why not listen and then come back later when both of you are calm and discuss the proper wording and tone of voice? Acceptance does not mean you have to agree with the content of what is said. Rather, it means that you understand that what your spouse is saying is something he/she feels.
3. You should be able to repeat what your spouse has said and what you think he/she was feeling while speaking to you. Real listening implies an obvious interest in your spouse's feelings and opinions and an attempt to understand them from his/her perspective.

Failing to listen may actually increase the amount of talking coming your way.

Joyce Landorf explains: *Your wife may be a compulsive talker. Was she always that way, even before you were married? Or did she just seem to get that way with time? Some women talk at the moment of birth and a steady stream follows each moment of their lives forever after, but others have developed a nonstop flow of talk for other reasons. Many times a compulsive talker is really shouting to be heard by someone. The more bored you look, the more you yawn, the more you watch the dog or TV, the harder she talks. She just talks all the more to compensate. You may have stopped listening a long time ago, and she knows that better than anybody. Do you think this has happened to you? When was the last time that you asked these question of your wife? "How do you feel about. . . ?" and/or "What happened here at home today?" Do you ever intersperse her remarks with, "You may be right, Hon." If your wife feels you are not willing to listen to her, she has two options: to talk louder and harder; or to talk less and withdraw. Either way, it's very hard on the marriage.*

You can learn to listen, for it is a skill to be learned. Your mind and ears can be taught to hear more clearly. Your eyes can be taught to see more clearly. But the reverse is also true. You can learn to hear with your eyes and see with your ears. Jesus said: "Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; and you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn again, and I should heal them'" (Matt. 13:13-15).

Let your ears hear and see.

Let your eyes see and hear.

The word *hear* in the New Testament does not usually refer to an auditory experience. It usually means "to pay heed." As you listen to your spouse you need "to pay heed" to what he or she is sharing. It means tuning into the right frequency. Because of my retarded son, Matthew, who does not have a vocabulary, I have learned to listen to him with my eyes. I can read his nonverbal signals which carry a message. Because of Matthew I have learned to listen to what my counselees cannot put into words. I have learned to listen to the message behind the message—the hurt, the ache, the frustration, the loss of hope, the fear of rejection, the feeling of betrayal, the rejection, the joy, the delight, the promise of change. I reflect upon what I see on a client's face, his posture, walk, pace, and tell him what I see. This gives him an opportunity to explain further what he is thinking and feeling. He knows I'm tuned in to him.

Three Components of Communication

Every message has three components: (1) the actual content, (2) the tone of voice, and (3) the nonverbal communication. It is possible to express many different messages using the same word, statement, or question simply by changing our tone of voice or body movement. Nonverbal communication includes facial expression, body posture, and actions.

The three components of communication must be complementary in order for a simple message to be transmitted. One researcher has suggested that successful communication consists of 7 percent content, 38 percent tone of voice, 55 percent nonverbal communication. We often send confusing messages because the three components are contradicting each other. When a man says to his wife with the proper tone of voice, "Dear, I love you," but with his head buried in a newspaper, what is she to believe? When a woman asks, "How was your day?" in a flat tone while passing her husband on the way to the other room, what does he respond to, the verbal or nonverbal message?

A husband, as he leaves for work, comes up to his wife, smiles, gives her a hug and a kiss, and states in a loving voice, "I really love you." After he leaves she feels good. But when she notices the newspaper in the middle of the room, pajamas on the bed, dirty socks on the floor, and the toothpaste tube with the cap off lying in the sink, her good feeling begins to dissipate. She has told her husband how important it is to her that he assume responsibility for cleaning up after himself because it makes extra work for her when he doesn't. But he has been careless again. She believed him when he left for work, but now she wonders, "If he really meant what he said and really loves me, why doesn't he show it by assuming some responsibility? I wonder if he really does love me." His earlier actions contradicted his message of love, even though the message may have been sent properly.

Concerning nonverbal communication, Dr. Mark Lee writes: *Marital problems may grow out of unsatisfactory nonverbal communications. Vocal variables are important carriers of meaning. We interpret the sound of a voice, both consciously and subconsciously. We usually can tell the emotional meanings of the speaker by voice pitch, rate of speech, loudness, and voice quality. We can tell the sincerity or insincerity, the conviction or lack of conviction, the truth or falsity of most statements we hear. When a voice is raised in volume and pitch, the words will not convey the same meaning as when spoken softly in a lower register. The high, loud voice, with rapid rate and harsh quality, will likely communicate a degree of emotion that will greatly obscure the verbal message. The nonverbal manner in which a message is delivered is registered most readily by the listener. It may or may not be remembered for recall. However, the communicator tends to recall what he said rather than the manner of his speech.*

There are many types of listening. Some people listen for facts, information, and details for their own use. Others listen because they feel sorry for the person. They feel a sense of pity. Some people listen to gossip because they revel in the juicy story of another person's failures or difficulties. There are occasions when people listen out of obligation, necessity, or to be polite. Some who listen are nothing more than voyeurs who have an incessant need to pry and probe into other people's lives.

Obstacles to Listening

Some listen because they care. Why do you listen? What are your motives? Any or all of the above? Listening which springs from caring builds closeness, reflects love, and is an act of grace. Sensitive listening and hearing are open mine shafts to intimacy. Too often the potential for listening lies untapped within us like a load of unmined gold. All of us have barriers which inhibit our listening. Some are simple and others complex. In order for caring listening to occur we need to be aware of some of the common listening obstacles to communication.

Defensiveness is a common obstacle. We are busy in our minds thinking up a rebuttal, an excuse, or an exception to what our spouse is saying. In doing this we miss the message. There are a variety of defensive responses.

1. *Perhaps we reach a premature conclusion.* "All right, I know just what you're going to say. We've been through this before and it's the same old thing."
2. *Or we may read into his/her words our own expectations, or project onto another person what we would say in the same situation.* David Augsburger writes, "Prejudging a communication as uninteresting or unimportant lifts the burden of listening on one's shoulders and frees the attention to wander elsewhere. But two persons are being cheated: the other is not being given a fair hearing, and the listener is being deprived of what may be useful information. I want to cancel all advance judgments—prejudgments—and recognize them for what they are, prejudices want to hear the other in a fresh, new way with whatever energies I have available."
3. *Rehearsing our responses* -- rehearsing a response (as well as other defensive postures) is not what the Scripture is calling us to do as a listener. "He who answers a matter before he hears the facts, it is folly and shame to him" (Prov. 18:13, AMP).
4. *Responding to gun-power words.* Gun-power words hook you into a negative defensive response. They create an inner explosion of emotions. Gun-power includes, "That's crude"; "That's just like a woman (or man)"; "You're *always* late"; "You *never* ask me what I think"; "You're becoming just like your mother." Not only do we react to gun-power words but we may consciously choose to use some which makes it difficult for our spouse to listen. What are the gun-power words that set you off? What is your spouse's list of gun-power words? Certain selected words can cut and wound.

Not all defensiveness is expressed. Outwardly we could be agreeing but inside we are saying just the opposite. If your spouse confronts you about a behavior or attitude you display that is creating a problem, do you accept the criticism or defend yourself?

Look at the guidance of Scripture:

"If you refuse criticism you will end in poverty and disgrace; if you accept criticism you are on the road to fame" (Prov. 3:18, TLB).

"Don't refuse to accept criticism; get all the help you can" (Prov. 23:12, TLB).

"it is a badge of honor to accept valid criticism" (Prov. 25:12, TLB).

"A man who refuses to admit his mistakes can never be successful. But if he confesses and forsakes them, he gets another chance" (Prov. 28:13, TLB).

Another listening barrier may be attitudes or biases we hold toward certain individuals. These could include people who speak in a certain tone of voice, ethnic groups, the opposite sex, people who remind us of someone from our past, etc. Because of our biases we reject the person or the personality without listening to what the person has to say. In effect we are saying, "If you're——— (and I don't like people who are———) I don't need to listen to you."

Our own personal biases will affect how well we listen more than we realize. For example, it may be easier for us to listen to an angry person than a sarcastic person; or some tones or phrases are enjoyable to listen to, whereas others may be annoying; repetitive phrases which another uses (and may be unaware of) can bother us; excessive gestures such as talking with the hands or waving arms can be a distracter.

Some people are distracted in their listening because of the *sex of the person who is speaking*. Our expectations of what a man shares and doesn't share and what a woman should or should not share will influence us. We may listen more or less attentively to someone who is in a position over us, under us, or in a prestigious position. We may assign *stereotypes* to other people, and this influences our listening to them. One person hears with *optimism* and another with *pessimism*. I hear the bad news and you hear the good news. If your spouse shares a frustration and difficult situation with you, you may not hear him because you don't like complaining; it bothers you. Or you may hear him as a person who trusts you enough to share.

Our own inner struggles may block our listening. We have difficulty listening when our emotional involvement reaches the Point where we are unable to separate ourselves from the other person. You may find it easier to listen to the problems of other people rather than your own spouse's. You are hindered by your emotional involvement. Listening may also be difficult if you blame yourself for the other person's difficulties. Hearing what someone else is saying may bring to the surface *feelings about similar problems we are facing*. Our listening may be hindered if we are fearful that our own emotions may be activated too much. A man may feel very ill at ease as his emotions begin to surge to the surface. Can you think of a time when in listening to another person you felt so overwhelmed with feelings that you were unable to hear?

If someone has *certain expectations* for you, you may be hindered in listening to that person. If you dislike the other person you probably will not listen to him very well. When people speak too loudly or softly you may struggle to keep listening.

Do you know what the hindrances are to your listening?

Who is responsible for the obstacle? Your partner or you?

You can overcome the obstacles.

The initial step is to identify the obstacle. Of those listed, which obstacle do you identify as yours?

Who controls this barrier? You or the one speaking?

Perhaps you can rearrange the situation or conditions so listening would be easier.

You may need to discuss as a couple what each of you can do to become a better listener and what you can do to make it easier for your spouse to listen to you.

Another obstacle which hurts the listening process is similar to defensiveness—it is interrupting. You may erect this barrier because you feel the other person is not getting to the point fast enough. Or you may be thinking ahead and start asking for information which would be forthcoming anyway. Your mind wanders and races ahead. You say, "Hold it. I've got a dozen ideas cooking because of what you said. Let me tell you some of them . . ." "It is easy for our minds to wander, for we think at five times the rate we can speak. If a person speaks at 100 words a minute and you listen to 500, do you put your mind on hold or daydream the rest of the time? We process information faster than it can be verbalized, so we can choose to stay in pace with the speaker or let our minds wander.

You may find yourself facing yet another obstacle—overload. Perhaps you have used up all the space available in your mind for information. Someone else comes along with a new piece of information and you feel you just can't handle it. You feel as though you are being bombarded from all sides and you don't have enough time to digest it all. Thus it becomes difficult to listen to anything. Your mind feels like a juggler with too many items to juggle.

Timing is another common obstacle. Have you ever heard comments such as these, "Talk? Now? At 2:30 in the morning?" "Just a minute. There's only thirty-five seconds left in the final quarter of the game." "I'd like to listen but I'm already late for an appointment." *Physical exhaustion presents another obstacle.* Both mental and physical fatigue make it difficult to listen. There are times when you need to let your partner know that this is not a good time, but tell him/her when you will be able to listen.

Have you heard of *selective attention*? Another way of expressing this obstacle is filtered listening, screening the information being shared. If we have a negative attitude we may ignore, distort, or reject positive messages. Often we hear what we want to hear or what fits in with our mind set. If we engage in selective listening, we probably engage in selective retention. That means we remember certain comments and situations and forget those which we reject. We each—even at our best—see in part, understand only in part, and recall only a small part.

Steps to Better Listening

How can you become a better listener?

Understand what you feel about your spouse. How you view your spouse affects how you listen to him or her. A partner's communication is colored by how you view him. This view may have been shaped by your observations of his past performance or by your own defensiveness.

Listen with your ears, your eyes, and your body. If your partner asks, "Are you listening to me?" and you say, "Yes" while walking away or fixing dinner or doing the dishes, perhaps you aren't really listening. Concentrate on the person and the message, giving your undivided attention. Turn off the appliance or TV when there is an important matter to talk about; set aside what you are doing and listen.

There are several responses that you could make to indicate to your spouse that you are listening and catching all of what he is saying.

1. *Clarifying* is one of these responses. This response reflects on the true meaning and the intention of what has been said. "I think what you're saying is that you trust me to keep my promise to you, but you are still a bit concerned about my being away just before your birthday."
2. *Observing* is another skill. This response focuses upon the nonverbal or tonal quality of what your partner has said. "I noticed that your voice was dropping when you talked about your job."
3. Another response is called *reflective listening*. A reflective statement attempts to pick up the feelings expressed. Usually feeling word is included in the response, such as, "You seem quite sad (joyful, happy, delighted, angry, etc.) about that."
4. *Inquiring* is yet another helpful response. An inquiry draws out more information about the meaning of what was said. A very simple response would be, "I would like you to tell me more if you can."

Be patient, especially if your spouse is a slow or a hesitant talker. You may have a tendency to jump in whenever you can find an opening, finish a statement, or hurry him along. You cannot assume that you really know what is going to be said. You cannot read your partner's mind.

Listen to your spouse in love. When you listen in love you are able to wait for the person to share his/her thoughts, feelings and what he or she really means.

Communication Levels:

As we go down step by step, our communication becomes both deeper, more personal and better!

Clichés

Facts

Opinions

Feelings

Needs

Ten Commandments for Better Listening:

1. *On passing judgment.* Thou shalt neither judge nor evaluate until thou hast truly understood. "Hold it right there, I've heard enough to know where you stand and you're all wet."
2. *On adding insights.* Thou shalt not attribute ideas or contribute insights to those stated. "If you mean this, it will lead to there, and then you must also mean that."
3. *On assuming agreement.* Thou shalt not assume that what you heard is what was truly said or what was really meant. "I know what you meant, no matter what you say now. I heard you with my own ears."
4. *On drifting attention.* Thou shalt not permit thy thoughts to stray or thy attention to wander. "When you said that, it triggered an interesting idea that I like better than yours."
5. *On closing the mind.* Thou shalt not close thy mind to opposing thoughts, thy ears to opposite truths, thy eyes to other views. "After you used that sexist language I didn't hear another thing you said."
6. *On wishful hearing.* Thou shalt not permit thy heart to rule thy mind, nor thy mind thy heart. "I just knew you were going to say that, I had it figured all along."
7. *On multiple meanings.* Thou shalt not interpret words except as they are interpreted by the speaker. "If I were to stop breathing, would I or would I not expire?"
8. *On rehearsing responses.* Thou shalt not use the other's time to prepare responses of your own. "I can't wait until you need a breath! Have I got a comeback for you."
9. *On fearing challenge.* Thou shalt not fear correction, improvement or change. "I'm talking faster and snoring you because I don't want to hear what you've got to say."
10. *On evading equality.* Thou shalt not over-demand time or fail to claim your own time to hear and be heard. "I want equal time. I want you to feel equally heard."

The language of the lovers in The Song of Songs

By Barry McWilliams

Without verbal lovemaking, there would be no beauty and little feeling in love. It would be cold and impersonal. Too often today the media portray the communication between lovers as coarse or ugly. A book in the Bible, The Song of Songs, gives us a much better picture of "love talk" that is beautiful, which builds up our spouses and our marriages and is much more honoring to God.

In preparing this study, I examined the vocabulary of the Song of Songs of Solomon, God's "marriage manual". The following observations draw on this study, and then expand with more principles in regard to our "Love Talk": the manner in which married couples communicate their love for each other.

In this "Song" there is a definite beauty of speech that stands out even when expressing the most intimate of thoughts. There is much explicit and intimate talk in the Song, in fact, there is enough to make anyone blush. There are plenty of definite references to the sexual organs of the body - the breasts, etc - and many more "suggestions".

There is a considerable "poetic" use of words - creating with verbal imagery lovely expressions of feelings and emotions that are hard to put into words. There is the richness and beauty of comparison as they describe one another in terms of animals or plants, and their pet names for each other. Expressions abound with double meaning - a reference to "*Blow on my garden that its fragrance may spread abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits*" expresses her desire for his intimate sexual contact with her genitals in a way that is beautiful without vulgarity, or clinical coldness, especially when read in the larger context of the garden and plant imagery throughout the book.

There are a number of observations to be drawn from this use of imagery between married lovers:

We have to recognize that it is a secret love language that this couple has created to express their feelings for each other.

It is for the privacy of the bed-chamber. These words with their explicit meanings are for the ears of the beloved alone - they are not used in conversations with others, or, crudely to titillate the general public.

Much of their love language is drawn from the pleasant things of their backgrounds. How appropriate the botanical illusions of gardens and fruit from and to a girl who has grown up working in the vineyards. Drawn from daily life, these have been infused with sincere and honest emotional expressions of love.

The lovers in the Song communicate much more than just passion in their secret language.

There almost seems to be a third level of meaning behind the words. For behind the literal and poetic meaning are statements concerning character and personality. For example, in the description of the bride in Chapter 4 are not only references to her physical beauty, but also declarations as to her character as well. Perhaps we can learn from this to create a love language that speaks to more than the physical, and carries with it much more.

The lovers are both profuse and frank in their love talk.

They do not make love in silence, nor do they hesitate to express desire and delight in explicit ways. There is no inhibition in either man or wife. Each tells the other what is desired or what pleases.

There is much romantic talk! The smooth words of the lover who comes courting continue on into their marriage as he woos and arouses his wife again and again with his words. The bride does not hold back on responding to his love talk with her own "sensual" speech. In fact, nearly half of the 117 verses in the Song are hers. Love is constantly expressed in a variety of ways and settings .

How "sensual" is both their lovemaking and their love talk.

There are repeated references to fragrance and taste and sight and touch. Kisses are sweeter than wine, lovemaking is fragrant with myrrh, and the lovers describe each other intimately. There is much ornamentation and beauty in their clothing and the settings of their love. There is an elegance and a sense of preciousness that speaks loudly of how special their love is.

The lovers stir one another's imaginations with their talk. They create fantasies with their words and build anticipation of delights to come. For him to speak of "*climbing the palm tree and taking hold of its fruit*" or her to speak of him "*browsing among the lilies*" certainly heightens the passion of the other.

How aware they are of each other, and also how constant and positive they are in expressing their appreciation of one another.

He is sensitive to her insecurity and repeated need of encouragement and moves to meet that need with his words. She responds to him similarly, letting him know how pleased she is in him and by his loving. We can infer from this that they were active listeners - hearing not only the words, but also the feelings and needs behind them.

This kind of openness does not come readily. Lovers must prepare the way to the wonders of sexual communion through open communication and much talk. Marriage books unanimously state the greatest need for married people today is to talk to each other.

There is richness and variety of mood and atmosphere, of time and place. But often the words of the lovers are what makes the moment so romantic, so seductive, so sensual, so special as they express their love for one another. Romantic gestures, and places will never compensate for the absence of verbalized expressions of love.

Open communication lines are an important pre-requisite for the "one flesh" experience. While love talk must be private (as all deeply personal communication must be based upon the trust that confidences will not be betrayed), Love talk should not be confined to the bedroom, though it often leads the way into it.

We can draw the following principles from this love song:

1. There should be frequent and varied expression of love between lovers. Love talk ought to be a constant on-going process. That requires deliberate effort by both partners.
2. These expressions consist of positive expressions of appreciation and affirming the value of one's spouse as they are. One key message of the Song is the importance of building up one another through the communicating of that which we respect, admire, and cherish in the personality and character of another person to them. It is not negative, critical, or complaining in tone.
3. Love talk is honest and sincere in fully sharing oneself and in appreciating our spouses.
4. Love talk is sensitive to the needs and concerns of one's lover, and thus actively listening. Love talk is responsive. It is a dialog of heart and mind.
5. Love talk seeks to be beautiful and pure. It uses lovely and highly expressive language that is both sensual and emotional, but never crude.
6. Love talk is sensual, both in that it includes both verbal and non-verbal communication, and in that it appeals to all the senses. Kisses, hugs, caresses, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and actions are just as important as the words being used. In fact, when verbal and non-verbal communication are not in agreement, we usually trust the non-verbals.
7. Love talk is appropriate to its circumstances. At times, love talk is romantic, at times intimate, sometimes playful, sometimes painful, some times quite serious - at all times it involves building up our spouse and the marriage relationship. It is need orientated, reflecting God's wisdom in making of two different people a oneness where the strengths and weakness of the two balance each other.
8. While very personal desires are often shared, yet such "fantasies" ought to be grounded in reality (loving our spouses and not a dream lover) and honoring to God (not lust-orientated, but love orientated).
9. Love talk is open communication on a variety of levels between two people committed to one another. It is true intimacy, where we give over the keys to our inner selves and become transparent to our mates.

May we learn from the Song of Songs how to bring singing into our marriages through the delights of love talk.

ADJECTIVES & ADVERBS.

Beautiful (13)
 lovely (5)
 beloved (4)
 love
 darling
 bride
 loves
 pleasing (3)
 awaken
 desires
 kiss(es)
 delightful(2)
 browses
 arouse
 delight
 awake
 delights
 gaze
 graze
 embraces
 arise
 hear
 listen
 taste
 desire
 spoke
 held
 sweet
 gazing (1)
 despise
 follow
 leaning
 descend
 lover's
 lovers
 adore
 enclose
 crowns
 charming
 perfect
 peering
 purest
 praise(d)
 contentment
 rejoiced
 radiant
 ruddy
 delights
 flawless
 outstanding
 bright
 lovingly
 handsome

SPICES

spice(s) (7)
 henna (2)

nard
 cinnamon(1)
 calamus
 saffron
 aloes

THEIR BODIES

breasts (8)
 eyes (7)
 head (5)
 heart
 hair
 arm
 mouth (4)
 lips
 neck (3)
 teeth
 cheeks (2)
 legs
 hands
 face
 temples
 arms (1)
 appearance
 hand
 navel
 nose
 finger
 body
 tongue
 tresses
 waist

ANIMALS

flock (5)
 gazelle
 doves (4)
 sheep
 fawns (3)
 stag
 dove
 goats
 foxes (2)
 does
 flocks (1)
 raven
 lions
 mare
 leopards

SMELL

fragrance(8)
 myrrh (4)
 perfume
 incense (3)
 blended (1)
 perfumed
 perfumes

FRUITS

fruit (6)
 pomegranates (3)
 apples (2)
 apple
 pomegranate
 mandrakes
 fig
 wheat

FLOWERS

garden (6)
 lilies
 tree (5)
 vineyards
 vineyard
 bloom (3)
 vines
 cedars (2)
 field
 blossoms
 palm
 budded
 fruits
 lily
 fountain
 gardens
 trees
 clusters
 cluster (1)
 firs
 blossoming
 dew
 growth
 rose
 rains
 flowers
 streams
 orchards
 plants
 pools
 verdant
 waters

FOOD

wine (8)
 miik (3)
 sweetness(2)
 honeycomb
 honey
 banquet (1)
 eat
 nectar
 Goblet
 raisins

JEWELRY & ORNAMENT

silver (4)
 royal (2)
 jewels

earrings (2)
 crown
 shekels
 chariots
 ivory
 carriage
 sword
 elegance (1) decorated
 chrysolite
 cloak
 banner(s)
 necklace
 polished
 panels
 marble
 purple
 ribbon
 jewel
 crowned
 robe
 scarlet
 sandaled
 sapphires
 sachet
 garments
 tapestry
 noblest
 upholstered
 inlaid
 veiled

PLACES

Lebanon (7)
 beds (2)
 mountains
 desert
 tents
 hills
 mountain
 dance (1)
 dens
 chambers
 Hesbon
 Gibeah
 Damascus
 hill
 Carmel
 bath
 earth
 crest
 Kedar
 Mahanaim
 countryside
 forest
 rains
 valley(s)

The most important Eight Minutes of Married Life

There are two extremely critical times for communication between a husband and a wife. Both times involve only four minutes! That all. They are the first four minutes upon awakening in the morning and the first four minutes when you're reunited at the end of the day. These eight minutes can set the tone for the day and the evening. This is a time when couples can share their love and concern, their interests, and can affirm one another, or, they can be angry, curt, critical or indifferent and adversely affect the rest of the day or evening.

Examine the patterns which you have established in your marriage.

Think about the way you respond to each other at these two critical times. What do you say? Are you in a rut?

Think about your morning routine. Is this a time when you want closeness and intimacy, or would you prefer quiet and privacy? How can you make your routine into a time satisfying to both?

What happens during the first four minutes when you are reunited at the end of the day? News, weather, children's misbehavior, bad news, grumbles or complaints? Silence? Does the family pet get more attention than your mate?

Do you give undivided attention, listening with your eyes as well as ears? Do you touch – hugs, kisses, etc.? Are your first remarks complaints? Are you prepared to greet the other? Do you try to look appealing? Do you give space to relax and unwind? Do you head for the phone or the e-mail? Do you ever "surprise" your mate with something special when you come home?

Here are a number of communication guidelines.

Read through them and then complete the "What Do You Think?" portion at the end of the chapter.

1. Greet your spouse after a period of being separated (even if only for a few hours) with a smile, pleasant talk such as a happy greeting, touching and kissing, a compliment, humor, or recounting one of the day's interesting or "success" experiences.
2. Set aside a period of transition between work—or any potentially stressful activity—and other parts of the day. This transition time is designed to provide a "decompression period" so that any pressures, frustrations, fatigue, anger, or anxiety that may have been generated will be less likely to affect marital communication.
3. Never discuss serious subjects or important matters that involve potential disagreement when you or your spouse are overly tired, emotionally upset, sick, injured, or in pain.

4. Set aside a special agreed-upon time every day to take up issues involving decision making, family business, disagreements, and problems. This "Decision Time" should allow for the relaxed and uninterrupted discussion of all decision-making and problem-solving activities. No other activities should be involved, such as eating, driving, or watching television. Take the phone off the hook. It may also help to set a time limit.
5. Some couples have found it helpful to save all complaints about their marriage, disagreements, and joint decisions for the scheduled Decision Time when these matters are taken up. Jot down items as they arise. The way you approach the problem will determine your spouse's response. In the decision sessions, try to reach a specific solution.
6. Set aside a scheduled tune for non-controversial marital conversation, every day if possible. Among the topics that could be discussed are: the experiences you each have had during the day or at other times; non-controversial plans or decisions that involve individual partners; the couple or the family.
7. Each person should have a special "topic turning signal" to signal his or her spouse to change the conversation from a controversial topic. The signal should be an agreed-upon neutral word or phrase.
8. Do not blame your partner. Save matters of complaint and proposed change for the Decision Tune.
9. Stay on the topic being discussed until each of you has had a say.
10. Avoid talk about what happened in the past or what might happen in the future if it is potentially controversial.
11. Be specific in what you talk about. Define your terms and avoid overstatement and generalities.
12. Acknowledge the main points of what your partner says with such words as "I see," "I understand," "Yes," "Um-hm."
13. Try to keep the nonverbal aspects of your communication consistent with the verbal message. Don't express compliments with scowls, or an indifferent tone of voice and a pleasing facial expression.
14. Be as accurate as you can in describing objects or events for your partner. Remember you are describing it from your perspective.
15. Praise your spouse for the things he/she says that you like. Use words that you think will be appreciated.
16. Discuss topics with your partner that you know he/she will like to talk about. If your partner fails to discuss topics to your liking, do not hesitate to suggest that you would like to discuss the desired subjects further.
17. Never exaggerate in order to make a point. If you really want to persuade your spouse, write the subject down and save it for the next Decision Time.
18. Don't mind read or make presumptive statements about what your partner has said.
19. Don't quibble about minor or trivial details.
20. Respond fully but not excessively when your turn comes.
21. Repeat what you think your partner said if you have trouble understanding him, or if you think you did not hear what he or she intended.
22. Help each other to follow the rules. Praise your spouse for rule-consistent talking.

What Do You Think?

Go back through the list and put your initials by each guideline that you would like to apply in your marriage.

After your spouse has done the same, share your selections.

Discuss the steps you will take to implement these principles in your marriage.

Set a date to evaluate how these guidelines are working