



COMMUNICATION: THE FOUNDATION OF PASSION

Passion starts with communication. Deep communication. The kind in which your hearts and minds are truly connecting. The kind in which you both are sharing personal things that you don't share with anyone else, issues that are deep in your hearts and often have to do with your view of yourself. Sharing feelings like that must involve opening yourselves up to the other. The trouble is, very few couples experience anything close to this level of communication. Why? Because God made the two sexes so incredibly different.

Picture the following scenario. (I think you'll recognize it.) A man and a woman are in conversation. It could be at home, in the car, or in a restaurant. Both are taking turns talking and listening. Then, suddenly, it happens. The woman notices that the man is not listening. She glances at him and sees the telltale signs: his mouth is hanging open, his eyes are glassy and staring off into the distance, and his body is as rigid as a statue.

It's not a stroke. It's not a seizure. It's not some kind of temporary paralysis. It's what all women hate. It's what drives them crazy. It's *the Zone*.

The Zone is a periodic mental blank spot that men move into without warning. In the Zone, there is little, if any, brain activity. For a brief period, conscious thoughts cease.

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The woman takes the Zone personally and says, “You’re not listening to me!” She’s right. He’s not. Now, it’s bad enough at this point; the woman is insulted and angry because the man wasn’t paying attention to her. But it gets worse. The woman, being a woman, has to ask this question: “What were you thinking about?” The man, being a man, with all sincerity, has to answer, “Nothing.” The woman can’t believe it. “What do you mean, *nothing*?” She can’t conceive of going blank and having nothing on her mind. It has never happened to her. She’s convinced he’s lying. He had to be thinking of something!

Speaking on behalf of all men, ladies, let me assure you that the Zone is not an intentional attempt to drive you over the edge of sanity. It just seems that way. It’s a perfectly natural part of being a man.

In fact, the Zone operates as a protective shutoff valve for a man’s brain. When his brain is in danger of taking in too much information, it automatically shuts down. So, when your man zones out, you should be happy. *Wow, that was a close one. I guess I was talking too much.*

The Zone is just one difference between a man and a woman. There are a million differences! And all these differences block us in communication.

Solomon and Shulamith have the same differences all couples do. The wonderful thing is, they know how to get past all these differences and achieve a deep level of communication. The main way they do this is by “dancing the Four Step.”

LET’S DO THE COMMUNICATION FOUR-STEP

God has designed a specific method couples can use to maneuver around their differences and connect—really connect—in conversation. I call this method the Communication Four-Step, and Solomon and Shulamith demonstrate it throughout the Song of Solomon. Each time these two lovers follow these four progressive steps, they develop intimate conversations. And what happens when you get intimate conversations? You get passion and plenty of it.

STEP ONE: WHEN YOU’RE APART, DWELL ON THE POSITIVE

The cycle of intimate communication begins *before* you ever sit down to talk. The method is simple: Whenever you’re apart, fill your mind with positive thoughts about your partner. As you dwell on your sweetheart’s wonderful qualities, your feelings of love will intensify. Your heart and your mind will open up. You will get excited about seeing your special person.

This first step occurs at the very beginning of the Song of Solomon. Shulamith is alone, and she is thinking very positive thoughts about Solomon. She loves his kisses (1:2), adores his lovemaking (1:2), is intoxicated by his scent (1:3), and believes everything about him has a beautiful fragrance (1:3).

Thinking these positive thoughts about her man sparks Shulamith’s passion for Solomon and makes her want to be with him: “Draw me after you and let us run together! The king has brought me into his chambers” (1:4).

Chambers? What are they going to do in his chambers? Play checkers? Read the paper? Fold the laundry? No! They’re going to talk on a deep level and then make love.

Remember back when you were dating and your love was blooming? You thought all kinds of positive things about your wonderful new partner all the time, didn’t you? All those positive thoughts created intense feelings of love and longing to be with that amazing person, right?

Get back to doing this! It will reenergize your love and get you warmed up for your times of communication. When you dwell on the positive when you’re apart, you’ll be ready to open up when you get together to talk.

STEP TWO: MAKE TIME TO BE TOGETHER

Now that you’re warmed up, you have to get together to talk. To connect in conversation, you must have regularly scheduled times of communication. As I recommended in chapter 6, you need a minimum of four thirty-minute Couple Talk Times each week. No children present. No pets. No television, computer, or telephone. No distractions of any kind. Just the two of you in a

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private, quiet place in your home.

Who schedules these Couple Talk Times? The husband. Who makes sure they happen? The husband. Who leads in these talk times? The husband.

Solomon and Shulamith make time to be together throughout the Song of Solomon. One of the secrets to their incredible passion is their commitment to spend time together, away from everyone and everything else, on a regular basis.

I don't want to hear your lame excuses for why you can't meet with your spouse in four thirty-minute Couple Talk Times. It's not that you *can't*; it's that you *won't*.

Solomon was the king of Israel. A pretty busy guy, wouldn't you say? If Solomon could make time for Shulamith, you can make time for your spouse. We always make time for what's important to us.

Just this last week, I sat with a man and his wife in my therapy office. The man was so tied up with his career, his church, and his community organizations that he had no time left for his wife. I told him: "When you're divorced, you'll have plenty of time for your career, your church, and community organizations, but you won't have this wonderful woman to share your life with."

Make time every week to talk.

STEP THREE: WHEN YOU'RE TOGETHER, START WITH THE POSITIVE

You've warmed up for your time together by dwelling on your partner's positive qualities. Now you've sat down in a private, quiet place in your home to begin your thirty-minute Couple Talk Times. Now what do you do? Do what Solomon and Shulamith do: start by saying positive things about each other.

Every time Solomon and Shulamith are together—*every* time—they begin their conversation with special pet names and with praise. Right up front, they verbalize their love for one another. Their positive comments come before they bring up any topics. What they're doing is following up on the nonverbal positive thoughts they dwelt on when they were apart.

This burst of sweet positivity is the best way to start a Couple

Talk Time. It automatically deepens Solomon’s and Shulamith’s level of conversation and helps them open up and share personally. It will do the same thing for you and your sweetheart.

SANDY ISN’T SANDY, SHE’S “SWEETIE CARKEST”

Solomon and Shulamith are into terms of endearment. Big-time. Solomon calls Shulamith “my darling” nine times. Shulamith calls Solomon “my beloved” a whopping twenty-four times! Solomon also calls Shulamith “my dove” (Song of Solomon 2:14; 5:2; 6:9), “my bride” (Song of Solomon 4:8–12; 5:1), and “my perfect one” (5:2; 6:9). Shulamith calls Solomon “gazelle” or “young stag” (2:9, 17; 8:14), which means “stud” or “hunka-hunka burnin’ love.”

Taking my cue from Solomon, I call Sandy “Sweetie Carkest.” “Carkest” is a form of Clarke. I also call her “Tweedie,” a version of Sweetie, and “Special T.” (I won’t explain this one.) Silly? Sure. Sappy? You bet. Gushy? No question about it.

But do these cutesy names make Sandy feel special? Yes. Do they make her feel loved and closer to me? You bet. Do they create a positive flow and prepare her for a great conversation? No question about it.

COMPLIMENTS PRECEDE CONVERSATION

After using pet names with each other, Solomon and Shulamith still aren’t quite ready for dialogue. Just before they talk about whatever they’re going to talk about, they lay some heavy-duty compliments on each other. They praise each other in two areas: physical beauty and character.

A good example of their mutual praise before deeper conversation is found in Song of Solomon 1:9–2:4. Here the compliments bounce back and forth between the lovers. It’s as if they are trying to top each other with more and more flattering comments. As their praises flow, their passion intensifies and they become more and more vulnerable.

For starters, Solomon—using the imagery of his mare—tells Shulamith she is a beautiful and confident woman with excellent character (1:9–10). He lets her know that her cheeks and neck are

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stunning. He also calls her beautiful twice (1:15), and mentions the beauty of her eyes.

Shulamith responds by calling him “handsome” and “so pleasant” (1:16). She lets him know that he is very attractive physically and as a person.

Solomon fires back that she is “like a lily among the thorns” (2:2). This means she is the most beautiful and impressive woman he knows.

Shulamith responds by telling Solomon that he is “like an apple tree” in the forest (2:3). In other words, he protects her, and she feels safe with him.

Now, that’s how you begin a loving, deep conversation! Does all this praise seem over-the-top to you? Does it make you feel uncomfortable? Believe me, you’re not alone. Here’s a dialogue I had recently with a husband after I urged his wife and him to begin their Couple Talk Times with mutual praise:

Husband: All this praise between Solomon and Shulamith is overkill.

Dave: No, it’s not. It’s what lovers do.

Husband: But it’s not real life! Couples don’t do this kind of gushing praise. It’s embarrassing.

Dave: It is real love; that’s what it is. This kind of mutual praise helped Solomon and Shulamith open up and talk personally. You know what’s embarrassing? Sitting together with nothing to say.

Husband: We did this praising thing back when we were dating. We’ve matured as a couple and moved past that stage.

Dave: I’m sorry to hear that. You’ve lost something precious. Let me guess. You’ve also moved past your passion, haven’t you? This mutual praise is not just for couples who are dating. It’s for all couples, no matter how long

they’ve been together. In fact, the longer you’ve been married, the more there is to praise.

Husband: I’m just not a gushing, sweet, syrupy person.

Dave: Then become one. You only have to be syrupy with one person on the face of the earth. Your wife. With practice, you’ll get the hang of this praise thing. When your wife is happy and your conversations are deeper, you’ll keep it up with—if not gush—gusto.

Start your Couple Talk Times the way Solomon and Shulamith start theirs: with pet names and with praise. I recommend you call your spouse one pet name, then say “I love you” and give her one compliment. The compliment can be for a physical attribute (“Your eyes are gorgeous”), a character trait (“I love that you are so affectionate”), or an action (“Thank you for making a wonderful meal last night”).

You’ll be amazed at how this opening burst of positivity deepens your conversations.

If you and your partner have endured a tough few days or you are in a painful place as a married couple, crank up the positives at the beginning of your Couple Talk Times. You need more positive flow to overcome the negativity in your relationship. Use two pet names and say “I love you” twice, and give two compliments. Neither of you may feel like doing this, but force yourselves to squeeze out these positives. It will make a difference in your conversations and in your feelings for each other.

STEP FOUR: TALK ABOUT EVERYTHING

I know it’s hard to believe, but you’re finally ready to talk. I still want you to use the Couple Talk Time stages I covered in chapter 6: create ambiance, pray a brief opening prayer, read your couples’ devotional together, discuss any carryover topics, discuss current

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events, pray together, and move from prayer to conversation.

The final step in Solomon and Shulamith's Communication Four-Step—talk about everything—applies to the current events stage of your Couple Talk Times. The key here is being willing to bring up and discuss every possible topic. Virtually every topic in the known universe is fair game.

Too many couples place too many topics off-limits. They can't talk about sex. They can't talk about money. They can't talk about spiritual matters. They can't talk about in-law issues. They can't talk about _____ (fill in the blank).

Avoiding sensitive topics may help you not to fight, but it will also kill your passion. If you can't discuss areas of disagreement and pain, you can't resolve the underlying issues, and your resentments will grow year after year. The terrible weight of all these unresolved topics will crush the life from your relationship.

Eventually, these taboo topics will widen the gulf between you and your spouse, and before long you won't talk about anything significant. Silence, or sticking to superficial, safe topics, never produces passion.

Solomon and Shulamith have a wide-open, no-limits-allowed, we-can-talk-about-anything communication style. When they start talking in this fourth step, nothing is off the table. Check out this list of topics they discuss in the Song of Solomon:

Her deepest insecurities. Her past traumas. Her lack of care for her body. Specific and detailed descriptions of each other's body parts. Friends. Family. Childhood. The need to refrain from premarital sex. Vacations they want to take. Conflicts between them. How to resolve a conflict. Misunderstandings. Specific and detailed descriptions of each other's personalities and character traits. Their feelings of love and passion for each other. What their bedroom looks like. Kissing. French kissing. Making out. Foreplay. Sexual intercourse. Detailed descriptions of their kissing, making out, foreplay, and intercourse. What they'd like to try in the bedroom. Having sex in the outdoors. Vacation sex.

Exactly how she becomes lubricated prior to intercourse. The permanence of their love. The importance of keeping God at the center of their relationship. God being the source of their love. Their emotional connection. Their wedding day. The problem of indifference in marriage. Forgiveness.

See what I mean? Solomon and Shulamith are fearless when it comes to bringing up topics for conversation. They covered all these topics in only eight chapters! And this isn't even a complete list. Through Solomon and Shulamith, God is telling you and your spouse to have the freedom to talk about everything—from the most mundane and trivial to the most intimate and painful.

Don't ever say to your spouse, "I'm not going to talk about that." You have the right of refusal with just about any other person, but not with your spouse. To be a healthy and passionate couple, you *must* be willing to talk about *any* topic. You may temporarily put off a conversation, but as soon as possible you need to go to your spouse and say, "I'm ready to talk about that now."

It's very common for one spouse to genuinely struggle to open up and share personally. It can be the husband. It can be the wife. If the strategies in this chapter don't lead to a breakthrough after two months, go *as a couple* to a Christian therapist. Work as a team on the problem. Together, with the right guidance, you will uncover and remove whatever is blocking the uncommunicative spouse from engaging in deep conversations—whether it's past, unresolved pain; personality issues; or marital issues.

If there are deep, unresolved wounds in your relationship, these wounds will hamper your ability (and probably your willingness) to communicate on a deep level. But you don't have to remain stuck there. Find a professional Christian therapist, and go through a process of healing. It will be painful, but along the way you can forgive and trust and learn to communicate on an intimate level.