

Responding Like Jesus When Your Husband Doesn't Want to Talk

Are you hammering at a brick wall, trying to get it to talk? When your spouse will not communicate, that's what it may feel like.

One frustrated wife wrote to me recently, "Our communication is terrible ... My husband is a clam, and I don't know how to get him to communicate his feelings. He has never been able to. And I've done everything the wrong way to try and get him to open up."

Perhaps you can relate. You don't need to be reminded that nagging your spouse and berating them for not communicating is a losing strategy. Enough of that.

So, your spouse should communicate better, or more, or more deeply, or more consistently, or more understandingly or with less anger. But they're not reading this; you are. So here are some things for *you* to do if your spouse struggles to communicate.

1. Deal with Your Own Heart First

Simply doing your homework before trying to communicate may make a lot of difference. You can't change your spouse, but you can work on changing you. Perhaps you already know some ways you've tried to communicate in the past that didn't work; write out some opening lines and practice some healthier ways to initiate a conversation if necessary.

Make sure your own heart is open. If it's not, spend some time in prayer or whatever else you need to do to deal with your heart before going any further. If you want your spouse to

share vulnerably, you'll have to be vulnerable yourself. You need some measure of healing yourself before you can be useful in helping your spouse go there.

2. Learn to Feed Yourself

If you're the one always trying to communicate, step back and consider what you're trying to achieve. If you're running on empty and desperately grasping at your spouse to fill you up, you're certain to be disappointed. You're responsible for feeding your empty soul. Find some healthy ways to get your own mental/emotional/spiritual needs met; time with healthy friends, in nature and with God.

When your own soul is filled up, you'll have so much more to bring to your marriage. You'll be able to understand your spouse with more clarity and empathy and be more creative in finding effective ways to communicate.

3. Enter Your Spouse's World

Study your spouse. Understand what makes them tick as much as you can. Spend conscious time and energy seeking the key to their mind and heart. Observe the world through their eyes. Show interest. Ask questions. Don't come with any agenda other than to understand. When possible, join them in some endeavor they enjoy or are working on.

Entering their world will help you understand more of your spouse's personality, how they process information, when their mind and heart may be most open and what is important to them. Understanding those things is invaluable in letting you know the best ways to communicate. There are plenty of people (especially men) who communicate best while engaging in some activity together.

And don't make the mistake of assuming your spouse should communicate with as many words or in a similar way as you do. Look for the ways in which they do communicate and respond

positively to that.

It's also important to understand whether your spouse's personality simply struggles to communicate or whether this is a deeper failure in the relationship. Refusal to communicate can, at times, be a sign that pornography, infidelity, or other big issues are present and need to be dealt with.

4. Draw Out Your Spouse

There's a big difference between trying to force someone to talk and inviting them into a connection that is appealing, safe or exciting. Are you creating a safe space for your spouse to share themselves? How safe with you would you feel if your positions were reversed? Look for the fear. Is there some place your spouse is afraid? Be the safe place to deal with that.

Listen with your heart. There are many spouses who have learned how to help their husband or wife express things they were unable to otherwise. Helping your spouse in this way may be one of the best gifts you can give them, and you'll only get there by having an open understanding heart.

5. Over and Over and Over Again

If you've led your spouse to believe (perhaps unconsciously) that communication is fruitless or will be met with criticism or anger, it will take time for both of you to develop some new patterns. Marriage the way God intended it is a place for both partners to have their deepest hurts guarded carefully and to find healing. You undoubtedly have added to each other's pain; that can start to change now.

If one positive communication happens, resist the urge to gloat or criticize or demand. Learning new skills takes time—for both of you. Keep studying your spouse, creating safety, drawing them out and praying. A more satisfying marriage for both of you is worth the effort.

Your Turn: What skills have you learned about helping your spouse communicate? If you're lacking here, how are you going to practice new skills now? Leave a comment below. {eo}

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