

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study Guide

FAMILY LIFE

LESSON 5: BUILDING COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Family Life. The series of lessons looks at spiritual leadership in the home as it pertains to building a healthy Christian family. It begins with an understanding of the Biblical basis for family, and moves on to topics such as preparing for marriage, building good communication between spouses, managing finances, and leading one's children. This series takes the view that spiritual leadership begins in the home, and that both men and women have specific roles in this regard. The lessons present God's best design for families, recognizing that in today's world families can come in many forms. The lessons will benefit those in marriage, those who have the role of a parent, as well as young people looking to create healthy relationships in the future.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



FAMILY LIFE

LESSON 5: BUILDING COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson explores the role of communication in strong marriages, and discusses listening skills that can be used in any relationship.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

Both men and women bear God's Image, and when they do so in a loving marriage relationship, it is a beautiful image indeed! But often men and women have difficulty communicating effectively with one another. Medicine, sociology, psychology and every other branch of learning confirms that men and women are different in more ways than just their physiological makeup. The way they think, socialize, process problems, and communicate is often quite different. In all societies and cultures this difference is unmistakable. But like all things God has designed, this difference is no accident. Both careful communication and active attentive listening will help any two people to communicate more effectively – especially a married couple. The principles of effective listening are of utmost importance, and can also be applied to other areas of life.

GETTING STARTED

1. What are some of the major personality differences between men and women? How do they approach problems differently? How do they communicate when a problem arises?
2. Why does God care about how we communicate with our spouse? From what we've talked about in earlier lessons, what is hindered when we don't communicate well?



STUDY

❖ **MADE TO BE MEN AND WOMEN:** Sometimes we may wonder why God put men and women together to bear His Image, and pass the Gospel to the next generation through family. Men and Women are so different! In fact, sometimes it might seem that they are speaking different languages!

- **Different for a Purpose:** Like all things God has designed, this difference is no accident. It was by God’s design that each of us was assigned a gender and a purpose to fulfill (Genesis 1:27).
- **Biblical Manhood:** Many men in the Bible did not sit around and wait for something good to happen. Instead they courageously moved forward in the direction God had for them, accepted responsibility for their calling, and worked toward that goal. Think about Noah, Moses and David. Sometimes they were afraid, but they were successful because they didn’t let fear stop them. They led their family, protected others, and remained strong in their convictions. A man may be more physically powerful than his wife, but he must use that strength to work hard and protect, rather than harm. A man should lovingly provide what his family needs and humbly lead them, knowing his strength comes from God. Men often see the ‘bigger picture’, and are concerned with what is happening outside the home. They value strength, direction, wisdom, power and respect.

What do the following verses tell you about biblical manhood?

1 Corinthians 16:13-14	
Ephesians 5:23-24	
Exodus 4:20	

- **Biblical Womanhood:** The Bible says that an excellent wife is more precious than jewels! A woman who is following God’s design for her life will be like the Biblical women Sarah, Ruth, Esther and Mary. Their strength comes from their compassion and desire to serve God. They focus on developing the beauty of a quiet spirit, and a life filled with good works and modesty. They live in obedience to God, and trust Him even when they have fears. A woman's role in the home is to provide what her children and husband need emotionally, as well as physically. She should consider their comforts delights before her own. A woman is often more concerned with small details of life and the relationships between family members. She should strive to



excel in communication as she values intimacy, faithfulness, security, fruitfulness and love.

What do the following verses tell you about Biblical womanhood?

1 Timothy 2:9-12	
Ephesians 5:22-24	
Proverbs 31:10-31	

- **Learning from Differences:** In these differences, we can learn from one another. Neither men nor women can see the complete picture of life on their own, but benefit from seeing the other's perspective. God calls us all to try to understand one another, not be harsh but show respect. To do so, we must acknowledge their different priorities, different perspectives and different desires!

What do these verses tell us about the way men and women should relate to one another?

1 Peter 3:7	
Colossians 3:19	
1 Corinthians 13:1-13	



- ❖ **THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION:** Without good communication men and women cannot accomplish their dreams and goals. They feel isolated instead of intimate, and end up working against one another rather than alongside one another.
 - **God's Commitment to Communication:** Consider how God communicates with us! God's Word tells us that married couples are a picture of Christ and the Church. Certainly this symbolizes how important communication is (Ephesians 5:28-32)!
 - He has given us His Word (the Bible), and communicates to us through it (2 Timothy 3:16).
 - He created the world to communicate His glory (Psalm 19:1-2).
 - He communicates personally to us through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-2).
 - He encourages us to pray, and He responds to our prayers (John 15:7, 1 John 5:14).
 - **Jesus models a Commitment to Communication:** Consider the example of Jesus in communication.
 - Jesus asked questions, and listened (Mark 8:27, Mark 9:21).
 - Jesus talked about what was important (Mark 10:21, Matthew 14:27).
 - Jesus expressed how He felt (Mark 8:2, Mark 10:14).
 - Jesus used physical touch as well as words (Matthew 17:7, Mark 10:16).
 - Jesus explained what He meant when there was confusion (Mark 4:34).
 - When He was hurt, He did not retaliate or use words to harm others (1 Peter 2:21-25).
 - **How and what we communicate:** The way we speak to one another has very powerful effects! We can destroy people with the words we say, or we can build them up and encourage them. We honour and love our spouse well when we are careful with our words. Using harmful words to communicate to a person we should love and respect is not just bad and unkind, it is sinful.
 - Jesus used a variety of means to ensure his message was getting across. God communicates to us through words, through the world we can see, through other people, through His Spirit. Do you think people make enough effort to see that they carefully communicate with others, and that their message is understood?

- ❖ **OVERFLOW OF THE HEART:** Sometimes those closest to us experience our worst behaviour. We can be irritable, argumentative and display our worst self in the heat of an argument. Whatever is in our heart will come out in our speech eventually. A large part of building a good marriage is evaluating our own weaknesses and working to improve them. That should precede pointing out the faults of our spouse.



- Read the verses in each category. In one sentence, try and summarize a single biblical principle that is taught in these verses.

Verses	Principle of Communication
James 3:2-12 Proverbs 12:18	
Proverbs 10:19-21 Proverbs 11:13 Proverbs 21:23	
Proverbs 12:25 Proverbs 15:1 Ephesians 4:1-3	
Proverbs 18:21 Ephesians 4:29-32 James 1:19-20	

- **Our Speech Reflects our Heart:** When we use unkind words that harm someone, it is because we don't trust them or we harbour hatred toward them. We should carefully examine our heart if we find ourselves using words that hurt people. This may require much prayer and confession. Our words matter. They show people what we are like inside, and we will have to give an account to God for words spoken (Luke 6:45).
- **Taking Every Thought Captive:** When we have an evil or hateful thought towards someone, the Bible tells us to capture that thought and put it out of our minds. This involves wilfully refusing that thought and stopping it when it returns. We are not at the mercy of our thoughts and feelings! With God's help we can practise thinking good things and loving thoughts about others (2 Corinthians 10:5).
- Finally, what did Jesus tell his disciples about our words in Matthew 12:36-37? How should we speak with these words in mind?



- ❖ **COMMUNICATION AND BEARING THE IMAGE OF GOD:** Everyone wants to be heard and listened to. How we listen to others communicates our love for them, along with the words we speak. When we put aside anger and selfishness in order to better communicate with our spouse, we bear His image well and also find increased intimacy and peace within our marriage. Let us consider what [James 1:19](#) and [Colossians 3:13](#) advise us about everyday communication.

What ?	Why?	How?
Quick To Hear	Learning to listen well and really hear another person is a skill. It is more than simply waiting for another to finish speaking so we have our turn! It helps us understand the other person, what their point of view is, and what they are trying to communicate. When someone is communicating with us, we should give them our full attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at the other person and make natural eye contact. • Position your body so they know you are interested in them. • Ask questions to clarify communication, • Acknowledge their feelings and point of view. • Focus on what they are saying and how they are saying it.
Slow To Speak	Our words can be dangerous weapons or powerful tools. We may want to share our heart and thoughts with others, and defend our position with confidence; however, we don't need to attack another person to make our position stronger. We must be careful and considerate. When we think before we speak we can often avoid hurting the other person. Words spoken out of anger, fear or shame can especially be regretful.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • choose words carefully, and consider the consequences of them. • don't have important discussions while angry or feeling strong emotions • punishing others with our words or attempting to manipulate them isn't acting in love • Some biblical guidance about our words: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Colossians 4:6 - Romans 12:14-15 - Proverbs 14:1-33 <p>be careful when you speak in anger about using words like 'never, always' when talking about someone else – they alienate someone who would otherwise be willing to work on a solution with you.</p>
Slow to Anger	Anger and other strong emotions can cause us to say or do things we later regret. When we belittle someone or bring up something we know will cause them pain, we might later say 'it was the anger speaking'. While it takes practice and is in no way easy to do, we must learn to control our anger before it destroys relationships. We do not have a right to use our anger to harm others regardless of the cause. Emotions such as fear and guilt can act the same.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are too angry to speak, leave the situation and address the issue later • If you cannot leave, count to three inside your head, take a deep breath and visualize a calm place or happy memory. • Consider the truth in God's Word about anger: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Psalm 37:8 - James 1:20 - Proverbs 14:29 - Proverbs 19:11



<p>Quick to Forgive</p>	<p>When others anger us, we must learn to forgive quickly. When we recall the offences we have made against God and how He forgives us so quickly, we can do the same to others. It will take practice. When we feel rage against another, we must remember they are weak and sinful as we are. We must forgive instead of venting our anger on them. We did not deserve God's forgiveness and yet He forgave us. When we are quick to forgive our spouse it does not mean accepting or encouraging their sinful behaviour. We can still express hurt without anger, but with much forgiveness.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when we forgive, we do not say the behaviour is 'okay' or right! • forgiveness happens when we choose to think differently about an event or person. We change our attitude, feelings and response to them. • forgiveness means we stop feelings of revenge, or feelings of being owed restitution, and leave the matter with God. • sometimes our hurt comes from misplaced expectations. When we change our expectations of someone they will disappoint us less. • Consider the Biblical call to forgive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ephesians 4:32 - Matthew 6:14-15 - Proverbs 10:12
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- Which of the above is hardest for you? What person causes you anger right now? What forgiveness do you need to give?

- How would a marriage change for the better if both partners consistently used the above advice?

❖ **BUILDING INTIMACY AND TRUST:** Good communication with your spouse requires that you lovingly listen to them. Marriages should be places of trust, acceptance and intimacy, not a competition or combat zone! It may take years of practice as we surrender our sense of being 'right' and allow for differences.

- **The Communication Cycle:** Communication is more than words flying in one or more directions! In order for communication to be successful, there must be one person who delivers a message and another person who receives and understands it. Simply talking does not count as communication! In order to ensure communication happens:
 - o Ask questions to ensure understanding.



- o Pause, and watch body language.
 - o Use examples when necessary.
 - o Ask your listener to summarize what has been said.
- **Escalation:** When anger and frustration heat up a discussion, here are some ways a couple can continue the communication:
- o **Find out the Facts:** Often angry words and disagreements stem from misunderstanding. When you find yourself in an argument, take a step back and ask for more clarification of the facts. What happened? What exactly is causing the disagreement?
 - o **Consider the Motives:** When a disagreement arises, there are often deeper issues behind it. What might be causing frustration and anger? Are there fears, guilt or resentment causing this argument to erupt?
 - o **Share Feelings:** Instead of accusing your spouse and saying “you never...” or “you always...” which will only aggravate anger, share how their words or actions make you feel. Use words such as “When this happens I feel...” and “I would like...”. No one can disagree with how you feel.
 - o **Play on the Same Team:** Remember that you and your spouse are on the same team, working toward the same goals. Marriage is not a competition – your focus should not be on winning arguments!
 - o **Focus on the Future:** When difficulty arises, focus together on how you both will change patterns of behaviour for the future, rather than on what has happened in the past. It is easy to blame one another and recall bad decisions. Concentrate on making good decisions together.
- **Building Intimacy:** Good communication with one another also contributes to improving our relationship and developing intimacy. These are some of the most important words used in strong marriages:
- o **I love you.**
 - o **Please forgive me.**
 - o **I am sorry.**
 - o **I will take responsibility.**
 - o **What do you think?**
- Consider how your marriage would improve if you and your spouse regularly asked one another questions like these:
- o **How can I love you this week?**
 - o **What do you need from me today?**
 - o **What’s on your mind?**
 - o **What would you like to do right now?**



- ❖ **CONCLUSION:** Though different from each other, both men and women can learn to be better communicators! Instead of fighting against one another for power, we can actively love one another by listening, loving and learning from each other. When we do this, God is glorified.

SUMMARY

- ❖ We were made to be men and women by God for a purpose. Men and women are different, and will need to learn to communicate with one another to have strong marriages.
- ❖ God values effective communication, and we should to. Listening to someone well, and communicating with kindness is one important way we can love others.
- ❖ Our words come from an overflow of our heart. We must take angry thoughts captive and choose to love each other. The change happens within our heart and mind.
- ❖ The Bible advises us to be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger and quick to forgive.
- ❖ We can build intimacy and trust with our careful and loving words.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1.

How do you feel when someone has really heard what you had to say, and has listened well? How do you know? How can they show you?

2.

What is one thing you want to do differently next time you get into a difficult discussion or argument?