



COMMUNICATION *101*

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Are You a Good Listener?

21 WAYS TO TELL

In a world where communication happens at the speed of light and we feel more “connected” after a 140-character tweet—listening is a dying artform. Few of us possess the time or the training to receive the stories of those around us. Unfortunately, this means people are withering around us. They carry their lives tucked deep within them, and long for somebody (anybody!) to simply have the occasion to ask for and absorb what’s on their minds—what makes up their lives.

So we’ve created a brief inventory to help identify some strengths and weaknesses of your personal listening style. Again, it’s an artform. So expect to need a lot of practice! But don’t let that stand in the way of you taking a few definitive steps to loving better through listening.

INSTRUCTIONS In the blank before each statement:

- Place a ‘+’ to indicate a **strength**: *Hey, I’m doing something right! This describes me.*
- Place a ‘-’ to indicate a **weakness**: *Nope, I’m not there yet.*
- If you find a statement neither a strength nor a weakness of yours, leave the area blank.
- Then, select 3-4 weaknesses you’d like to improve.

People come away from talking to you and possess a better understanding of themselves.

You wait a few seconds after the person has stopped talking, to see if they have more to say.

You practice “reflective listening,” using words like, “So I hear you saying that you’re...”

You’re comfortable with abstaining from advice at times, to simply be with someone in their grief. (Think of what Job’s friends didn’t do.)

You ask questions that cause people to explore what they haven’t before.

People often respond to you, “That’s a good question”—but it’s okay with you if you’re not the person with all the good questions.

You refrain from interrupting.

You’re comfortable with not having an answer for some of life’s “unfixables.”

You use facial expressions that are receptive: soft eyes, nodding, eye contact.

You pray silently for a person while listening, and ask God for wisdom in responding.

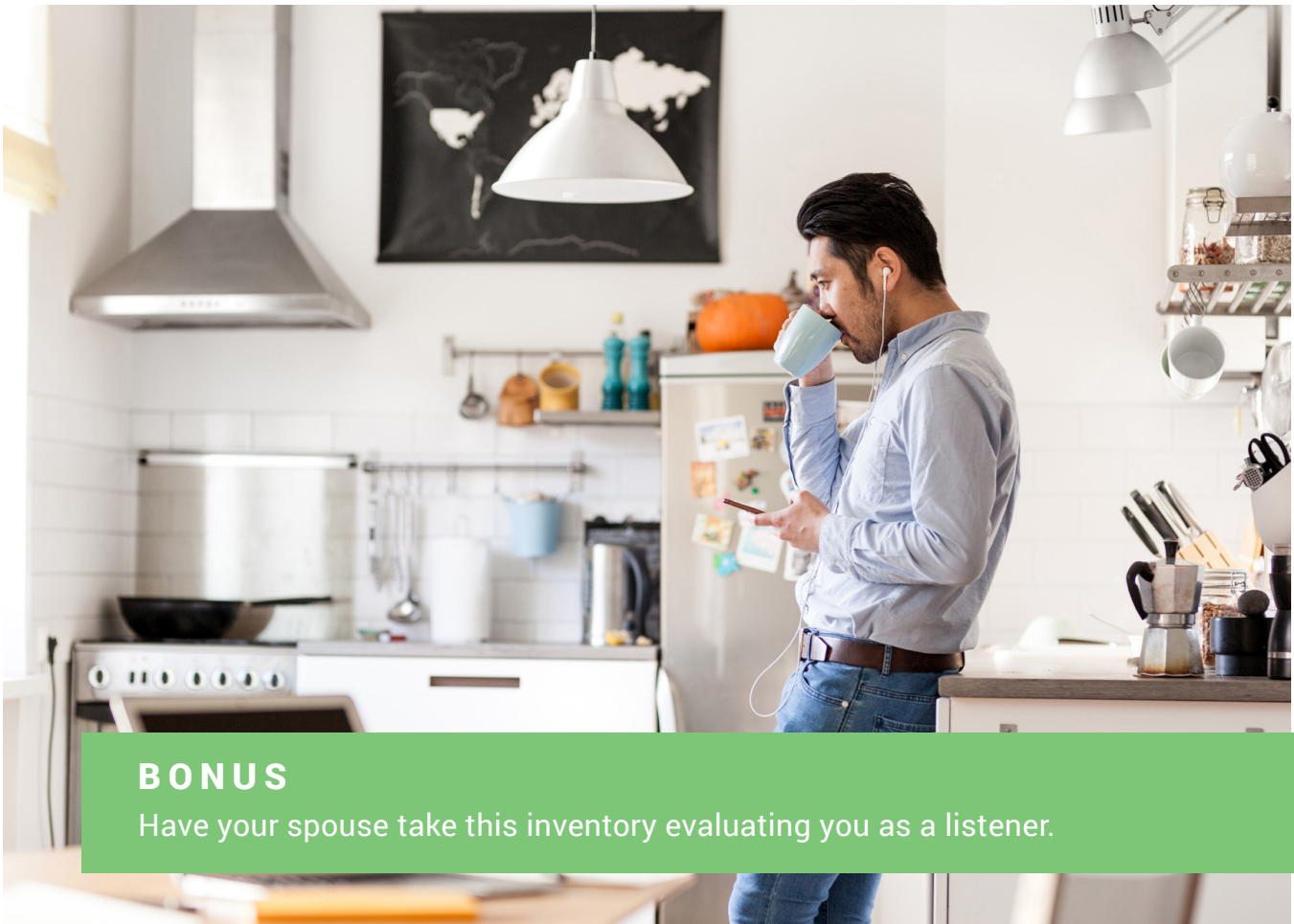
You refrain from finishing a person’s sentences.

You ask for clarification when you don’t understand what the other person means.

You don’t feel the need to prove yourself as wise or helpful.

Rather than planning your responses, you try to set those aside in your head and focus on what’s being said.

People are noticeably comforted after you spend time listening to them.



BONUS

Have your spouse take this inventory evaluating you as a listener.

_____ Your advice to a person is highly individualized, reflecting back what you've heard them say and steering clear of pat answers and clichés.

_____ You have time in your schedule to listen to friends.

_____ Before offering advice, you offer compassion and understanding: "I am so sorry. That sounds incredibly hard."

_____ You share your own circumstances that relate, but are careful not to refocus the conversation on you, or to indicate your circumstances were worse/harder.

_____ You think of your friend's experience after you've left the conversation, internalizing their struggle. They're on your heart, so you pray for them, too.

_____ More than a problem being fixed, you prioritize that the speaker feels heard, received, and understood.

23 Questions

to Take Your Relationships to the Next Level

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

Remember when your mom wouldn't let you snack before a meal because it would spoil your dinner?

Let's just say our speed-of-light culture and social media can be a lot like Cheetos: They make us feel like we're getting fed socially. But in reality, a 140-character tweet or a status update can be full of a lot of air and artificial flavoring.

Wondering how to take your relationships a little deeper?

We've compiled some questions to help you get to the stuff that matters. Grab a cup of coffee, start with a little small talk, and then try a few of these.

1. What are your dreams for our kids?
2. What do you pray for most often?
3. What's God been doing in you lately?
4. When you get to heaven, what are some questions you hope to ask God?

5. What's one realization (or more than one) that changed your perspective and understanding of a past event?

(i.e., I found out the parents of that bully in school were getting a divorce. Or, I discovered I'd totally misunderstood my sister's perspective, and she hadn't been malicious at all.)

6. When was the time in life you felt most alone?

7. What's one regret you have?

(If it impacted others, have you sought forgiveness from God and the people you affected?)

8. What are some of the most meaningful things people have said to you?

(i.e., I felt validated when someone with whom I'd had a conflict for a long time came and apologized. Or, My dad said he was proud of the man I'd become.)

9. What qualities do you immediately find magnetic about a person—and what qualities are immediately off-putting?

10. At what times in your life have you felt closest to God, or when do you feel closest to God now?

REMEMBER: GENUINE CONVERSATION

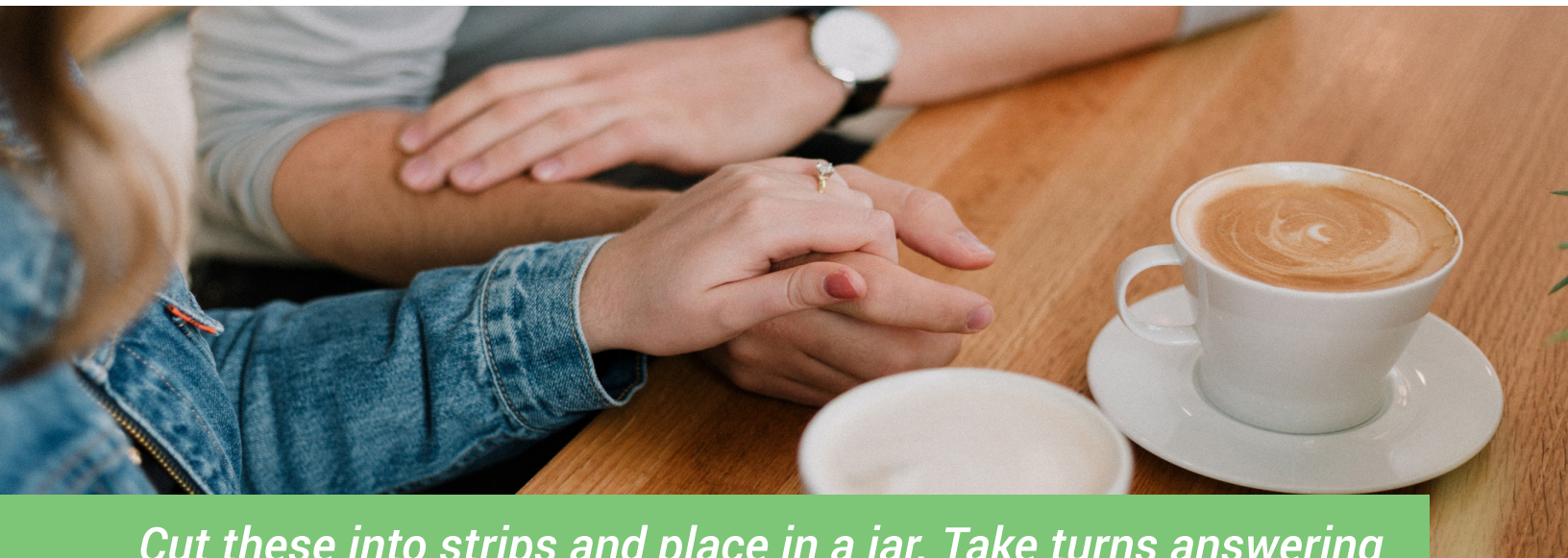
- builds on our own authenticity and vulnerability.
- sets aside our own agendas.
- makes “charitable judgments”—assuming the best about someone until able to gather more information.
- when tempted to pass judgment or criticize, instead presents (non-pointed) questions to understand.
- practices reflective listening.
- seeks real understanding.
- listens more than it responds.
- seeks to love the other person well—not meet our own needs to be known as a counselor or confidante, or to “win the other person over” divorced from compassion and concern.
- is patiently comfortable with others being “in process,” with silence, with deep emotion; it does not always seek to fix, advise, or solve.

11. If you could describe yourself in five adjectives, what would they be? What are three adjectives you sometimes wish you were, but you're not?
12. What do you most want or wish for that you haven't (yet) seen realized? How do you deal with these "not yet's" or "noes" in your life?
13. Where, when, and with whom do you feel most at home? What represents "home" to you and why?
14. What's a dark time you experienced that most people don't know about?
15. What kind of friend do you need? What could I do, practically speaking, to be a truer friend to you?

TALKING ABOUT **TOUGH STUFF** WITH YOUR SPOUSE?

Here are eight more questions to help you come alongside your spouse when handling tricky topics.

1. **What was that like?**
2. **What do you feel like doing?**
3. **What are you afraid will happen?**
4. **What do you think you need?**
5. **What do you wish you could say?**
6. **What do you want most to protect or just avoid?**
7. **I'm hearing that ___ is really important to you. Do you think it's become too important?**
8. **What do you wish you could say to that person?**



Cut these into strips and place in a jar. Take turns answering the questions.

Conversation Starters for Everyday Romance

Before bed each night, draw one slip of paper. Take turns answering the question with your spouse to keep regular conversation going in your relationship.

1. What is one way I can help you tomorrow?
2. What did you like that I did today?
3. Where did you notice God at work today?
4. What was the hardest moment of your day?
5. What was the easiest moment of your day?

6. Recount a recent good memory of us.
7. Who showed kindness to you today?
8. What frustrated you today?
9. What is the best song you listened to today?
10. What made you laugh today?
11. What did you have for lunch today?
12. What were you nervous about today?
13. If you could redo any part of today, what would it be? Why?
14. Did you meet anyone new today?
15. When did you feel bored today?



16. What is something exciting you did today?
17. What is something you did today that you never want to do again?
18. What is something you did today that you can't wait to do again?
19. What made you feel important today?
20. Show and then tell me about a picture you took today.



You've likely suspected at times that, intentional or not, your spouse just isn't listening to you.

Four Clues Your Spouse Isn't Listening

BY LISA LAKEY

I don't even remember the exact conversation. But something told me my husband wasn't quite as interested as I was. It went something like this:

Me: "I really think that's something we need to address. What do you think about the whole situation?"

Husband (absorbed with his phone): "Mm-hmm."

Me: "So ... you agree or disagree about what was said?"

Husband: "Yeah." (Briefly looks at me.)

Me (Attempting to choose humor over annoyance): "So then, aliens for dinner. Blah, blah, blah."

Husband: "Mm-hmm."

Yep. My sweet husband wasn't listening.

You've likely suspected at times that, intentional or not, your husband just isn't listening to you. You've asked numerous times for help with a task he can't remember you mentioning.

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Or he suddenly has no idea why you're angry when you've told him at least once a day for the last week. *Did he even hear you?*

Wives, don't be so smug. You're just as guilty.

I know I am. The other day I was so completely focused on planning out the week's activities, menus, and grocery list, that my husband was probably talking to me for several minutes before I ever looked up. Oops.

The age-old battle of communication in marriage isn't an issue that's going away on its own—in fact, this exact issue is addressed during the opening session of [FamilyLife's Weekend to Remember® marriage getaway](#). Communication struggles need to be identified (in a loving manner, I might add) before they can be repaired.

Below are four clues in your conversations with your spouse that tell you he or she might not be listening. After that, keep reading for reasons your spouse might not be hearing you.

Four Clues

1. He doesn't focus on you during the conversation.

Instead, his eyes wander to the television, his phone, a book, whatever. Active listeners will convey their interest through both eye contact and body posture. At times I've noticed that even if my husband is engaged in a task (like cooking or working on a car) and therefore can't look at me, his shoulders are slightly inclined to me. It lets me know he's listening even without eye contact.

2. She doesn't respond to what you are saying.

You ask a question, and your spouse doesn't answer. Sure, sometimes she might need a minute to think about a proper response. But if she doesn't even notice you actually asked a question, that's a pretty quick clue that you and your spouse aren't communicating quite up to par. If she's listening, she will likely respond appropriately to what you are saying. Sometimes a simple nod to let you know she is listening is all you need.

3. He doesn't seem to understand (or care) what you are telling him.

It could be the way you present it, but if your spouse is actively listening, he should attempt to clarify the information you are giving him. "So what you are saying is ..." can go a long way in understanding someone's viewpoint.

4. She is focusing on the emotion of the conversation, rather than the words being said.

Instead of hearing what you are saying, your spouse immediately becomes defensive or hurt or angry. My experience as a wife tells me this might be a bigger problem for the ladies. I am an emotionally driven person. I have a terrible habit of letting my emotions react and my brain catch up later. Hear the words your spouse is saying to you, and try not to focus just on your emotional response to it.

Improving your communication

If the clues above resonate with you, relax a little. There's hope. Even the best marriages have struggles. But healthy communication is what can take your marriage from okay to great. It allows for a deeper level of intimacy and oneness with your spouse. And who doesn't want that?

Whatever the reason why your spouse just isn't hearing you, here are a few tips for improving your communication:

1. Understand that you and your spouse probably have two completely different communication styles.

I tend to think everything out loud and will likely share my feelings on every topic. My husband prefers a simpler, get-to-the-point approach, and long, drawn-out conversations are not his cup of tea. These differences can be a source of strife if we refuse to respect each other's differences.

2. Talk to your spouse rather than at him.

Tone matters. No one likes to feel they are being lectured to, especially not your

spouse. Are you using the same tone you use when telling your kids to clean their rooms? If so, expect your spouse to shut you out. Proverbs 18:21 gives us a sharp warning on this, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”

3. Don't let your own emotions rule the conversation.

Beware of emotionally charged words. I'm not saying you shouldn't tell your spouse how you feel. Just understand that your emotions on a particular issue might not be theirs. Bringing anger to the conversation will likely cause your spouse to tune you out or react defensively. Ephesians 4:29 offers another important reminder on the power of our word choice—“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”

4. Choose a time when you can talk each day.

One of the best tidbits of marriage advice we've received is to always make time to catch up with each other. This is also the one we've struggled to apply the most. Kids, work, and other schedule demands (not to mention just being exhausted at the end of the day) can make it hard to set aside a daily time to talk without interruptions. But the benefits on this one far outweigh the struggle of carving an extra 20 minutes into your day.

A skill you can learn

Thankfully, healthy communication is a skill couples can learn. Praying together is one way to start opening up the lines to proper communication with your spouse. But often, we need further help. The [Weekend to Remember](#) is a great tool for couples to learn not only what their communication styles are, but how to accept and respect each other's differences while learning to fix broken communication habits and listen well to their spouses.

I've learned I am an “enjoy-the-ride” communicator, while I am married to someone who prefers “land-the-plane” conversations. Respecting those differences allows me to have deeper, more meaningful conversations with my husband. And it ensures he is listening. Well, more often than not!

For more help with communication, be sure to read [“10 Rules for Good Communication With Your Husband”](#) and [“The Number One Problem in Marriage.”](#)



The road I took to learn about communication was a tough one. Here are some of the tools that helped transform my marriage and change my heart.

5 Communication Tools That Saved My Marriage

BY ROB FLOOD

We were blissfully in love and thrilled to be on our honeymoon. Then came day five—we had our first argument. That put us on a slippery slope moving swiftly toward desperation. Within the first nine months of our marriage, Gina and I were both convinced that we not only married the wrong person, but also were condemned to a loveless marriage.

One very tangible side effect of our difficulties was poor communication. I would ask, “What’s for dinner?” She would hear, “I can’t believe you haven’t prepared dinner again tonight!”

She would say, “What time are you coming home?” I would hear, “You better get here and help me because you’re never here.”

We could not express anything we wanted to. We resorted to hurting each other with our words. We did not build each other up ... we tore each other down and caused deep, emotional pain. Quite honestly, we had endured so much hurt that we could not see any hope for ever communicating well. Our despair was overwhelming.

In counseling, we began learning about intentional communication. I remember thinking, “That is the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard. This stuff is so simple ... I can’t believe I’m paying this guy for this.”

But, once I got off of my high horse, I realized something very simple yet profound: If

communication was really that simple, everyone would be doing it and all of our communication would glorify God and reflect His image (1 Peter 4:11; Ephesians 4:29). Glorifying God did not describe my communication, and it may not describe yours either. In fact, many of us struggle to communicate well even with those we love the most: our siblings, our parents, our children, our spouse.

The road I took to learn about communication was a tough one. Here are some of the tools that helped transform my marriage and change my heart.

1. The Principle of First Response: The course of a conflict is not determined by the person who initiates, but by the person who responds.

You may feel it's okay to strike at someone verbally because, "He is picking a fight with me." You may be correct, but that person does not have the power to decide whether a fight actually occurs. That power rests with the responder. As Proverbs 15:1 (NIV) says, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

Jesus has a well-worn track record with the Principle of First Response. Recall the times that the Scribes and the Pharisees came to question Him. They were the initiators in nearly all of their communication. Their intention was to defraud Jesus and corner Him. In how many cases were they successful? None. They failed because the power to decide the direction of each conflict rested with Jesus, the responder (Luke 20:19-26).

The implications of following Jesus' example were huge. My wife's sin did not give me free license to sin in return. And conversely, my sin did not give Gina free license either. By following the principle of first response, we were being called to take a poorly spoken comment and redirect it.

2. The Principle of Physical Touch: It is difficult to sin against someone while you are tenderly touching him or her.

A difficult time to apply this principle is after an argument has begun. However, a perfect time is when you know you are about to sit down and have a discussion about something that might lead to tension.

You know what those topics are in your marriage. Maybe it's a conversation about a

specific child. Maybe it's your in-laws or your finances. For us, as you might imagine, it was when we sat down to talk about our communication. Those were tough conversations.

During these times, we would sit down and pray together ... and touch. Usually we were at opposite ends of the couch with Gina's legs stretched out across mine while I held them. (You may prefer holding hands or sitting close enough that you naturally touch.)

As we talked, we would inevitably notice something. When our conversation began to drift toward conflict, we stopped touching. We found what I'm certain you'll find: It is very difficult to fight with someone you are tenderly touching. So, we had a choice at that point: to stop fighting so we could keep touching or to stop touching so we could keep fighting.

3.

The Principle of Proper Timing: The success of a conversation can be maximized if the timing of the conversation is carefully chosen.

The book of Proverbs tells us, "A man finds joy in giving an apt reply—and how good is a timely word!" (15:23 NIV).

Typically, the first opportunity Gina and I have to talk about the day is at dinner. But with four young children, our dinner table is an active and busy one. Consequently, we cannot practically have an extended and meaningful conversation.

So, if something has occurred that I must discuss with Gina, I'll wait until the children are asleep. To bring it up during dinner is to invite frustration and ineffectiveness.

Let's look at a couple of scenarios where we're more likely to fail.

Gina is a very intentional homemaker and often has wonderful ideas on how to better serve our family. Let's say she is contemplating a new approach to family dining. She's been thinking through this for weeks and she's now ready to get my input. This is a very good thing—but probably not at 1:30 on a Sunday afternoon when I'm watching a football game.

I'm also prone to fall into the poor-timing trap. For example, Gina and I could be downstairs enjoying normal conversation. We head upstairs at 11:30 p.m. and Gina is ready for bed. As the lights go out, I ask, "What do you think God is doing with the children?" This is a question Gina would love for me to ask ... about three hours earlier. When 11:30 comes, she's ready for bed—not an extensive discussion.

There are times when a conversation is critical to have at that very moment. In those cases, of course, the football game goes off and we talk. Or, the lights go back on and we're up until 2 a.m. However, those should be the exceptions rather than the rule. The majority of the time, we should be more strategic in the timing of our conversations.

4.

The Principle of Mirroring: Understanding can be enhanced if we measure it often throughout a conversation.

The Scriptures inform us that, if we are to understand and become wise, we must be sure to incline our ears. Proverbs 22:17 states, "Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge."

Have you ever meant one thing by what you said but the person you were talking to heard something else? It can make for very frustrating communication. If you're not sure if your spouse is getting what you're talking about, check to see if you hear this phrase a lot: "What do you mean by that?"

Mirroring can help you test whether you are hearing your spouse properly. Once your spouse makes a point ... repeat it to him or her. Say something like this: "So, what I hear you saying is ..." or, "Are you saying ... ?" Then, in your own words, tell your spouse what you understand to have been said. Then, the most important part of mirroring comes. You must allow your spouse to either affirm or correct what you've said.

As we learned this principle, I often didn't like Gina's negative or inaccurate summaries of my statements. So, I defended them and failed to allow her the freedom to speak honestly. In time, I learned that her summaries actually were quite accurate; my reactions were negative because I didn't like how they exposed me.

5.

The Principle of Prayer: Success in communication is more likely when we invite God to be an active participant and guide.

This principle is not complicated, but it requires our close attention. We've become so accustomed to hearing about prayer that its importance often passes us by.

No matter what principle you might be using at the time or what subject you might be talking about, no scenario is beyond prayer.

I wish someone would have shared with me what late 19th and early 20th century evangelist R.A. Torrey said on prayer:

The reason why many fail in battle is because they wait until the hour of battle. The reason why others succeed is because they have gained their victory on their knees long before the battle came ... Anticipate your battles; fight them on your knees before temptation comes, and you will always have victory.

One of the greatest difficulties that couples face with this principle is awkwardness. They are not used to praying together. So, as they begin to like each other less in the midst of unconstructive communication, the thought of praying together is not very appealing.

We learned an easy fix to this ... [start praying together](#). Begin with 30 seconds of prayer as you go to bed each night. Pray regularly as a family prior to eating. Pick one night a week to pray for your children, your pastor, and your marriage. Among the enormous benefits that you'll see in your family, the regularity of prayer will make praying in the midst of communication breakdown more probable.

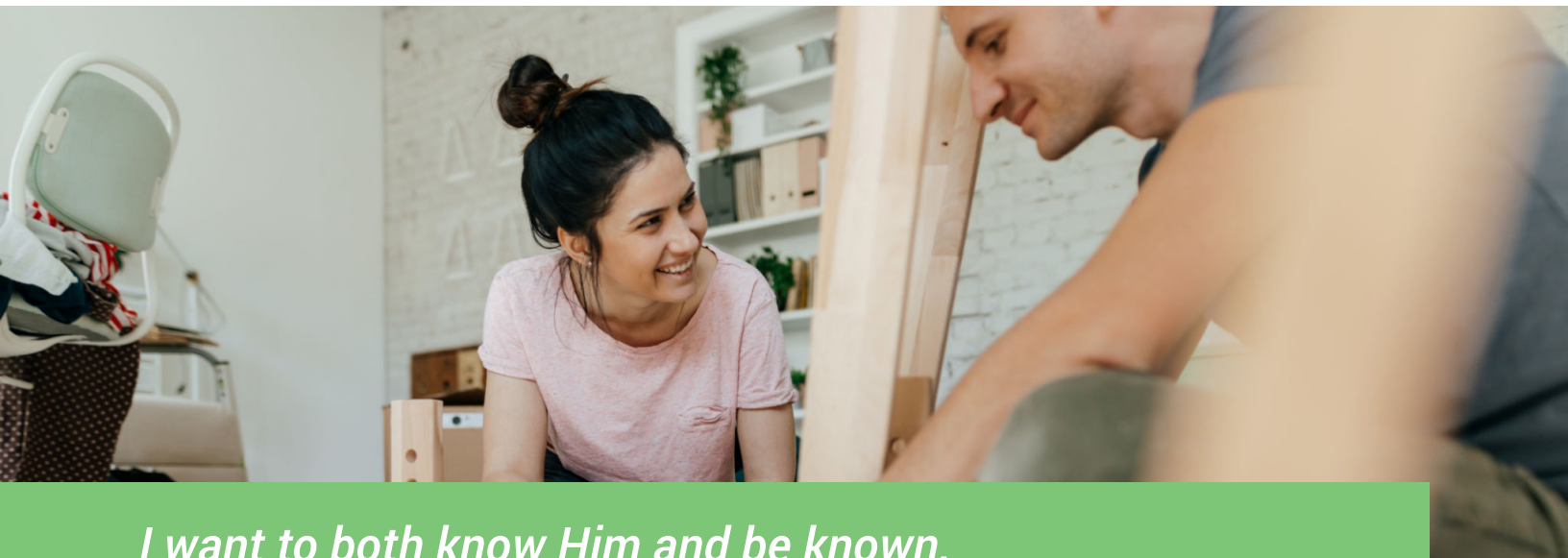


The transformation never ends

As a result of God's grace intersecting with these principles, communication is now among the greatest strengths of our marriage. It's not that we don't still mess up—we do. Thankfully, God continues to work on me. He'll continue to work on you, too.

At one time, I was convinced I married the wrong woman. She was convinced she married the wrong man. Now, we cannot imagine knowing, loving, or enjoying anyone more than we do each other.

Your relationship with your spouse may differ from ours, but this much is true: Your spouse should be the single most important person you have in your life. Like it or not, communication is the tool that God has given us to knit our hearts and our minds together. Success is possible if we're willing to apply some intentional principles. We've all been called to God-honoring communication. Step forward in humility and faith and watch Him transform you.



I want to both know Him and be known.

7 Ways to Get Your Husband to Talk to You

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

My husband is an introvert who loves people. I look at his face when he walks in the door. I can usually tell when his word bucket is so full it's oozing down the sides.

I can find myself caught in that dance between finally processing my day and all I've been accumulating to tell him and just meeting him where he's at. Which may not yet be ready for a 13-minute monologue.

I don't just want to connect with him for me. He has rich thoughts—as a complex, stunning person—rumbling beneath the surface. I want to both know him and be known. I want, in our conversation, to be naked and unashamed (Genesis 2:25).

And preferably not just one of us.

But that can be tough if he doesn't engage. How can we draw out the men we love into conversation that fills us both?

A few ideas:

1. Talk less.

Him talking more may mean me talking less. When in doubt, I sometimes count five whole seconds after he speaks. I'm surprised by what he adds!

For all of us, that also means putting the kibosh to

- interrupting or jumping in, even to reassure.
- steering the conversation our own direction or turning the conversation to our own experiences (except briefly, to show you understand).
- finishing his sentences.
- one-upmanship.
- overreacting.

Note: Sometimes—not always—I find the amount of exchange in our conversation to be proportionate to my selfishness.

Am I taking from my husband, using him for my ends, or truly loving him? Or is conversation a chance to give him my presence, comfort, and ear ... and a chance to talk, too?

By the way—our spouses weren't designed to pull all of our emotional weight. Are we maintaining vulnerable, intimate friendships with other women so our husbands aren't our only go-to's?

2.

Communicate closer to his language.

Sometimes the effort required for guys to listen to us talk through our meandering bunny trails can leave them scattered and exhausted. Without the energy to want to tell their own stories. Guys' ideal sense of connectedness may not be sitting at a coffee shop for an hour (I know. #Mindblown).

So my husband has asked me to tell him my end point first. And then recount the back story. This feels less open-ended. (Where's she going with this? How long will it take? Could she play a theme song when she's getting close, like the news—or maybe have a little box over her shoulder with the headline?)

If I can condense a bit and pause before launching into another anecdote, it drains less of his conversational energy. It also leaves space for him to interact.

In fact, when I do this, he asks more questions about what caught his interest. (That's instead of giving me that deer-in-the-headlights look.) In this way, I cross

“cultures” a bit into what my husband values in communication.

But your husband may be different. Conversation isn't about applying a universal-husbands rule. It's about finding your spouse's own conversational style.

3. Ask permission to come in.

There's a level of respect to simply asking if we can engage someone right now, or if we can press in on something vulnerable.

- *Is this a good time, or are you in the middle of something?*
- *So, can I ask you a question about that?*
- *Can I push back on that a little? (If you disagree.)*

Sometimes, if my husband might feel ambushed by my idea, I say, “I'm not sure you're going to like this idea, but ...”

(Bonus: It can have a bit of a reverse-psychology effect on him: *Well, you never know! I might like it!*)

4. Find your rhythm.

A lot of guys emerge from work needing time to let the day filter through in order to receive more words and be ready to talk again.

It's counterintuitive. But if you want to converse, first give him some down time so he can feel like he's got his whole brain back.

He might feel overwhelmed by a day when more ground was lost than gained. In this respect, consider asking questions that aren't so open-ended when he gets home. “What are some wins you had today?” “Any highs or lows?”

Can you find a conversational rhythm that meets both of your needs? Hint: It may involve asking for what you need and interweaving that with his best times for conversation. (Which may not be at the end of the day.)

Perhaps you can plan a catch-up time alone over decaf for 15 minutes after the kids go to bed. Maybe you'll have the music off when you drive together so you can chat. Or perhaps you'll have alone time to talk on Friday nights. Maybe you'll pick a regular date night or “date in.”

5. Ask questions that invite him in.

Use those sunny social skills and warm conversation to gently, patiently mine his depths. Ask questions to help expose the heart of things: his desires, his fears.

- *What was that like for you?*
- *What are you afraid will happen?*
- *What do you hope will happen?*
- *What do you wish would happen?*

Gently try to come into his world.

- *That sounds intense.*
- *That would catch me off guard.*
- *That sounds like it would be really hard.*
- *That sounds like a big win.*
- *When I think about [a related experience from your past], I'm thinking this would be [adjective] for you. Is that what it was like?*

Then insert a questioning look—"Am I right?" And then? Silence. Let him fill in.

6. Be safe.

To be a safe place, you are

- not needing to prove yourself as a good wife or his best friend. (Your focus is on him, not you). Image-management gets in the way of good listening.
- receiving him compassionately when he discloses a way he's lost or failed. Remember—it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).
- affirming him. Waiting to address his weaknesses until an appropriate time builds him up and extends grace (see Ephesians 4:29). But be courageous, too!
- refraining from fixing/giving advice (especially pat answers), until he feels understood and received by you.
- sometimes just being with him in the middle of life's unfixables.

- creating time to listen, undistracted and completely present. (Put down your phone or that laundry you're folding).
- creating conversation where, through your nurturing questions, he might even come away understanding himself better (i.e., not how you understand him or see the situation).
- with a low voice and soft expressions, asking questions which might otherwise feel bold.
- showing you're not upended by his realness, even if it's ugly at times. Your tone has the power to communicate, *We're in this together*.

[This incredible podcast \("What if He Doesn't Deserve Respect?"\)](#) communicates the power of a husband feeling like you're on his side—even when he royally blows it. Rather than ready to indict or problem-solve.

And guess what? That's restating the gospel to him: *You are more than the sum of your weaknesses. You don't have to perform to get close to me. It's not us against each other. It's us against the problem.*

7.

Communicate your desire rather than controlling him.

The longing we have to connect is deeply good; it's even God-like.

But personality type or "love language" isn't an excuse for greed or selfishness in conversation or energy levels. Just like it's not an excuse to hole up, plug in, and tune out.

Look for that sweet spot where you're both getting needs met and laying down your wants. That's marriage, right?

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After nearly two decades of marriage, he's changed a lot. But I love that he still tells the truth.

Just Tell Me What I Want to Hear

BY JANEL BREITENSTEIN

My husband had this annoying habit when we were first married: Telling the truth.

I'd request his opinion on my shirt, and he would casually let me know if it looked sloppy or less-than-flattering. He'd thank me for the meal from my shiny new Better Homes and Gardens cookbook, but when I pushed, he'd suggest I cut back on the onion.

Or I would begin a well-known wifely script. "I feel so [insert adjective]. I can't believe you're attracted to me."

My husband was supposed to reply, "I am married to the most beautiful woman in the world." But he recognized the quicksand of my insecurity, my attempts to drag him in.

A truth-teller would not speak with inaccurate superlatives. Instead, he extended a branch: "I'm not going to say you're the most beautiful woman in the world; you wouldn't believe me anyway." *Try me.* "But you are beautiful to me."

Kind of anti-climactic. Where did this guy go to man school?

At times, he thought I wanted to be reminded of scriptural principles. (And I did. But not when I was sinning, for Pete's sake.) Not in a self-righteous way. Just carefully, honestly telling me what I needed to hear.

He was gut-level honest about sin he was struggling with. At first I'd feel awkward. Or disappointed. Or angry.

But the more this happened—and the more I revealed my own struggles—the more intimate and refining our relationship became. We drew closer, confessing failures, then asking forgiveness and even quietly holding each other accountable.

As he grew more gentle, more careful about his timing and choice of words, I recognized something valuable and rare: trustworthiness.

His compliments aren't an attempt to make me feel good. His looks of admiration are from a brother in the battle, helping me anticipate the places I'd be wounded by my sin—or wound others. The white lies greasing the wheels of so many relationships aren't welcome.

After nearly two decades of marriage, he's changed a lot. But I love that he still tells the truth.

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LOVING THESE INSIGHTS? WE'VE GOT MORE IDEAS WHERE THAT CAME FROM

**1.**

Why Can't He Just Listen?

Wondering how you can avoid “fix-it mode” in conversation, and instead create interactions that leave you feeling heard without treating your husband like “one of the girls”? Shaunti Feldhahn and Brian Goins explain a process with two critical steps.

**2.**

Building a Strong Communication Climate

How would you describe the communication climate in your marriage? Are you and your spouse enjoying sunny skies or would “partly cloudy” better describe your interactions? Communication expert Tim Muehlhoff talks about the conditions that are conducive to great marital communication.

**3.**

I Beg to Differ

Communications expert Tim Muehlhoff offers some communication tips for successfully navigating tough conversations—and shares examples from his own life.