Healthy Communication in Marriage:

"Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt,
so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Colossians 4:6

Healthy communication is absolutely foundational to every strong marriage. If you cannot communicate with your spouse in a healthy way, frustrations turn into anger and conflict is created instead of resolved. You cannot resolve conflict without effective communication. Communication is partly verbal and partly non-verbal. As a husband or wife, what your words say need to match up with the non-verbal expression of your face and actions of your life. As Christians we are commanded to be gracious in our speech. This grace and kindness is an overflow of the fruits of the Holy Spirit being worked out in our hearts. When our communication tends toward harshness and anger something is wrong.

Below are ten basic practical steps to maintaining healthy and gracious communication in your marriage:

1. Respect your spouse and treat them with kindness. You speak in a careful and self-controlled way to people that you respect. You speak with kindness toward people that you love. You should both respect and love your spouse, resulting in the type of communication listed below.
2. Really listen: When you really listen to someone you pay attention and want to hear what they have to say. Really listening considers the merit in what the other person has to say. This means not interrupting the other person because what you have to say is more important. This means you are not formulating a counter-response while they are talking. You can't listen and jump to a conclusion before the other person has finished their thought. Listening is related to patience and friendship. Interruption and retaliation is related to competition and adversaries.
3. Assume the best: Many occasions arise where something happens, and you only know part of the story. In every such situation with your spouse, you must assume the best! You must begin by trusting your spouse and assuming that there is a good explanation for whatever you don't know about the situation. Love is hopeful in all things (1 Cor 13:7). The opposite is to assume the worst of your spouse. This is the attitude of distrust we develop with our enemies. You must not default to a position of communication where you treat your spouse like an enemy. This sets communication up for failure. Assume the best and set yourself up for success!
4. Don't bring up past forgiven sins: If your spouse has asked for forgiveness and you have granted forgiveness, it should not be brought up against them again. You must ask God for the self-control to not drag your spouse back into the mud they just got free of. In an ungodly way, it can feel satisfying to strengthen your position by undercutting your spouse, but none of this is of Christ. We seek to reconcile with our spouse, not defeat them in a battle of words and accusations. There is no place for grudge-bearing in Christian marriage. Instead, we must forgive over and over again, from the heart, as Jesus commands us to (Matt 18:21-35).

5. Don't undercut or barb: To undercut or barb is to make negative and hurtful comments that imply what you want without clear communication. This is sometimes known as passive-aggressive behavior. These side comments are not made to be helpful, but to insult and "remind" a person of their problems. Instead, if you have a struggle or grievance with your spouse, speak and listen in a kind way that gives the opportunity to lead to reconciliation and peace.
6. Do not raise your voice: *"The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God"* James 1:20. When you raise your voice with your spouse, anger has come upon you. Yelling at your spouse may make you feel self-vindicated in the moment, but nothing of the Lord will come from it. You should ***never*** yell at your spouse. Raising your voice sinfully overwhelms anything true or helpful you may actually say with your words. It's literally lost in the noise.
7. Try to have good timing: Work to bring up difficult subjects at a time conducive to resolution. It's not wise to bring up difficult subjects when your spouse is dead tired, holding a crying child, just in the door from work, late for an appointment, or for whatever reason is not in a place to have an unhurried conversation that could resolve the issue. Communication takes time. Difficult conflict resolution takes significant time. Make time for healthy communication.
8. Avoid "always / never" in conflict resolution: Overstatements do not help resolve conflict. Overstatements work to categorize the entire person as a problem. Instead, work to isolate specific instances of struggle or sin, so the offending person can ask forgiveness and work to correct a specific problem.
9. Stop texting when the communication turns negative: It is impossible to resolve conflict by text. When communication turns negative, you must talk by phone or in person as soon as possible. Both spouses need to reach agreement on this before the angry texts start flying. One spouse or the other must identify that the communication has taken a negative turn, have self-control, and state that texting will cease until they can call or meet in person.
10. Seek resolution: Never give up on each other. Seek resolution and reconciliation because of love and your marriage vows. Apathy and division are not acceptable in Christian marriage. Work the problems out with healthy communication and prayer. Anger is a problem, but so is silence and aversion.

I encourage you to put these basic principles in a place where you will be reminded of them often, then pray for self-control and love to abide by them.

Lord, help us to speak with grace and kindness,
Pastor Vic