

## **CHAPTER 21**

# **COMMUNICATION BARRIERS BETWEEN THE SEXES: HOW TO SOLVE THEM**

- I. WHY IS IT THAT MEN AND WOMEN AT TIMES HAVE SUCH A PROBLEM COMMUNICATING WITH EACH OTHER?
- A. When a fellow and girl engage in conversation, chances are there will be uncomfortable silences, strain, and nervous tension.
  - B. Motives are often suspicioned and language and actions are misunderstood.
  - C. Why are men and women afraid to relax and be themselves around one another?
  - D. Why can't they relate to each other without all the hassle, anxiety and self-conscious fear?
- II. WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF COMMUNICATION BARRIERS AND WHAT CAN BE DONE TO OVERCOME THEM?
- A. Today, we're going to explore this subject and offer a number of practical helps.
  - B. To do this, we will discuss three major areas:
    - 1. External causes.
    - 2. Personal hang-ups and acquired fears.
    - 3. Recommendations and solutions.
- III. LET'S BEGIN BY EXAMINING THE EXTERNAL CAUSES.
- A. Eight points:
- 1. Indwelling sin or an inherent bent toward self-centeredness.
    - a. When Adam and Eve sinned, they cut themselves off from God's Spirit that would have filled them with outgoing concern and love toward others.
    - b. But they forfeited His gracious gift, and instead took on the greedy, grasping and self-seeking nature of Satan.
    - c. A number of scriptures indicate that this evil and selfish bent was passed on to their children. (Ps. 51:5; Ps. 58:3; Eph. 2:3)
    - d. Thus, you and I became the children of Satan, filled with lust, pride and vanity.
    - e. It is this evil pull within that causes the conflict and grief we often experience in human relationships.
  - 2. A negative self-image, infused by Satan.
    - a. One of Satan's most damaging tactics is to destroy our sense of self-worth.
    - b. He does this by assaulting our conscience and reminding us of how guilty and sinful we are.
    - c. He causes us to think we're hopeless failures and unworthy of God's forgiveness or the acceptance of fellow man.
    - d. This self-condemned, rejected attitude carries over into our social life producing anxiety and inhibitions.
  - 3. Poor family upbringing or a negative home environment.
    - a. Chances are that our parents and family members were more prone to criticize for our mistakes than they were to praise and encourage when we succeeded.
    - b. Possibly discipline was administered for the slightest mistake and often in anger.
    - c. Brothers and sisters may have harassed and ridiculed when we failed in our struggling efforts.
    - d. As time went by, we acquired a negative self-image.
    - e. Eventually we were molded into an insecure person with grave misgivings about our value and usefulness as an individual.

4. The intimidating and destructive influence of playmates, peers and associates.
  - a. The anxieties and self-doubts that we frequently suffer often can be traced to negative bombardments we receive from others, starting in childhood up to the present.
  - b. We may have been picked on, put down and made fun of.
  - c. Perhaps we were chosen last to play on the team, overlooked for opportunities, shunned at dances, laughed at in class, etc.
  - d. We came to think of ourselves as second-rate citizens.
  - e. Many of our hang-ups and fears no doubt were infused into our psychic by these traumatic experiences.
  
5. An inbred feeling of inferiority.
  - a. Mr. Armstrong recently said that there isn't a human being alive who doesn't suffer to some degree from inferiority.
  - b. It's part of the curse handed down to all generations as a result of the first sin.
  - c. Inferiority is painful self-doubt and a low estimation of one's true value.
  - d. It stifles initiative, drains enthusiasm and can turn one into a recluse.
  - e. One who suffers from inferiority experiences difficulty and distress in communicating with others.
  
6. The perverse effect of the media and the world at large.
  - a. Hollywood has created a make-believe fantasy of the "gloriously" successful man and woman.
  - b. It stresses such things as beauty, fame and fortune as the ideals to strive for.
  - c. It perpetuates the belief that we're unfulfilled and inferior if we don't adopt its glamour and adventurous lifestyles.
  - d. Yet we know inwardly that we could never attain such a grandiose plane.
  - e. Consequently, Satan has used this damnable propaganda to drag us down into a state of hopelessness and despair.
  - f. This negative self-appraisal affects our ability to communicate comfortably with others.
  
7. Differences in geographical and cultural backgrounds.
  - a. Social tensions are likely to arise when individuals from radically different walks of life attempt to interface.
  - b. The underprivileged feel uneasy and inferior to their more sophisticated counterparts.
  - c. The well-to-do and better educated tend to look down on and shun the less fortunate.
  - d. Differences in customs, dialects, accents, vocabulary, tastes and lifestyles can also cause people to be at odds!
  - e. Such cultural and geographical backgrounds often create a kind of class system that puts a strain on open and friendly communication.
  
8. A warped sense of values instilled by the world's educational and religious systems.
  - a. We were taught in public schools and universities that we must be competitive if we're to achieve success in this dog-eat-dog society.
  - b. We were instructed to lie, cheat, and fight for our rights in order to win in the game of life.
  - c. Destroying the name and reputation of neighbor was considered legitimate if it meant getting the better end of the deal.
  - d. Conversely, the churches of this world instilled into our minds the diabolical attitudes of pride, prejudice and self-righteous vanity.
  - e. We came to think we were "holier than thou" and that our brand of religion was best.
  - f. No doubt many of us brought these carnal attitudes into God's Church which make us judgmental and condemning of others.

## IV. LET'S NOW EXAMINE THE SPECIFIC CAUSES THAT CREATE COMMUNICATION BARRIERS.

- A. Here's a list of the most common problems that affect each of us to some degree.
1. Fear of rejection.
    - a. A fear that I will not be liked and be accepted as a person if I open up and reveal my true self.
    - b. Afraid of appearing ignorant, uninformed or mentally inferior if I express my opinion.
    - c. A fear of criticism and ridicule if I should attempt to break the ice and fail.
    - d. Afraid to express a point of view that's different from others.
    - e. A fear that my thoughts won't come out right and I'll be misunderstood.
    - f. A fear of being manipulated and taken advantage of if I appear vulnerable and naive.
    - g. Afraid that I won't measure up to the expected standards of a perfect gentleman or a virtuous woman.
    - h. Afraid I won't fit in with the cliques or the "in" crowd
    - i. Fear of appearing too pushy or aggressive as a woman if I try to make friends with a man.
    - j. Afraid of appearing unmanly and weak if I divulge my innermost fears and anxieties, even to my closest female friends.
    - k. A fear of being crushed or cast aside as in the past if a relationship doesn't work out.
  2. Insecurity and self-doubt.
    - a. Having a sense of low self-esteem and a deep-seated feeling of inadequacy.
    - b. Being so aware of my imperfections that I feel extremely self-conscious.
    - c. Having an overall lack of confidence in myself.
    - d. Doubting my ability to "make the grade" as a successful A.C. student.
    - e. Feeling deficient and inept when compared to the charisma, charm and attractiveness of fellow classmates.
    - f. Believing that certain instructors or administrators doubt my competence and may jeopardize my future.
    - g. Being resentful toward and avoiding those who seem to get the breaks.
  3. A morbid self-concern or preoccupation with one's own problems and interests.
    - a. When one is absorbed in himself he usually finds little time to care about others.
    - b. He's oblivious to the needs and desires of those in his environment and runs roughshod over their feelings.
  4. Lack of skill and experience in communicating with people.
    - a. This is usually the result of a sheltered background, overprotective parents and insufficient opportunity.
    - b. It causes one to be shy and introverted.
    - c. Often such individuals lack tact and diplomacy in dealing with others and give the impression of being aloof and insensitive.
  5. Preoccupation with romance or mate-shopping.
    - a. This is one of the greatest barriers of communication between the sexes.
    - b. Fellows and girls tend to prematurely evaluate each other as a potential mate.
    - c. They seem to think only in terms of physical appearance and sexual appeal.
    - d. This can cause one of two things to happen.
      - (1) Immediate rejection if the person fails to meet the ideal standards.
      - (2) Coming on too strong if the person appears to have all the desired qualities.
    - e. Either of these attitudes can act as a "turn-off" and limit the chances of establishing a friendship.
  6. Not knowing how or when to express an interest in someone you like.
    - a. There's someone in your life you're especially fond of, and a relationship seems to be developing.

- b. Yet, you're fearful of "blowing it" if you bring up marriage too soon.
  - c. Tension and anxiety arise when you're not sure how to determine if the feeling is mutual.
7. Not knowing how to interpret the signals and body language of the opposite sex.
- a. Uncertainty emerges when you're unsure if a person is sending a message or simply expressing his or her personality.
  - b. You're left wondering whether he or she has an interest in you.
  - c. You're afraid to respond for fear you've drawn the wrong conclusion.
8. Putting the wrong meaning into what people say.
- a. This unfortunate situation can be caused by the person who's talking as well as by the listener.
  - b. Possibly the person speaking assumed his message was clear but left out important details.
  - c. The listener may have been preoccupied or distracted and didn't hear the whole story.
  - d. Perhaps a remark is made in jest, but is interpreted as an insult.
  - e. The super self-conscious person is prone to read negative things about himself into a conversation that were never intended.
9. Playing games and projecting a false image of yourself.
- a. This simply means wearing a mask or putting on a facade.
  - b. It is trying to hide your insecurities by pretending to be someone you're not.
  - c. It can take on the form of being macho, overly confident or putting on airs.
  - d. This is hypocrisy to the core, and eventually your charade will be discovered.
10. Withdrawing and pouting when the ego is wounded and feelings are hurt.
- a. This childish conduct reflects emotional immaturity and a lack of deep conversion.
  - b. It creates tension and causes others to react in kind.
  - c. Such behavior stifles communication and restricts the building of relationships.
11. Being uptight and suspicious when others are overly familiar and flirtatious.
- a. We tend to recoil and put up defenses toward people who take such liberties.
  - b. A man resents being aggressively chased or having a woman throw herself at him.
  - c. A lady is repulsed when a man behaves like a playboy or overtly flatters her.
  - d. These motives raise suspicions and drive a wedge between the sexes.
12. Being too dominant and overpowering.
- a. When a man has a strong and domineering personality, he usually intimidates the weaker sex — especially if she feels insecure.
  - b. If a woman is loud, boisterous and boldly assertive she will cause men to avoid her.
  - c. A barrier is also erected when either sex holds strong opinions and verbally attacks anyone who opposes them.
  - d. Many friendships are shattered when this ill-mannered behavior is displayed.
13. Trying too hard on a date to please and impress.
- a. If a fellow or girl works too hard at making a date successful, the event will seem forced, strained and unnaturally structured.
  - b. Instead of the date being lively, relaxed and spontaneous, it will be overly formal.
  - c. This will cause each to be stiff and uncomfortable.
  - d. Obviously, this type of situation will impede warm and friendly conversation.
14. Forming a pre-conceived opinion of an individual before you get to know him or her.
- a. First appearances can be misleading.
  - b. People may be reserved and self-conscious before you've won their confidence.
  - c. It's unfair to draw a conclusion about someone before you get to know him.
  - d. Much damage can be inflicted by prematurely judging and condemning the character of another.

15. Asking questions that are private and personal.
  - a. Whenever we pry into other people's lives we cause them to become defensive and withdrawn.
  - b. They also may become angry and resentful.
  - c. Prying, probing and poking around into the innermost secrets of fellow students is a sure-fire method of blocking communication.
  
16. Lecturing or giving unwanted advice.
  - a. Adults do not want to be treated like children.
  - b. Nor do they want others to lead their lives.
  - c. Butting in and offering unsolicited counsel will put a strain on any relationship.
  - d. It's one thing to listen and be a sounding board, but to exert pressure to adopt your recommendation is morally wrong.
  - e. This is being presumptuous and may destroy your friendship.
  
17. Being too picky about little mistakes and dwelling on the negatives.
  - a. Nobody is perfect — we all have faults to overcome.
  - b. Focusing on others' shortcomings is like a fly lighting on the rot of an apple.
  - c. Picky people are narrow minded, impatient and unforgiving.
  - d. By dwelling on every tiny flaw, such individuals become a source of irritation and discouragement to all their associates.
  
18. Being obnoxious, uncouth and overbearing.
  - a. In the area of human relationships, this is probably the lowest and most dishonorable state a person can fall into.
  - b. One who's degenerated to this level of conduct exhibits no semblance of Christian character.
  - c. He's uncultured, rude, thoughtless and displays the manners of a pig.
  - d. He's insensitive to others and tramples on their feelings like a bull in a china closet.
  - e. This type of individual does great harm to the cause of unity and peace in God's Church.
  - f. If you have any of these characteristics, you can never build lasting friendships until you repent and come to fully see yourself.

#### V. WE NOW COME TO A NUMBER OF SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOW TO CONQUER YOUR HANG-UPS AND FEARS.

A. The important thing to remember is not to despair, but to rest assured that victory over your problems is absolutely possible.

#### B. Solutions:

1. Admit to yourself that you put up barriers and build protective walls.
  - a. The sooner you face this fact, the quicker will be your rate of progress.
  - b. Hiding in the background is a coward's way of escaping reality.
  - c. To gain self-respect, you must face your problems head-on and determine to turn over a new leaf in your life — starting today.
  
2. Realize that it will take courage, discipline and persevering prayer to conquer your fears.
  - a. To the degree that you set your mind to overcome is the degree you'll grow and progress.
  - b. You must set your hand to the plow and determine never to look back.
  - c. This will necessitate prevailing daily prayer and an all-out effort to win the battle.
  
3. Practice. Think of each person you meet as a unique challenge.
  - a. As is true with any skill or sport, you must practice until you are relaxed, comfortable and confident — an expert in every sense of the word.
  - b. Therefore, with each person you encounter, take advantage of the opportunity to improve your communication skills.

- c. Don't become paralyzed with fear, but force yourself to step out and take initiative.
  - d. You'll be utterly amazed at the changes you'll make in a few weeks' time.
4. If you should fail, bounce back and try again.
    - a. Realize you'll make *faux pas* and falter from time to time.
    - b. But don't let your mistakes discourage you, or drive you back into your shell.
    - c. Brush off the dust, and keep trying.
    - d. No matter how many times you stumble, let each mistake be a catalyst to propel you forward.
5. Quit pretending and just be yourself.
    - a. Trying to be someone you're not is like having two personalities.
    - b. One is an image of how you want people to picture you, the other is what you really are.
    - c. But why should you want to be someone else when you are one of a kind?
    - d. Stop play-acting and develop your own personality.
    - e. Endeavor to be what God intended — an original copy.
6. Learn how to break the ice and start a conversation.
    - a. This can be achieved by asking the right questions and skillfully drawing people out.
    - b. Ten possible openers:
      - 1) Ask a background question.
      - 2) Comment on a local event.
      - 3) Pay a compliment.
      - 4) Ask for advice.
      - 5) Find something to praise.
      - 6) Ask for help.
      - 7) Ask for an opinion.
      - 8) Ask for an evaluation.
      - 9) Ask about local customs.
      - 10) Ask about local restaurants.
    - c. The above points are taken from: "*Conversational Magic: Key to Poise, Popularity and Success*" by Les Donaldson, Parker Publishing Company, Inc., W. Nyack, N.Y., 1981.
    - d. Remember that others probably feel just as tense as you are. Therefore, be courageous and take the lead.
7. Look for common ground and similarities to talk about.
    - a. So often we tend to focus on our differences as men and women that we fail to see the ways we may be alike.
    - b. A new world of fellowship will open up to you when you discover mutual interests and similarities.
    - c. You'll find that conversation will flow much easier and be more spontaneous.
    - d. For example, you may ascertain you're both from large families, from the same state, like to travel, etc.
    - e. Look for areas where you can relate and most of your tensions will disappear.
8. Try to put others at ease by creating a warm, relaxed and friendly atmosphere.
    - a. This means, first of all, forgetting yourself and concentrating on those you meet.
    - b. Make a habit of greeting people with a smile.
    - c. Show sincere interest in them through direct eye contact.
    - d. Be responsive to what others say with appropriate feedback and humor.
    - e. The all-important key is to make each person feel special and important.
9. Be approachable and project an attitude of genuine sincerity.
    - a. Be down-to-earth and show an empathy toward other people and their problems.
    - b. Avoid being cynical, frivolous and sarcastic.
    - c. Be careful about turning people's remarks into a joke.
    - d. Make it easy for them to communicate by being warmhearted and humble.
10. Learn how to be tactfully open and honest.
    - a. Sincerely try to reveal your true self and inner feelings by being above board and candid.

- b. Being open doesn't mean "telling it like it is" with no regard for other people's feelings.
  - c. It simply means being unpretentious and not trying to hide the true intent of what you're saying.
  - d. Be diplomatic and remember that harsh, austere words can inflict deep wounds and leave scars that can linger for years.
11. Develop a keen awareness of the feelings and deep sensitivities of the opposite sex.
- a. Failure to understand that people have tender emotions can spell disaster in human relationships.
  - b. For example, being too direct or kidding too much can bruise one's ego.
  - c. We should drill into our consciousness the biblical command to be kind, courteous and tenderly affectioned (Rom. 12:10).
  - d. Being aware of how we come across to others is another way of expressing agape love (Matt. 7:12).
12. Accept each person as being a unique creation of God.
- a. As there are no two snowflakes alike, neither are there two perfectly identical people.
  - b. Each has his or her own special characteristics and plays a significant role in God's great plan.
  - c. The Creator doesn't want us all to become yellow pencils.
  - d. Remember that if God loves everyone, so should we, even though they are different.
  - e. View each individual you date as an exciting challenge and learn to adapt to his or her personality.
13. Be patient and understanding toward those with idiosyncrasies or glaring faults.
- a. No one has yet attained perfection.
  - b. We all have symbolic warts or blemishes.
  - c. Growth is a process and it may take years for fellow Christians to see their flaws.
  - d. Instead of criticizing or rejecting imperfect friends, why not try to love and encourage them?
14. Learn to be tolerant of people with differing opinions, tastes and lifestyles.
- a. Who's to say that we're always right?
  - b. Since God created each of us differently, it stands to reason that our viewpoints will vary.
  - c. We've all been given the right from God to be an individual.
  - d. Therefore, let's not judge others by our own private standards.
15. Learn how to listen the way Christ did.
- a. Jesus Christ didn't monopolize the conversation.
  - b. He was deeply interested in what people had to say and avoided distractions and lapses in concentration.
  - c. He listened attentively and respectfully.
  - d. As a matter of fact, listening is still one of His great joys today in acting as our High Priest.
  - e. Learning to listen is a cardinal rule in becoming an expert conversationalist.
  - f. Few things will turn people off faster than having a partner in conversation show boredom or disinterest.
16. Prepare a reserve list of conversational topics to fall back on.
- a. A date worth having is a date worth preparing for.
  - b. Spend a few minutes thinking about topics you can discuss if your well runs dry.
  - c. Have four or five ideas readily in mind.
  - d. This might involve relating an experience, sharing a lesson you've learned, describing an exciting place you've visited, discussing something in the news, etc.
  - e. Try to make each date a memorable and profitable experience.
17. Develop tough skin and don't be so sensitive when put down or rebuffed.
- a. To hold resentment or nurse a grudge because someone has offended you indicates that you're not really in control of your life.

- b. Your old carnal self is still in command, and you're taking yourself too seriously.
  - c. Forgive quickly and crush the desire to retaliate.
  - d. God commands us to love our enemies — how much more so should we love our brothers and sisters in Christ?
  - e. The mature way to deal with a person who's hurt you is to return good for evil.
18. Until it's time to get serious, treat each other as good friends.
- a. First of all, think of A.C. as one big family.
  - b. There are hundreds of people for you to get to know.
  - c. Make the rounds so that you'll have a broad base of experience when contemplating marriage later in life.
  - d. Don't allow your emotions to get carried away — put on the brakes.
  - e. Date widely and absorb every personality you can.
19. Build a comfortable, trusting friendship first, then if a romantic interest develops, it will be easy to express your feelings.
- a. You'll do yourself a great disservice and that of the person you like, if you press for a commitment too soon.
  - b. Before a woman agrees to marry a man she wants to know that she can safely trust him.
  - c. Before a man chooses a wife, he should want to know her inner makeup and character.
  - d. It's exceedingly important, then, to keep the relationship platonic, so you can think with a clear mind.
  - e. Build trust and respect before you even think about discussing marriage.
20. Realize the immense importance God places on the second great command.
- a. In summarizing man's second most important duty, Jesus Christ said to love your neighbor as yourself.
  - b. Please notice that He called it the second great commandment — not the 10th, 30th or the 92nd.
  - c. Next to loving God, loving neighbor is the most important thing you can do on earth.
  - d. Yet, so often, it's the one command that we treat with least regard.
  - e. Obey it with your whole heart and you will find that most of your communication problems will vanish.

#### VI. CONCLUSION:

- A. Why tolerate defeat in your life any longer?
- B. Unless you take yourself in hand, conditions will probably never improve.
- C. Turn over a new leaf and start today.
- D. Set your hand to the plow and don't look back.
- E. Think eternity!

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