



CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

BY TOMMY NELSON



Can You Hear Me Now? – Communication in Marriage

© 2006 Tommy Nelson

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CONTENTS

		Page
Resource Credits		4
Can You Hear Me Now?		5

Session	Title	
1	Static on the Line Interferences to Communication in Marriage	6
2	Clear Channels How to Communicate <i>With</i> Each Other	20
3	Strong Signals How to Listen and Respond	34
4	Hang-Ups and Disconnects How to Fight Fair	48
5	Reconnecting How to Build Bridges of Love	62
6	Call Screening Addressing the Topics We Avoid	76

Leader's Guide

Group Covenant	89
Welcome to Community! (Group Leader Tools)	90-93
Leader's Tips and Notes	94-101
About the Author & Acknowledgments	102
Meeting Planner & Group Directory	103-104

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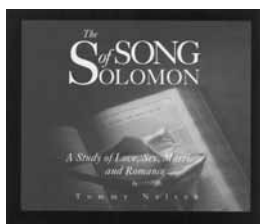
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CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

We long for connection in our marriage—for the deeper experiences of two hearts that have been joined together as one. Early on, as we were getting to know each other, heart-level communication was at the core of our relationship. When we fell in love, many of our conversations focused on sharing our hopes and dreams, our wounds and struggles, and even our fears. Since those early days, we have matured, our marriage has grown in many ways, and yet it often seems that we've lost something vital as communication has been reduced to talking about the “stuff” of life – jobs, schedules, kids, chores, and bills.

Research highlights that most problems in marriages arise from one of four sources: (1) communication problems, (2) sexual difficulties, (3) money management differences, and (4) in-law issues. It shouldn't surprise anyone that communication is far and away the most common and most serious problem in marriage.

It's as if we're communicating clearly by phone, but then interferences produce static on the line, the clear signal begins to fade, and we have frequent disconnects. But we *can* strengthen our communication as we interact with a group of other people to understand key truths related to:

- * *Static on the Line* – Interferences to Communication in Marriage
- * *Clear Channels* – How to Communication *With* Each Other
- * *Strong Signals* – How to Listen and Respond
- * *Hang-ups and Disconnects* – How to Fight Fair
- * *Reconnecting* – How to Build Bridges of Love
- * *Call Screening* – Addressing the Topics We Avoid

This unique study will be a lot of fun as you interact with other couples around what God says in the Bible about communication. In addition, each couple will enjoy date nights together as they take steps to improve communication at home and spend time reconnecting.

You'll experience a life-changing journey through unique discovery-focused Bible studies, group interactions, questions to take to God and to your heart, and sharing life together with the other members of your group.

Static on the Line

INTERFERENCES TO COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE

Early television sitcoms of the 1950s featured suburban families that functioned ideally – that is, all except *The Honeymooners*. Ralph and Alice Kramden bickered furiously in a rundown, walk-up flat at 358 Chauncey Street in the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn. By day, Ralph drove a bus along Madison Avenue and Fifth Avenue for the Gotham Bus Company. At night he “communicated” with his wife using now-famous phrases such as, “One of these days, Alice ... POW, right in the kisser” and “Bang! Zoom! You’re going to the moon, Alice.”

Actually Ralph loved Alice, but anger and other static interfered. Their connection kept breaking up. By show’s end, fortunately, he always reconciled with Alice and told her, “Baby, you’re the greatest.”

But life isn’t a sitcom. Everything doesn’t automatically resolve itself every 30 minutes. We need to identify the issues that interfere with our marital communication and be ready to make the necessary adjustments.



Breaking the Ice

10-15 MINUTES

LEADER: Be sure to read the introductory material (page 4) and the Leader’s Guide (page 89) before the first session. These “Breaking the Ice” questions are intended simply to get people talking to one another and to help acquaint group members with one another.

- I. How important is the telephone to your daily routine?
- I do my job on the phone.
 - The phone keeps me in touch with my family.
 - My cell phone is permanently attached to my ear.
 - The phone is a tool I use occasionally.
 - I hate the phone and rely on e-mail instead.
 - Other: _____

2. Are you a talker, or are you more the quiet type? In what situations do you find yourself more talkative? More reserved?

3. What would you list as the top four problems people have in marriage?



Discovering the Truth

30-35 MINUTES

LEADER: In each section of “Discovering the Truth,” ask various group members to read the Bible passages aloud. Be sure to leave time for the “Embracing the Truth” and “Connecting” segments that follow this discussion.

Most problems in marriages arise from one of four sources: (1) communication problems, (2) sexual difficulties, (3) money management differences, or (4) in-law issues. It shouldn't surprise anyone that communication is far and away the most common and most serious problem. Husbands and wives sharing thoughts, concerns, dreams, and needs with each other is vital to a strong marriage.

When God created Adam and Eve, they had no communication breakdowns with Him or with each other. A major component of the image of God in us is the ability and the need to live in relationship with others. The fall of humanity distorted the image of God in us, and twisted our ability to live in harmony with God and with one another.

Husbands and wives live in close proximity, so they must communicate with each other all the time. We have no real alternative if we want to live together happily. Yet, various forms of static can make marital communication difficult. Let's look at three major kinds of interference.

Interference 1: The Tongue

The Bible often refers to the tongue when it wants to address the totality of our spoken communication. Let's see what Jesus clarified about our speech.

³⁴ For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. ³⁵ The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him. ³⁶ But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment of every careless word they have spoken.

MATTHEW 12:34-36 (NIV)

LEADER: Discuss as many discovery questions as time permits. Encourage participation by inviting individuals to respond. It will help to highlight in advance the questions you don't want to miss. Be familiar with the Scripture Notes at the end of this session to help clarify any issues. There are additional tips and helps in the Leader's Notes section that begins on page 96.

1. According to Matthew 12:34-36, what's the source of our words, defining the content and attitude that pours from our tongues? What implications do you see for communication in marriage?

Life and death are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

PROVERBS 18:21 (HCSB)

² We get it wrong nearly every time we open our mouths. If you could find someone whose speech was perfectly true, you'd have a perfect person, in perfect control of life. ³ A bit in the mouth of a horse controls the whole horse. ⁴ A small rudder on a huge ship in the hands of a skilled captain sets a course in the face of the strongest winds. A word out your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything—or destroy it! ⁵ It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. ⁶ By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony into chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell.

JAMES 3:2-6 (THE MESSAGE)

2. What are some ways highlighted by James (verses 5-6) that our tongues could set dangerous fires? What are some other ways you've seen the tongue bring "death" instead of "life" (Proverbs 18:21)?
3. What is Proverbs 18:21 referring by the tongue having power of life? Share an example you've experienced of the tongue giving life.

The tongue is like a bucket dipping into the well of our heart, bringing up what it finds there and pouring it out on those around us. Every outward behavior or word has a corresponding inward belief in our hearts. In a world full of distorted beliefs and desires, the tongue can cause us a lot of trouble in our marriages.

We can set fires in many ways: with vicious talk, demeaning words, nagging, bullying, manipulation, and controlling speech.

Interference 2: Unresolved Issues

Every time a married couple doesn't resolve a problem between them, it becomes a weed planted in the garden of their relationship.

²⁵ Laying aside falsehood, speak the truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity.

EPHESIANS 4:25-27 (NASB)

4. According to Ephesians 4:25-27, what can happen in our hearts and relationships if we're passive and avoid dealing with problems as they arise?

5. Brainstorm together the kinds of issues that couples might find difficult to discuss—issues that could generate unresolved communication problems.

^{15:17} *Better a meal of vegetables where there is love than a fattened calf with hatred.*

^{17:14} *To start a conflict is to release a flood; stop the dispute before it breaks out.*

^{18:19} *An offended brother is [harder to reach] than a fortified city, and quarrels are like the bars of a fortress.*

PROVERBS 15:17; 17:14; 18:19 (HCSB)

6. As you read the three proverbs about quarrels, what key truth about conflict resolution stands out to you? How will a couple end up relating if they continue to sweep problems under the rug?

Unresolved issues are like weeds in a relationship. Left to take root, they spread through the garden, fertilized by anger and frustration. Weeds ignored over the years choke the garden of marriage. A couple stops talking about heart issues, such as dreams, fears, delights, and the relationship withers.

Many communication issues arise from the daily “stuff” of life. Example: A mother is exhausted from chasing her preschooler all day and getting up in the night with her baby. She hasn’t a shred of energy for sex. Her husband comes home frustrated with the corporate grind, and wants to unwind in a time of intimacy. She thinks he’s an insensitive, demanding jerk; he thinks she’s an unappreciative, unresponsive iceberg. Trouble brews in paradise.

Interference 3: Gender Differences

Genesis 1:27 says, “male and female He created them,” reminding us that from the beginning God made men to be men and women to be women. It’s possible to make too big a deal out of this; we really aren’t from different planets. However, you get all sorts of static on the line when you fail to consider how differently your spouse looks at life and approaches problems.

Let’s look at a story that illustrates this ...

LEADER: Ask for three volunteers to read the parts of Narrator/Man, Abigail, and David.

[NARRATOR/MAN] ¹⁴ One of Nabal's young men informed Abigail, Nabal's wife: "Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, but he yelled at them. ... ¹⁷ Now consider carefully what you must do, because there is certain to be trouble for our master and his entire family. He is such a worthless fool nobody can talk to him!"

¹⁸ Abigail hurried, taking 200 loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five butchered sheep, a bushel of roasted grain, 100 clusters of raisins, and 200 cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. ... ²⁰ As she rode the donkey down a mountain pass hidden from view, she saw David and his men coming toward her and met them. ... ²⁴ She fell at his feet and said ...

[ABIGAIL] ²⁶ "Now my lord, as surely as the Lord lives and as you yourself live, it is the Lord who kept you from participating in bloodshed and avenging yourself by your own hand. May your enemies and those who want trouble for my lord be like Nabal. ²⁷ Accept this gift your servant has brought to my lord, and let it be given to the young men who follow my lord." ...

[NARRATOR] ³² Then David said to Abigail,

[DAVID] "Praise to the Lord God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! ³³ Blessed is your discernment, and blessed are you. Today you kept me from participating in bloodshed and avenging myself by my own hand."

I SAMUEL 25:14,17-18,20,24A,26-27,32-33 (HCSB)

7. How was David's response to Nabal's selfish and foolish attitude stereotypically masculine? How was Abigail's response to it stereotypically feminine? Did each respect the other's approach (see verses 17,26, 32-33)?

8. What are some gender differences in communicating and dealing conflict that can put static on the communication lines in our homes? How can we better honor and appreciate these differences?

The interferences from our tongues, unresolved issues, and the “stuff” of life can be amplified by the different ways men and women approach socializing, processing information, and solving problems. As long as you expect your spouse to react to events the same way you do, you’ll probably keep on hearing static on the line. Abigail and David are good examples people who didn’t let a stressful situation keep them from respecting each other’s perspective on life. Give your mate that same consideration these two strangers gave each other, and you’ll find your life enriched, too.



Embracing the Truth

10-15 MINUTES

LEADER: This section focuses on helping couples begin to integrate what they’ve learned from the Bible into their own marriages ... where “the rubber meets the road.” Ask volunteers to read the Bible verses.

The world we live in is not perfect, and we’re not perfect either. With the interferences of our tongues, unresolved issues, and gender differences, all mixed in with the “stuff” of life ... it’s a miracle we communicate at all. There are two vital truths we need to embrace to clear away these interferences.

Drop the Masks

⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor.

ROMANS 12:9-10 (NASB)

1. The Greek word for “hypocrisy” in verse 9 literally refers to play-acting with masks from Greek theatre. What does this verse say about our need to be real with each other? What can happen when we keep the masks on?

2. Why do we try to hide our hurt or pain from each other? What do you think would happen if we stopped play-acting, and risked being real about our feelings with God, ourselves, and our spouses?

Focus on the Heart

Remember, every outward behavior or word has a corresponding inward belief in our hearts. In a world full of distorted beliefs and desires, the tongue can cause us a lot of trouble in our marriages.

⁷ You can tame a tiger, ⁸ but you can't tame a tongue—it's never been done. The tongue runs wild, a wanton killer. ⁹ With our tongues we bless God our Father; with the same tongues we curse the very men and women he made in his image ... ¹⁰ My friends, this can't go on. ¹¹ A spring doesn't gush fresh water one day and brackish the next, does it? ¹² Apple trees don't bear strawberries, do they? You're not going to dip into a polluted mud hole and get a cup of clear, cool water, are you?

JAMES 3:7-12 (THE MESSAGE)

3. When are you most aware in your marriage that your tongue is untamed?
4. According to James 3:2-12, what does the way we use our tongues in our marriages suggest about our hearts?

We need to control our tongues, but ultimately we only correct the interference our tongues bring to our marriage by working on the condition and beliefs of our hearts. False beliefs lead to hurtful words and actions. Restless, angry, frightened hearts will always send out hurtful words.

In future sessions we'll focus on how to communicate with our mates, but from the beginning we must understand the core issues of taking off the masks and focusing on the heart—the well that our tongue draws from.



Connecting 15-20 MINUTES

LEADER: Use “Connecting” as a time to begin to bond with, encourage, and support one another. Invite everyone to join in and be open with one another, but allow members who don’t wish to share on a particular topic to pass.

The “Connecting” segment of each session is designed to build stronger bonds of friendship between group members. As friends learn one another’s stories in greater detail, their relationships become closer. This closeness will affect the quality of group interaction in subsequent sessions. Enjoy these encounters and the friendships they nurture.

1. When you were dating and engaged to your spouse, what were some of the thoughts and experiences you shared with each other and felt honored to be a part of?

2. When you were dating and engaged, what did you and you spouse argue about? Was there anything serious enough to put your relationship on hold for a time? Has the way you approach conflict changed?

3. What is one aspect of your mate’s communication style that you admire and wish you possessed to the same degree?

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

PROVERBS 4:23 (NIV)

4. A damaged or polluted heart pours out damaging communication. What are some ways that we can “guard” our own hearts and the hearts of our husbands or wives?

LEADER: Take some extra time in this first session to go over the Group Covenant at the back of this book (page 95). Now would also be a great time for each person to pass around his or her book to collect contact information in the Group Directory on page 104.

Share and record group prayer requests, and pray regularly for them between now and the next session. In addition to these requests, pray together for each couple that they will come to know greater unity and intimacy through this *Can You Hear Me Now?* study.

Prayer Requests:



Taking It Home

LEADER: Explain that the “Taking It Home” section following each session will contain an introspective question to ask either of your heart or of God. In addition, there is always a couple’s activity to reinforce what the group has discussed and to help couples strengthen their marriages. Encourage everyone to complete both projects before the next session.

You do not have to share anything from this “Taking It Home” session with your small group, although you will have opportunity in the next session. Take some time in the next few days to reflect alone and with your spouse about this first session of *Can You Hear Me Now?*

(1) A Question to Take to God on page 17.

(2) A Date Night on page 18.

LEADER: Ask each couple to set a date, time, and location for the “Date Night” ... right now before you close your session.

When? _____ Where? _____



SNEAK PEEK

Next time we meet, we’ll consider some core principles of communication that can enable married couples to understand and appreciate each other’s ideas, opinions, and feelings.





A QUESTION TO TAKE TO GOD

Studying and discussing God's truth is not an end in itself. Our goal is always heart and life change. To take the next step of integrating the truth into our lives, we need to (1) look honestly into our hearts to understand the innermost motivations that drive us, and (2) seek God's perspective on our lives and our journeys.

When you ask God a question, expect His Spirit to guide your heart in His truth. Be careful not to rush it or manufacture an answer. Don't write down what you think the "right answer" is. Don't turn the Bible into a reference book or spiritual encyclopedia. Just pose the question to God and wait on Him. The litmus test for anything we hear from God is alignment with the Bible as our ultimate truth source. Always keep a journal of the insights you gain from your times with God.

- ✦ God, You know me to the very depths of my being. Would You search me, and help me to see any lies that have contaminated my heart? What wounds and distorted beliefs are hurting my ability to communicate with my wife or husband?





DATE NIGHT

Before the second session of *Can You Hear Me Now?*, rent one of the following movies from your local video store: *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The African Queen*, *The Remains of the Day*, or *The Lion in Winter*. Pick up an assortment of your favorite snack foods and beverages. Choose an evening when neither of you will feel pressure from other responsibilities. If you have children, arrange for them to be cared for elsewhere so you can view the movie without interruption. (You might share childcare with another couple in your group). Watch the movie you chose from the following perspectives:

Husband – What did the man need to understand and respect about the woman (women) in his life?

Wife – What did the woman need to understand and respect about the man in her life?

When the movie is over, share your observations with one another. Discuss any insights this movie triggered about how communication breaks down and what couples need to do to resolve that breakdown.

Before you clean up, Join hands and pray together that God will enhance your communication, and motivate all the couples in your small group. Thank each other for making the effort to share and listen.



SCRIPTURE NOTES

I SAMUEL 25:14-33

25:22 *May God punish me.* This is a severe Hebrew curse. David's oath of revenge reveals the side of Davis's leadership that is quick, sure, confident, and violent.

25:28 *may evil not be found in you.* Abigail was a clever diplomat. She appealed to David's legacy, integrity, and reputation.

25:32 *Praise to the Lord.* David could see with spiritual eyes. Abigail had provided supplies for his men and kept him from an error in judgment and needless bloodshed.

PROVERBS 15:17; 17:14; 18:19

15:17 *vegetables ... fattened calf.* The contrast is between poverty and wealth. Poverty accompanied by love is vastly preferable to wealth accompanied by constant bickering and strife.

17:14 *release a flood.* The Hebrew image is a breach in a dam that starts small and rapidly becomes a raging torrent.

18:19 *fortified city ... bars of a fortress.* Derek Kidner notes that this proverb "is a forceful warning of the strength of the invisible walls of estrangement, so easy to erect, so hard to demolish" (*Proverbs*, Kidner, p. 130).

ROMANS 12:9-10

12:9 *Love.* The Greek word *agape*—self-giving love in action on behalf of others—is made possible by God's Spirit. *without hypocrisy.* Genuine, without pretense or play-acting.

12:10 *brotherly love.* The word for love used here, *phílidelphía*, denotes tender family affection, now appropriate for those in the church, a believer's new family.

EPHESIANS 4:25-26

4:26 *Be angry.* Paul recognized that there is a place for legitimate anger. But once admitted, anger is to be dealt with constructively in truth. Paul identified ways to deal with anger. Do not let anger develop into resentment.

JAMES 3:2-12

3:2 *get it wrong.* The Greek verb translated "stumble" appeared in biblical and non-biblical writing as a metaphor for sin. James wanted us to realize how hard it is to avoid sinful words based on distorted desires and beliefs.

3:6 *ruin the world.* Many scholars would like to punctuate the Greek text so this verse reads something like, "The tongue, which defiles the whole body, represents the evil world among our members." It's as though all the world's evil and distortions reside in our hearts and flow through our lips, waiting to burst out in flames. *the whole world.* This unusual expression—which means "the course of life"—seems to have been coined by James. It implies the cycle of life from its inception. The tongue has scorched our lives from the beginning. The beginning, middle, and end of every season of life suffer from the burning tongue.

3:7 *tame a tiger.* In Genesis 1:28, we read that God gave humans dominion over creation.

3:8 *can't tame a tongue.* People may tame everything else, but we cannot tame ourselves, especially our speech, without help from the Spirit of God.

3:12 *polluted mud hole.* James assumed our mouths all speak from a polluted spring in the depths of our hearts that requires divine intervention to purify.