

# Openness & Honesty

## Letting Yourself Be Known

by  
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This article is for **you** whether you are married or not. In fact, if you are single, it would be to your advantage to learn and practice good principles of communication before you "take the plunge" and make a lifelong commitment. I am writing about this because one of the most common problems I have seen in marriage is a lack of communication. By communication, I don't mean just talking (we **all** talk), but I mean the honest and transparent sharing of our hurts, hopes, frustrations, and fears. In other words, sharing from the depths of our hearts and giving each other a good look at the "real us." Now, I realize that the thought of such honesty utterly terrifies some of you, but that's exactly why I want to talk about it.

I believe that everyone longs to be known and understood in an intimate way, by at least one other person in their life. And if you are married, it makes good sense that your husband or wife would be that loyal and loving friend you are looking for. Good communication within a marriage is absolutely necessary. If you can't talk to each other honestly, you will slowly drift apart and live in your own "separate little worlds." The problem is this - in order to **have** a friend, you must also **be** a friend. It means laying your heart open and laying your life down - before you can ever hope to see that glorious friendship, fellowship, and love that God wants you to enjoy. This principle applies not only to marriage, but to every other relationship you will ever have.

### Looking Back

Before I go any further, I want to take you back into my past a little bit. When I first met my husband Keith, neither one of us were Christians yet, although we were both earnestly "searching for the truth." One thing that I noticed immediately was that he had a real conviction about being honest. He hated lying, and he was always quick to tell me what he was thinking about. I admired this quality in him and secretly wished that I could be that open. But on the other hand, his honesty totally intimidated me because (to my dismay) he wanted to know **my** thoughts too! This really presented a problem because I was a very "private" person, and I kept a lot of things inside. There were many things I never told anybody because I felt uncomfortable when others knew too much about me. I was a habitual liar (about some of the most insignificant things), and I rarely told **anyone** the things that were really on my heart. If someone started asking me too many personal questions, I would get offended and wonder why they were "being so nosy." I never really realized that they may have just been looking for a deeper, less superficial friendship with me.

This way of thinking had deeply affected my life without me even realizing it, but no one had ever confronted me on it before. I was very content to live with the two of me - the one I let people see, and the one I kept hidden. But my husband was a natural communicator. He wanted to get to know me - and I had never met anyone so persistent about it in my whole life! Why did he ask me so many questions? And where did he get the nerve to insist that I not only answer - but **answer honestly**? I hated it! There were so many times that I wished he would just **go away**. Sometimes the confrontations were pretty intense. He would ask me a question about something and I would say, "I don't know" or "I can't remember" (lies), or I would get angry, or cry, or just stare silently at the floor, refusing to say a word. I was actually hoping that he would give up and leave me alone so I could crawl back into my little shell. I was so insecure that I was afraid to open myself up and become vulnerable. I was sure I would be hurt and eventually rejected if I let myself be seen.

## Who Am I?

### ***"Even in laughter the heart may be in pain..." (Proverbs 14:13)***

The most frightening thing for me was realizing that I had spent so much time (my whole life!) trying to be someone who was accepted by others - that I never developed my **own** personality or character. I saw that many times I rationalized not being honest just to avoid a confrontation with someone who had a different opinion than I did. I had become a chameleon. I made sure I always fit smoothly into the situation, made no waves and posed no threats. I never shared any "bright ideas" (what if someone laughed?), and so I stopped getting them. I had become a hollow shell of a person. In fact, in the depths of my despair over my inability to open up, I started thinking of myself as a "non-person." I knew it was my own fault - that I had locked myself into a self-made prison. On the outside I looked fine, but inside I was a mass of insecurity, fear, and pain. To say this revelation devastated me would be putting it mildly. It all seemed so hopeless. The answer to my question of "Who am I?" was finally found, but I didn't like what I saw. **I was a phony!** At last I found out what the problem was, but it didn't scare me half as much as what the solution might be.

I wish I could say it was easy from there, but that was only the beginning. It took many soul-wrenching confrontations and many nights of tears before I finally saw that I was deceived. It took a determined husband, and the tender love and mercy of our dear Jesus - (we finally found that "truth" we had been searching for!) - to bring me through. I had to come to the realization that I could not please God unless I became an honest person. I needed to see I was in sin, and learn to hate it as much as God did. *"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight."* (Proverbs 12:22) It was not easy, nor was it painless - but without God, it would have been impossible!

## Taking Out the Splinter

It should be obvious that you cannot have a loving, fruitful relationship if it is not built on honesty and trust. This principle holds true for any relationship - but within a marriage, where there are daily interactions (and sometimes confrontations), it is most vital. There is a temptation to want to "keep the peace at all costs." This attitude just might "cost" you your marriage if left unchecked. Let me give you an example:

You get a tiny splinter in your finger. You know it's going to hurt a little to take it out, so you decide to ignore it. Three nights later you wake up out of a sound sleep in excruciating pain. Your finger is throbbing, fiery red with infection and swollen to twice its normal size. You groan because you know that splinter will have to come out - only now it's going to hurt twice as much. At that point you will find yourself wishing you had taken care of it immediately instead of waiting so long... and so it is with everything.

Some little hurt or disappointment that is left inside to fester and get worse will end up controlling you if you don't get rid of it at the first available opportunity. The Bible tells us not to let the sun go down on our anger (*Eph. 4:26*), and for a good reason. If we keep things inside, one hurt piles up on another... until we are crushed beneath the weight.

## Pride - The Game Of Selfishness

If you really want someone to know you are hurt, you have to say, "Ouch!" That means revealing yourself and coming out of hiding. Unfortunately, many people are too proud to do that. Rather than expose their true feelings or their weaknesses, they choose to walk around with hurt and bitterness in their hearts. Sure, it's embarrassing when seemingly trivial things upset you. But even these things need to be brought into the open, talked about, and prayed over.

Those who are too proud to share their real feelings will usually let you know by their actions and expressions that something is wrong - but they won't tell you what it is! They want you to guess, or better yet, somehow read their minds. They may "help" you by dropping sarcastic little hints, but they will never come right out and tell you what is bothering them. Someone who acts like this is very frustrating to be around, not to mention to try to live with. They are really playing a cruel and selfish game - for they expect to be understood without making any effort to be understandable. (I know... because I've done it!)

## Love Believes All Things

Another area that we need to be careful in is coming to wrong conclusions about other people's actions. For example: your husband comes home from work, and you can immediately tell that he is upset about something. But instead of asking him what's wrong, you think, "What is he so upset about - I wonder if he's mad at me? Oh, he's probably, still upset over that disagreement we had this morning. Well, he has a lot of nerve - I thought we settled that! Why can't he just forget about it? He **always**..." And before you know it, your defenses are up and you're stomping around the kitchen headed straight for trouble.

If we weren't always so worried about ourselves, we would have more time to be truly concerned about others. If this wife would have taken the time to ask her husband what was wrong, she might have found out that he had an exceptionally hard day at work, or that he was upset with himself because God gave him a test, and he failed miserably. But instead of believing the best, she assumed the worst - and missed an opportunity to minister to him by lovingly pointing him back to Jesus. How can we hope to know what's happening in someone's heart, if we don't care enough about them to take the time to find out? Love *"bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."* (I Cor. 13:7)

## The Fear Of Man

Putting up a front means keeping it up at all times - or being found out. If others love only the front we put up, but not the "real us" - we will never really feel total satisfaction from that love. On the other hand, there tends to be a fear that the person we really are would not be as well loved as the person everyone **thinks** we are. And so the show must go on.

In a strange way, this may be a rather "safe" place for some people to be - because if for some reason they **are** rejected, they can excuse themselves with the fact that it wasn't "really me" anyway. Therefore, they don't need to take **full responsibility** for what might be wrong in their life, or **work towards changing it**. This is a vicious cycle, and it takes a conscious effort, along with much prayer and strength from the Holy Spirit, to change it. If you don't give others a chance to love the "real you," you will never know that it is possible.

First you must see that the root of your problem is sin. Your fear of rejection is really the fear of man. *"The fear of man brings a snare, but he who trusts in the Lord will be exalted. Many seek the ruler's (husband's, wife's, friend's) favor, but justice for man comes from the Lord." (Proverbs 29:25-26)* The Bible again tells us that, *"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." (Proverbs 9:10)* It is **God's** approval that we should be earnestly seeking. If we fear the **right person**, we will find ourselves doing the **right things!**

## Have You Given Up?

If your marriage is sick, you must do everything in your power to make it well again. If you give up and think, "Nothing's going to help," or, "She'll never change," you are just signing the "death certificate" for your marriage.

At first you may have to push yourself to communicate. It may seem forced and unnatural, but don't let that discourage you. The more you do it, the easier it will get. When your marriage gets back on its feet, you will be grateful that you made the effort. No matter how painful it may be initially... the healing will be glorious!

Just think of a dangerously ill person who is being force-fed through a tube that's running down his throat, into his stomach. Sure, it might be embarrassing to be in that position and no doubt it is pretty uncomfortable - but at least he is being **kept alive!** When he gets better he'll have the strength to feed himself, but he will always be grateful for that "awful tube" - and the fact that his family and doctor loved him too much to give up on him.

## Some Practical Steps

One day my husband came up home and said, "What things could I do to make you happier?" I couldn't believe my ears - this was my big chance! I thought hard, but I was very surprised to find that I could only come up with a few things. (I thought there would be a lot more!) Then I asked Keith the same question and he could only think of a couple of things too. We were both amazed that such a few small grievances had become so annoying and "larger than life" to us. Surprisingly, most of these things were fairly simple to correct with just a little extra effort and thoughtfulness on both of our parts. Needless to say, we started trying harder.

You might try asking your husband or wife how you could make them happier - you just may be surprised at their answer. I would, however, like to give you one word of caution here - don't ask unless you are prepared to follow through with action. If you don't make an honest effort at changing, it will show that you were not sincerely concerned - and there will be a loss of trust suffered between you.

Another thing you can do is keep separate daily diaries where you can jot down your thoughts, trials, and blessings - then set aside some time each evening to get together and share what you have written. Once you are in the habit of sharing your heart, you may no longer need this to get you going - but it doesn't really matter **how** you do it... as long as you **do it**.

Above all things, **pray together** and ask God to help you draw closer to Him, and to each other. Ask Him to help you - drop your defenses and open up in a way that you never have before. Don't get discouraged if you have setbacks or find that one or both of you are going back "on automatic." You both have years of bad habits to break, and it's not all going to change overnight. But if you discuss your failures, forgive each other, and start over again, I know you will see an immediate improvement.

If your husband or wife isn't ready to make the effort, then **you** take the lead and change **your** life. If you really mean business, your determination to trust God and open up may spark their enthusiasm and encourage them to step out and try.

## Be Ye Kind...

***"Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, who ever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you." (Col. 3:12-13)***

When you go to share a hurt or a shortcoming that you see, be **very specific**, but go in an attitude of love and gentleness - ready to quickly forgive and forget. Remember, sin always hurts **God** the most - and your motive must be to see your loved one restored to a right standing with Him. If there is something that God wants you to tell your husband or wife, your reluctance to be honest about it is

surely hindering their growth in the Lord.

Many things are sensitive and hard to talk about. Pray first that God will show you the right time, give you the right words, and that He will prepare your mate's heart to openly receive. Be willing to be wrong - and be willing to be the one who has to change. Make it clear that even though you may not love all that **they do**, it doesn't change the fact that you **love them** and want to see them grow in godliness and become more and more like Jesus.

If you are on the receiving end, **don't be defensive**. Don't bring up all the "good" things you've done lately - but honestly try to see where you have been wrong. Don't try to justify your sin, but realize that you have made some wrong choices that have hurt God and those around you. Be quick to admit your mistakes and say you're sorry. If you are hard to approach, or get mad and snappy when shown a problem area - you will destroy some of the trust and openness you are trying so desperately to build. If you make others afraid to come to you... they won't! Nobody wants to walk into a den full of angry lions!

### What Openness And Honesty Is Not

Being open and honest does not give you license to sin. Richard Shelly Taylor, in his book *The Disciplined Life*, sums it up by saying,

*"Some people pride themselves on their frankness. 'I say what I think,' they boast. So does the fool according to the Bible. 'A fool uttereth all his mind.' (Proverbs 29:11) Frankness is indeed a virtue when mixed with intelligent, loving tact and discretion. However, it becomes a sadistic vice when it is merely the unbridled eruptions of opinions, without regard to times, places, or human feelings. 'There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.' (Proverbs 12:18)"*

Make it your goal to bring healing and reconciliation with your words, encouraging those you love to serve Jesus in a deeper and more meaningful way. Seek God for a balance of wisdom and love in your honesty - a balance that does not compromise the truth.

### God's Example

You must remember that you are not going to get more out of your marriage than you are willing to put into it. There's nothing worse than living in the same house with someone, even sleeping in the same bed - and yet being a million miles apart. You need to look at God as your perfect example. Think of the close relationship He has with His Son Jesus and with the Holy Spirit. They have no communication problems because their relationship is built on the deepest of loves. We were created in God's image, and so we, too, were meant to experience loving relationships. In fact, Jesus died to restore our relationships - first to God and then to others. You may faithfully try to follow some of the "steps" I spoke of to improve your marriage, but the results will only be temporary unless your priority relationship is the one you have with God. It is from this relationship only that you will receive the life-transforming power that is needed to bring a lasting change. If you seek to glorify God in your marriage (and your other relationships), then He will give you the ability to do it. You will never know true freedom in the Lord, or true happiness, until you come to grips with this issue and, with the help of Jesus, conquer it!

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