
Blocks to Communication

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"I can think of no person to whom one talks less than his wife."—Socrates

"The less we have to say to each other, the better I'm gonna like it."—J.R. Ewing to his wife, Sue Ellen.

Why is it that what once flowed so automatically ends up slowing to a trickle? How can the same two people who,

during engagement, ran up astronomical phone bills now go weeks without sharing the inner regions of their lives?

In the beginning, the Lord God created His world part by part, and Genesis pronounces the same refrain after each one: "It was good." When God created the first human being, the Scripture even exudes, "It was *very* good" (Gen. 1:31).

Then came a jarring change. Something showed up in Creation that made God wince. "It is *not* good," He announced (Gen. 2:18). What was it?

Aloneness.

God immediately did something

about that. He made woman, thereby bringing about the possibility of marriage, companionship, togetherness.

We all need communication. Feedback. Interaction. Especially if we believe in marriage as a partnership of souls, not just an economic or sexual alliance.

What trips us up? What maneuvers us into the not-good state of aloneness? Here are five common stumbling blocks:

1. *The rat race.* Too many urgent (but not necessarily important) things to tend to. Too many appointments, obligations, requirements on our time. Too much "stuff" on our calendars. Things that have to be done, or so we think. Work really does expand to fill the time available, as Parkinson's Law notes. Work of all kinds. Paid work, but unpaid work too.

In such a state, most husbands and wives still communicate such matters as, "Don't forget your mother's birthday next week." "The front right tire has a thump in it." "Can you pick up Suzanne at 6:30?" "We're almost out of charcoal for the grill." The particulars get handled (usually).

Meanwhile, the fun topics, the "what ifs," get forgotten. And the "heavies" get postponed indefinitely.

2. *Kids.* Not intentionally, you understand. Kids don't plot to squeeze out adult communication.

It is rather a case of the squeakiest axle getting the grease. Kids let their needs be known right away, and conscientious parents rush to respond. After all, it's pretty hard to ignore a fourth-grader who's stumped on long division, a preschooler with a bloody knee, a sophomore whose friends are gossiping about her.

But when do moms and dads get *their* needs met? When do they gain the inner fortitude and composure to handle the hundreds of external challenges? After all, parenting lasts only a couple of decades, while marriage is for a lifetime. If children are at the hub of the commu-

nication circle, what happens when they grow up and move away?

3. *The media, especially TV.* If it is true, as some research studies claim, that American husbands and wives communicate with each other an average of 27.5 minutes a week, that means many of us know more about Cliff and Claire Huxtable's marriage than about our own.

Two people sitting in the same room watching the same show are not really communicating, in the sense of engaging each other's minds. They are merely absorbing a distant medium simultaneously. Meanwhile the evening ticks away, and soon it's time for sleep.

TV watching *can* be a joint experience, if the viewers talk to each other about what they've seen, what it means, how it spawns a fresh idea about this or that. But how often does that happen?

4. *Fatigue.* I've occasionally talked with audiences about body metabolism and the difference between "morning people" and "night people," and then asked a curious question:

"How many of you are married to someone the opposite of yourself?"

A forest of hands always goes up. Those of us who hit the day with vigor at 6 A.M. and run out of steam about 8:30 at night are very different from those who get cranking about noon and can work productively till 2 in the morning. In a marriage of opposites, late-night pil-

low talk is doomed. It takes creativity and determination to find a time when *both* spouses can interact effectively.

5. *Fear of conflict.* Not many husbands and wives *enjoy* arguing. So whenever a sticky matter needs attention, the natural thing is to put it off, hope it will blow over, go do something different that's positive instead of negative. Why stir up a hornets' nest if you can avoid it?

Of course, in many cases the hornets need to be evicted before someone gets hurt. Not all problems resolve themselves. They must be tackled with honest, serious communication.

The blockage of communication in a marriage does not trigger an instant crisis. It's not a bombshell like, say, adultery. It is rather like the slow, steady buildup of cholesterol in the arteries, reducing the flow of nourishment to the limbs and organs and brain—a process that takes its toll only after long years. But it can be lethal.

How do we prevent this blockage? Other articles in this chapter spell out the steps in detail. They show the way to build the kind of communicating marriage that makes both God and us say, "It is good."