

communication

can you hear me now? ... can you hear me now?

Good communication has always challenged our marriage. Coming from families that had many bad communication patterns, we came into marriage with almost no skills. We tell people that if we can make it, anyone can make it.

Now, we have learned to communicate better We just can't hear each other!

We have proven that you can change! We have been guilty of all the wrong patterns listed on this page, and we are much better now. However, it required a long look in the mirror by each of us. We both still make mistakes at times. I still interrupt sometimes, Ed still gets defensive at times. But we have acknowledged that we haven't mastered communication, but have the commitment that our marriage will still survive.

God has a lot to say about communication. One of the most significant verses is: *For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.* (Luke 6:45a)

The root issue is not what we say ...it is what is in our heart. For the best communication, we must purify our hearts and put on God's mind and wisdom.

We must acknowledge our powerful our words can be. In James 3:5-6, God compares what we say with a spark that starts a wildfire. We are painfully aware of the damage a spark can have; it can destroy acres of land and large properties.

In an effort to give others tools we did not have, I am going to do a few lessons on communication. In this one, I am going to share some very destructive communication patterns. The next lessons will include the positive steps to take.

John Gottman researches marriage and communication to an infinitesimal proportion. He has filmed and analyzed thousands of hours of couples communicating in private settings. After years of research, he says "I am now able to predict whether a couple will stay happily together or lose their way." (*The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*) In three separate studies, he has been able to predict with a 91% accuracy rate whether couples stay together or get divorced after listening to them interact for five minutes.

He does this analysis from a clinical, observable position. His analysis does not include a work of God in the person's heart or learning new skills. His analysis includes attitudes and body language as well as words.

John Gottman says there are certain kinds of negativity, if allowed to run rampant, are so lethal to a relationship that he call them the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

They are:

1. Criticism - A complaint addresses the specific action at which your spouse failed. A criticism is more global - it adds on some negative words about your mate's character or personality.

2. Contempt - Includes sarcasm, cynicism, name-calling, eye-rolling, sneering, mockery, and hostile humor. Contempt is poisonous to the relationship because it conveys disgust. It's virtually impossible to resolve a problem when your partner is getting the message you're disgusted with him/her. Inevitably, contempt leads to more conflict rather than reconciliation. Couples who are contemptuous of each other are more likely to suffer from infectious illnesses (colds, flu, etc.) than other people.

3. Defensiveness - Although it's understandable that someone would defend him/herself, research shows that this approach rarely has the desired effect. The attacking spouse does not back down or apologize. This is because defensiveness is really a way of blaming our partner. You're saying, in effect, "The problem isn't *me*, is *you*." Defensiveness just escalates the conflict, which is why it's so deadly.

Criticism, Contempt, and Defensiveness don't always gallop into a home in strict order. They function more like a relay match - handing the baton off to each other over and over again, if the couple can't put a stop to it.

4. Stonewalling - One partner tunes out. A stonewaller doesn't give you any types of casual feedback (nods, eye contact, etc.). He (occurs most often with men) tends to look the other away or down without uttering a sound. He sits like an impassive stone wall. The stonewaller acts as though he couldn't care less about what you're saying, if he even hears it. Stonewalling usually arrives late in the course of a marriage than the other three horsemen.