

**Family Upreach, Inc.**

Course V: *Christian Marriage Skills*

"Communication in Christian Marriage"

Lesson Four

# *The Christian Marriage*

## COMMUNICATION IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

By

Alan & Shirley Sowders, B.A., M.S.

Brenda Frenzel, Buck Griffith,

Hillery M. Motsinger, Ed.D., L.P.C.

### Unit 18 – Lesson 1

(NewLife Behavior English Edition)



P. O. Box 270720, Corpus Christi, Texas 78427-0720

***"If any person be in Christ, he is a new creature . . . "***  
(Second Corinthians 5:17)

Copyright © January 1996 (Revised 2016) by H. M. Motsinger

## RESPONSE SHEET

Dear Student,

We have found that thoughtful *written* responses greatly enhance the student's understanding of this course material. Therefore, we urge you to use this **Response Sheet** as an aid in the study of this lesson.



### STEP 1: BEFORE YOU START

Before you start this lesson, please write three or four sentences to define communication in a Christian marriage, as you see it. Then, please put this sheet out of sight until you finish the lesson.

### STEP 2: PREPARING TO STUDY

Read the Study Questions on pages 11-12 (do not attempt to answer them now). Then read and study pages 3-10 as you would a chapter of a book.

# COMMUNICATION IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

We will study marital communication and its crucial place in your relationship with your spouse. Communication of any kind is a *skill* that is learned and we can improve it if we really try and apply the suggestions made. Reuel Howe says that *communication* is to *love* – what *blood* is to *body*. When communication stops, love begins to die (The Miracle of Dialogue, page 3).

We truly believe that this study will be very helpful in improving your marriage in dramatic ways. Most concepts suggested find their basis in the Scriptures so be prepared to turn to selections suggested and gain a deeper view of basic truths.

Before continuing, write three or four sentences on the Response Sheet (Page 2) defining communication as you see it as we begin our thoughts together. Then put it out of your sight until the end of this lesson. Read the entire lesson through once without looking up the scriptures. Finally, go back for a more in-depth study before completing the Study Questions on Pages 11-12.

## I. Introduction

Most everyone who reaches “marrying age” feels that they are fairly capable in the art of communicating their thoughts to others. As courtship deepens, more time is spent in conversation. Many couples talk until the wee hours of the morning – sharing with each other as the relationship develops.

When folks marry, they generally assume that things will continue as before. If anyone should be able to communicate, it ought to be folks married to each other.

But . . . experts give us some sobering thoughts:

Paul Faulkner tells us that “the ability to talk freely with understanding for each other seems to be the one factor, more than any other, that determines the quality of other marital ingredients. When communication stops, the other ingredients of marriage suffer.”

**“Poor communication is the main problem in 86% of all troubled marriages” – David Mace, Past President, American Association of Marriage Counselors.**

“The heart of marriage is its communication system. It can be said that the success and happiness of any marriage is measurable in terms of the deepening dialogue which characterizes their union” – Dwight Small, The Marriage Affair, page 326.

**NewLife Behavior – Course V**  
**Unit 18 – Lesson 1**

---

I think you get the “drift” of what all these are saying. Communication is highly important in the marital relationship.

These words are embellished and seasoned by the ideas of Virginia Satir in her book, *Peoplemaking*, (page 31) . . .

“Once a human being has arrived on this earth, communication is the largest single factor determining what kinds of relationships he makes with others and what happens to him in the world about him.”

“Everyone brings the same elements to the communication process.

He brings his body – which moves and has form and shape.

He brings his values – these concepts that represent his way of trying to survive and live the ‘good life.’

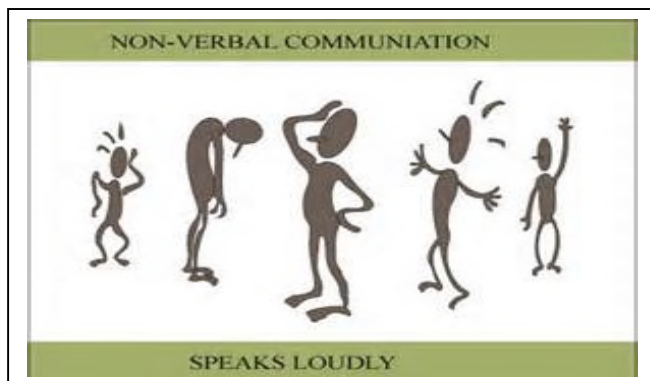
He brings his expectations of the moment, gleaned from past experience.

He brings his sense organs – eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin enable him to see, hear, smell, taste, touch and be touched.

He brings his ability to talk – his words and his voice.

He brings his brain – the storehouse of knowledge, what he has learned from past experience, what he has read and been taught.

“Communication is like a film camera equipped with sound (mini-cam). It works in the present, right here, right now, between you and me.”



**One researcher has suggested that successful communication consists of 7% content, 38% tone of voice, and 55% non-verbal communication.**

We are also aware that it is possible to express many different messages using the same words, statements or questions *by changing your tone of voice or body movement*. Non-verbal communication includes facial expression, body posture and actions.

**NewLife Behavior – Course V**  
**Unit 18 – Lesson 1**

---

So, let's remember that every message has three components:

- (1) The actual *message*
- (2) The *tone* of voice
- (3) The *non-verbal* element

The three components must be complementary in order for a simple message to be transmitted.

## **II. Communication or Conversation Guidelines**

Consider the following and commit yourself to practicing these suggestions for improving communication:

1. Greet your spouse after a period of being separated with a smile, pleasant talk, a compliment or humor, or by recounting the day's "success" experiences.
2. Set aside a period of transition between work, or any potentially stressful activity – and other parts of the day.
3. Never discuss serious subjects or important matters that involve potential disagreement when you or your spouse are overly tired, emotionally upset, injured, in pain, or hungry.
4. Set aside a special agreed-upon time each week 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.
5. Some couples find it helpful to save all complaints about their marriage, disagreements and joint decisions for the scheduled "Decision Time" to take up such matters.
6. In "Decision Time" sessions, try to reach a specific solution.
7. Set aside a scheduled time for non-controversial marital conversation every day, if possible. Experiences you had during the day, non-controversial plans or decisions that involve individual partners, the two of you, or the whole family are happily



**NewLife Behavior – Course V**  
**Unit 18 – Lesson 1**

---

shared in such relaxed and loving sessions.

8. Each person should have a special “topic changing signal” to inform his/her spouse to change the conversation from a controversial or painful topic. The signal could be an agreed-upon neutral word or phrase.
9. Do not blame your partner. Save matters of complaint and proposed changes for “Decision Time.
10. Stay on the topic being discussed until each of you has had a say. When discussion goes nowhere, one or both is missing something important. Aim for mutual understanding, not winning the argument or being right.
11. Avoid talk about what happened in the past or what might happen in the future if it is potentially controversial.
12. Be specific in what you talk about. Define your terms and avoid overstatement (“always” or “never”) and generalities.
13. Acknowledge the main points made by your spouse with words such as “I see,” “I understand,” “Yes,” or “Um-hmm.”
14. Try to keep the non-verbal aspects of your communication consistent with the verbal message. Expect complications if non-verbal messages clash with your verbal ones.
15. Be as accurate as you can in describing objects or events for your partner. Remember that you are describing it from your own perspective.
16. Praise your spouse for the things said that you like. Use words that you think will be appreciated.
17. Discuss topics with your partner that you know he or she will enjoy talking about.
18. Never exaggerate in order to make a point. If you really want to persuade your spouse, write the subject down for the next “Decision Time.”
19. Don’t mind-read or make presumptive statements about what your partner has said.
20. Don’t quibble about minor or trivial details.
21. Respond fully but not excessively when your turn comes to speak.



**NewLife Behavior – Course V**  
**Unit 18 – Lesson 1**

---

- 22. Repeat what you think your partner said if you have trouble understanding what is said or if you think you did not hear what was intended.
- 23. Help each other to follow the rules. Praise your spouse for rule-consistent conversation.

These basic guidelines are suggested by H. Norman Wright in his book, *So You're Getting Married*, pages 185-186.

### III. Rules for Conversational Excellence

We all would like to improve our communication style so that all goes well in our marriage relationship. Some of the following suggestions may help:

- A. Be Knowledgeable. To be considerate means we are sensitive and understanding. Understanding requires knowledge gained through heart-to-heart sharing of meaningful things in life.
- B. Be Loving. A better way is acceptance, unconditional love, grace and forgiveness as outlined by the Apostle Paul in First Corinthians 13:4-8.
- C. Be Transparent. Heidegger said: "Truth is when what is hidden is no longer so." Transparency is *truth and openness*.
- D. Be Trustworthy. A husband or wife must trust the other and develop confidence, faith, and hope. There is no room for suspicion and doubt.
- E. Be Positive. "Define what is most important and stress it; define what is unimportant and ignore it." Never spend more time on a problem than it deserves, nor allow minor differences to dominate too much time.
- F. Be Sensitive. A man or woman is more nearly defined by what he or she feels than by what they think. Accept all feelings – good or bad. Your spouse will love you for it.
- G. Be an Effective Communicator. In order to become an effective communicator, you must closely observe what is being said. Slight clues are often reason enough to stop and check out what is going on.
- H. Be an Active Listener. "Our culture is built on talk – not conversation." A good listener learns to listen to what is *not* said. He listens to *edges* of a conversation. He is aware of hidden meanings. "A wise man will hear, and will increase understand-



## NewLife Behavior – Course V

### Unit 18 – Lesson 1

---

ing” (Proverbs 1:5). Good listeners bring life to dead relationships.

- I. Be Concise. “Writing maketh an exact man” said Bacon. Writing forces you to read what you have said and rethink it, then – rewrite it. Writing is necessary if arguments develop. Five reasons for writing at such a time include:



1. The emotional heat usually cools off during the writing time.
2. Each spouse is able to finish the entire thought without fear of interruption.
3. When the partner reads the letter, he or she is forced to receive the entire message before answering.
4. Writing forces the critical writer to see his harsh, critical feeling in cold print. Usually as the letter progresses, hard feelings phase out and good feelings surface. When one spouse is not verbally articulate, the other tends to dominate the conversation.
5. Writing gives the non-verbal spouse equal time.

In addition to the above rule, Paul Coleman suggests that we write two letters to clear up confusion and improve mutual understanding. Write a letter to your partner sharing your point of view and another letter to yourself stating your partner’s point of view. Eventually, successful letter writing leads to successful dialogue, as each becomes more willing to listen and give the partner the benefit of the doubt (The 30 Secrets of Happily Married Couples, pages 24-25).

- J. Be Prayerful. Couples’ praying together is meaningful conversation between them addressed to God. It takes a duet and makes it a trio. In prayer, God’s Spirit is injected, hurts are healed, and forgiveness is granted.
- K. Be Decisive. It is hard to find time to talk, write, communicate or pray. You must “make” time.

The above was taken from Carl Brecheen and Paul Faulkner’s book, Whatever Happened to Mom, Dad & the Kids, pages 88-98.

## IV. Barriers to Clear Communication

We have to work to keep communication avenues open. They can become clogged and need clearing. Some of the following thoughts might help keep communication lines open in your marriage.

Some barriers are **mechanical**: distance, volume, speech or hearing problems. Some are **psychological**: words full of emotion may color the message or tone inviting emotional reactions. Emotions locked up and hidden also hinder talk. Some barriers are



## NewLife Behavior – Course V

### Unit 18 – Lesson 1

---

**intellectual:** inaccurate analysis of data, disorganized thought, fallacious reasoning, premature conclusions – leading to ineffective communication.

Here are still other major barriers . . .

- **MATERIALISM** (Proverbs 11:4; 23:4). This is putting things before people. A woman craves her husband's time more than the extra money overtime brings. A man wants his wife's attention more than a spotless house.
- **CRITICAL ATTITUDE** (Proverbs 11:12; 14:13). Life with a faultfinder is misery. Spouses are to love, not criticize (Matthew 5:44; 7:1-5).
- **FEAR** (Second Timothy 1:7). Fear freezes communication. Couples need to share weaknesses, temptations, sins, needs, dreams, negative feelings, and even crazy ideas. Fear is avoided and confidence created when the "real me" is known and loved.
- **MANIPULATION** (Proverbs 19:13). No one is comfortable being manipulated by pouting, nagging and whining. It leads to continual distrust and defensiveness.
- **PREOCCUPATION** (First Kings 20:40). This often occurs when time must be spent elsewhere. We are caught between the urgent and important. Check your priorities so that the important gets equal time.
- **DULLNESS** (Ephesians 3:20). God gave us creativity and expects us to use it. Try new things - different foods, eating places, wallpaper, etc. Happy vibrant messages result from growing through trying new things.
- **ALCOHOL** (Proverbs 21:17; 23:29-35). Don't let "strong drink" deceive you. It slows speech, addles the brain, and makes conversation impossible.
- **DISHONESTY** (Proverbs 12:22). Marriages need to be characterized by honesty and truth. "When two people live as close to one another as husband and wife do, it is impossible to maintain mutual trust without transparent honesty" (David Mace).
- **SHARING FAMILY SECRETS/GOSSIP** (Proverbs 25:9-10). Keep confidences even when not requested. Learn to discern and be sensitive.
- **BITTERNESS/ANGER** (Proverbs 22:24; 29:11; Romans 14:13).



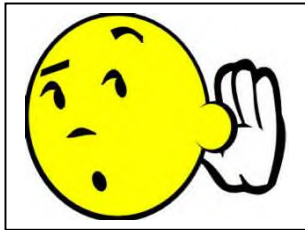
The preceding thoughts are outlined in Brecheen and Faulkner's book - [Whatever Happened to Mom, Dad & the Kids](#), pages 99-104.

**NewLife Behavior – Course V**  
**Unit 18 – Lesson 1**

---

## **V. The Gift of Listening**

Even when we are listening, we are communicating. Listening is a *gift* we give to someone we love and it is an appreciated gift. You can learn to listen because listening, like other aspects of communication, is a “skill” to be learned.



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 our own purposes. Hearing means that we are concerned about what is going on inside during the conversation. The word “hear” in the New Testament (Matthew 13:13-15) means to “pay heed.” Listening is caring for and being

empathetic toward the person speaking. Listening means you are trying to understand the *feelings* of the other person and are listening *for their sake*.

Here is a threefold definition of listening . . .

- 1.** You are not thinking about what you are going to say when he or she stops. You are not busy formulating your response. You concentrate on what is being said. You practice Proverbs 18:13 (it is folly and shame to “answer before listening”).
- 2.** You are accepting completely what is being said without judging what he or she is saying or how it is being said. You may fail to hear the message if thinking you don’t like your spouse’s tone of voice or words being used. Concentrate! Don’t miss the message. Come back later to discuss voice tone and word choices. Acceptance does not mean you agree with the content of what is said. It simply means you understand what your spouse is saying and what he or she feels.
- 3.** Be able to repeat what your spouse has said and what you think was *felt* 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 or her perspective.

Some of the above are from <u>More Communication Keys for Your Marriage</u> by H. Norman Wright, page 89.
---

## **VI. Concluding Thoughts**

We have only touched the high spots because this subject is a vast and rich area of study. No other behavior is so challenging and has such potential. No other behavior bonds people together as earnestly as heart-to-heart conversation.

It is significant that the God who made us is a God who speaks. He made us in His awesome image – as speaking creatures. Consider that this rich gift God has given may be one of His finest. Use it accordingly.

**NewLife Behavior – Course V**  
**Unit 18 – Lesson 1**  
*Session #4*

---

## **STUDY QUESTIONS**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

1. The quality of a marriage depends on
  - (a) money
  - (b) social status
  - (c) ability to communicate
  - (d) education
  
2. In communication before marriage, we
  - (a) without bragging, don't try to hide your intellect
  - (b) demonstrate genuine concern
  - (c) display a keen interest in the other person's ideas
  - (d) all of these
  
3. Successful communication consists of
  - (a) preconceived ideas
  - (b) 7% content, 38% tone of voice, 55% non-verbal
  - (c) talking loud
  - (d) winning disputes
  
4. Writing my thoughts down on paper helps me
  - (a) think about what I want to say
  - (b) helps practice my arguments
  - (c) keeps a record of my complaints
  - (d) proves my case
  
5. When tackling important matters, we should
  - (a) discuss it with friends first
  - (b) ignore it
  - (c) put it off
  - (d) pray about it and discuss it immediately
  
6. Some real barriers to communication are
  - (a) anger
  - (b) fear
  - (c) alcohol
  - (d) all of these

7. Where can we find help on how to communicate?
  - (a) The Bible
  - (b) Soap operas
  - (c) The street
  - (d) The example of marriages in Hollywood
8. Listening is
  - (a) thinking of an answer
  - (b) interrupting
  - (c) finishing sentences
  - (d) none of these
9. Communication involves
  - (a) empathy
  - (b) holding back
  - (c) silence
  - (d) changing the subject
10. What must be done in order to find time to effectively communicate?
  - (a) Quit your job
  - (b) Make time
  - (c) Wait until you are both ill at the same time
  - (d) Go on a long vacation

## REFLECTION

Write a few sentences on new ideas you learned about **communication** and how you can improve it.

## APPLYING THE LESSON

Finally, to get the most from your study, list one or more ideas that you want to use to change your behavior. Also, list questions you want to ask your instructor or studymate.