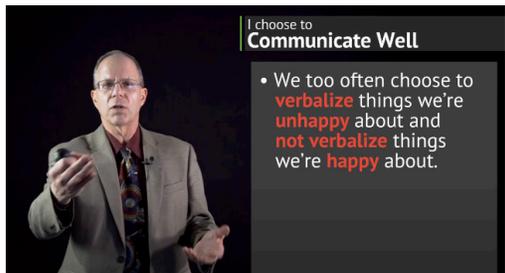


## Choosing to Communicate



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Welcome to lesson 4 in Making Choices That Will Transform Your Marriage: 10 Choices Successful Couples Make.

We really want to talk about communication in this lesson. This is all about how to communicate with each other and how to interact. I have some suggestions related to that, but I want to start by having us take a look at the concept of praise.

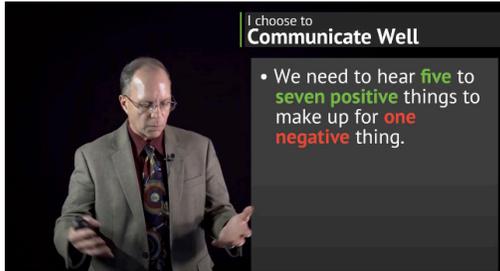
When you look at 1 Thessalonians 5:11, it says, “Therefore, encourage one another and build up one another.” That’s a direct, absolute, clear statement saying our interactions should be building up the people we’re talking to.

Yet here’s what happens for many, many, many, many people; not just couples in counseling, but everybody. There’s an experience of “I’m going to choose to verbalize things when I’m unhappy and not say it when I’m happy.” That happens over and over and over again.

So we’d like you to look like this. We’d like you to be able to be saying, “Great job, keep it up. Awesome. Well done.” If a person walks up the sidewalk, you’d be saying, “It’s so great to see you today.” You don’t even know who it is. You’re just building them up. We should be doing things to build people up, and somehow we’re not doing that.

What we’ve learned is that there’s a process that happens. We’ve heard this as the Golden Rule, the golden number of five. John Gottman talks about all sorts of research he’s created where, first, we need to hear seven positive things to make up for one negative thing.

I think about that with my couples, because I work with a lot of couples in marital therapy. I’ll hear in the beginning of the session . . . they rail off a list of five things they’re so mad about. “You did

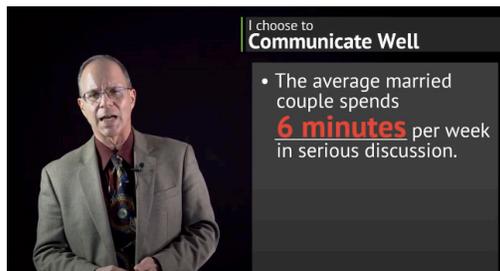


this, and you did this, and I can't ...” Sometimes, I wish someone would come in and say, “I did ...” rather than “you did ...” but they never do. Well, rarely. So what happens is they’ve listed off all these negative lists of things.

I ask them to stop for a second and do some math. What I want to say is, “Okay, if you just said five things that this person messed up with this week, you owe them thirty-five positive things before the session is over. So we need to get working on that.” They just look at me like I’m crazy.

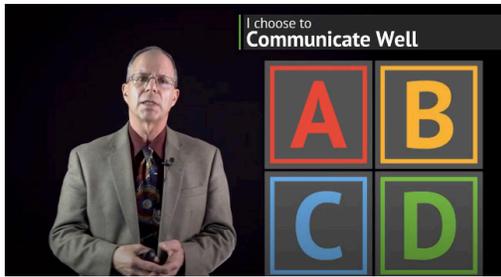
Then basically what this means is for all the times that you have spent cutting your partner down or saying what you wish they would do or what you were disappointed or frustrated in, even for them to perceive it’s equal, you’ve got to say five to seven times as many positive things. That’s really hard for most couples to make up for. So you’re always in the negative.

You’ve seen those ideas about how people put a jelly bean in a love jar when you say something nice and all that kind of stuff. Problem is, most people have taken so many beans out, there’s no beans left to do anything with. It’s all empty. Okay?



Studies have shown the average married couple spends a certain amount of time per week in serious discussion. You look at that number, and I want you to think for a second. What do you think the answer is there? Just think about it. How many minutes per week does a couple spend in serious discussion about important things? If we’ve had numerous studies done and we [inaudible 00:02:47] the study, what do we think we’re going to find? Believe it or not, the answer is six minutes a week, which is sad. Yet, if you think about how much time people spend at work, how little they see each other—they’ve got to get dinner ready, they’ve got to take care of the kids. When they’ve got the kids to bed, now they’re tired, and they’re worn out. They’re just trying to get to sleep so they can get up and do it all again the next day. On the weekend, it’s like, “Hey, I’m living for the weekend,” except now they have to do the work outside, in the garage, and they’ve got soccer games, and they’ve got church. And the next thing you know, an awful lot of couples have very little time to communicate.

When you do communicate, I’m going to suggest that there are some very clear principles for the way I would like you to communicate. This is, if you make the time to do it well, there are some principles that are all related to that. I call them the ABCs.



Imagine that: A, B, C, D. But the reason I call them the ABCs is because they are really the building blocks, the core of how you learn to relate to each other in a positive way. So they work just like learning your letters when you're a young child. When you learn the letters well, they work together, they build on each other, and then you develop words and conversation, and everything works great.

The first principle is active listening, and it's a type of accuracy in a sense. The idea is that if you're accurate and you're actively listening and you're clearly communicating, then what's going to happen is you're verifying the message. You're listening well. You're accurately understanding what the person said; and in so doing, the person is saying things clearly to you. So if you communicate accurately as a couple, I'm going to be feeding back to you what I heard, and you're going to be verifying that. So together with active listening, you're going to be able to accurately communicate and say what you said and know what the other person said.



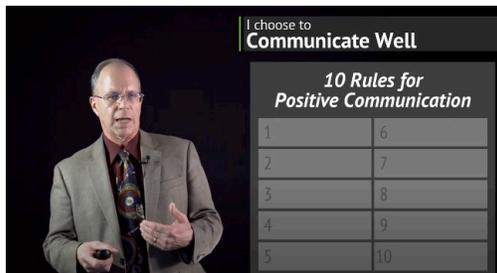
Secondly, and you've seen this in this video series, you have to be pretty bullet-pointed. You can't just start saying everything that's on your heart and keep rambling. Because five minutes have gone by, and you may not know it, but your partner has gone to their happy place somewhere else. They've lost you, because you need to make brief bullet-point statements and say, "Here's what I really want you to understand."

Thirdly, it really helps if you're clear. That means you can't conflate like a couple of things together or put one concept in with this and that and everything is overlapping each other. If you do, what happens is that you tend to have some conflict and you get into difficulty, because you don't really understand what the other person's saying.



Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, is delivery. Please be careful with your tone and how you deliver something and how you say it. An entire message can be blown out of the water, because the delivery is so poor that the other person feels attacked or misunderstood or unheard, and so the message isn't received at all.

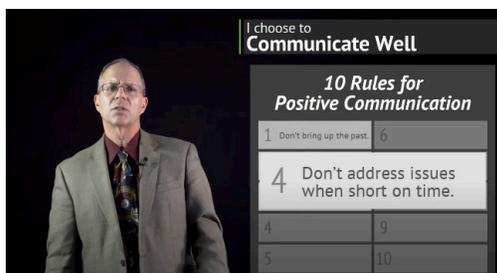
So we want you to communicate accurately in a number of ways. But what we really want you to do is try to be able to communicate accurately, briefly, with clarity, and in a positive delivery that



helps you understand what's going on. In order for you to do that, there's about ten rules that I've talked about that I think are really valuable. They're again in the 10 Choices Successful Couples Make book. But largely, I'm going to go through these just to give you a little flavor of what it might feel like to communicate in a positive way.

First thing is, don't bring up the past. It rarely if ever helps to go back and try and talk about a conflict that occurred back in 2012. It's just not going to be useful. What you want to do is say, "Here's the issue that's coming up currently. Here's what I'd like to talk to you about."

Secondly, I really believe in dealing with one conflict at a time. You can have seven different conversations about seven different things. That's awesome. But please don't try to put all seven things together, because what ends up happening is what God's trying to do is clarify between the two of you what really would be the transformational point that He wants to work in the marriage. If you're having difficulty praising each other and building each other up and encouraging each other, it gets a little difficult, because you've got too many conflicts, and you can't focus on more than one thing at a time.



I will say this, no good conversation in a marriage ever occurred after 9:00 p.m. The reason I say that is because for the most part when you're tired, you've gotten the kids taken care of, or you've done a long day at work, this is not the best time to try to talk about the biggest problem in your marriage that you want to deal with. Much better to say, "Hey, Hon, there's something I really haven't talked to you about, and I really want to. Can we have breakfast tomorrow before we go to work?" Or, "Can we have lunch tomorrow?" Or, "Can I meet with you after work?" Or, "When can we get each other's attention so we can really work together?" If you try to deal with problems when you're short on time, which is basically what happens at night too, things don't go well, because you're now compressed, and you've got to figure it out quick, and then you say things that you really probably wish you hadn't said. That's like when he's walking out the door to go to work and you're walking out the door to go to work and you've both got to get the kids to school—that's not the time to say, "So why did you say that last night?" Probably better to wait a little while and say, "Hey, I really want to talk to you after work. Can we talk later?"

By the way, be really careful about what you say in texts. That



does not work well to start a conflict by texting somebody about it. Say it in person. Interact with each other directly. I think God honors that, and God honors personal communication.

Your grandmother always told you, “If you don’t have something good to say, don’t say anything at all.” She said honesty was the best policy, right? There is no question that hiding things doesn’t help. You need to tell the truth and just be honest, because it’s very rare that a relationship is going to survive when you’re saying things that aren’t true.

Don’t hit below the belt. By that I mean you know the words that could hurt. You know in your heart when God makes you feel guilty and you start thinking, “Boy, if I say that, that’s going to hurt.” You can bring out the big guns. That would be really powerful and it would have . . . But you also know you’re going to hurt the person at a heart level if you say it. Very rarely do you need to hit below the belt. Be fair, be kind. You don’t need to say those things that you know are going to hurt.

One of the other things that I will say is that you really can look at what will work in the future instead of what went wrong in the past. So if you can, you spend quite a bit of time focusing more on things that would move forward rather than back.



I certainly believe that you should listen more than you talk. If you recall my earlier message about selflessness and unselfishness, the idea of being able to listen more and to try to understand the other person is really valuable.

It’s amazing, in our communication in America today, that most people stop listening when someone’s talking about halfway through or, maybe better, two-thirds of the way through. But almost nobody listens to anyone’s complete thought before they start talking or even thinking about what they want to say back.

What would happen if you didn’t think and just listened until the person was totally done? And then you thought, “Did I get that right? Is this really what you’re feeling?” You feed it back to them. You know those conversations when it feels like somebody really got you and you just feel like they understood you? Those are magical moments; and God honors those and respects those and values those when you really listen and want to understand the other person.



I mentioned using bullet points earlier, and I certainly think that's important here as well. Then I really want you to, as much as possible, avoid hurtful, destructive statements, because all that's going to do is lead to what John Gottman talked about—the four horsemen of the apocalypse. What he means by this is that there are four developmental stages that happen when conflict occurs in a relationship. Gottman's been studying marriages for a long, long time. He says he can be very accurate in predicting whether marriages are going to last. He looks at communication interactions and tells you that.

He talks about these four steps. Criticism is a statement where you're blaming your partner or you're finding a way to use the words always and never, those kinds of things. Those are problematic.



But contempt is what happens when now it's not just, "You're late," it's, "You're a late person." It adds insult to the criticism. Those very quickly deteriorate into defensiveness, because the other partner is pushing back now. They're like, "What? You're calling me this." Contempt is a very destructive part in a marriage, because you're basically saying, "I don't even like you anymore." Those statements lead to what we call stonewalling, which is when now we're into, "We can't fix this, we're hopeless, we're heading to the divorce attorneys." I don't want you to get to that stage in your marriage.



What I want you to think about this week in terms of an exercise is to really evaluate your positive and negative comments. Think about whether you are criticizing more or praising more. Think about that five to one ratio. How many positive statements do you have to make to [inaudible 00:10:37] up with the negative statements? If you can have that level of awareness of positive and negative statements in your marriage, I think you'll find that you can transform the relationship in really amazing ways; and you'll be shocked by what God can do within your marriage this week.