

Family Communication / Martha and Mary

Carol: I was walking through the park this morning and I saw a young married couple sitting at a table. They were leaning towards each other and talking. I couldn't hear what they were saying but they were deep in conversation and both seemed to be enjoying it. Every now and then they would smile or laugh. They looked like they were best friends!

Tammy: Welcome to Women of Hope... Today we're talking about communication... Isn't it fun to spend time with a good friend? I love to sit and chat about all kinds of things. I wonder what you like to do with your best friend?

Carol: When I was a teenager, my friend would come to our house and we'd talk for one or two hours...or even more sometimes! She would tell me every single detail about her life and especially her boyfriend... but she was not very good at listening to me – to what was happening in my life.

Tammy: Yes – that's important isn't it...to listen. And it's the same whether it's your marriage partner, another member of the family or your best friend.

Carol: ...Or even when you're talking to someone who you don't know very well yet. Having a conversation is like sharing isn't it? You take turns!

Tammy: Today we have a couple visiting with us... Peter and Susan. They were having some difficulty communicating with each other.

Carol: That's a pretty common problem isn't it! Even when a couple have been together a long time. Today they're going to tell us their story – and how they learned to communicate better.

Susan: Here is our story...Peter and I have been married now for 25 years. Our first five years together were happy...enjoying each other's company. For the next few years I was busy bringing up our two children...working in the house...cooking...cleaning...you know how it is!

Peter: And I was busy with my work...earning money...building our new home.

Susan: I was so excited with our new house...making curtains...placing the furniture...setting up the children's room...enjoying my cooking in my new kitchen...

But something was missing in our relationship as a husband and wife. I didn't know what was going wrong! We just couldn't seem to communicate well with each other.

Peter: No we couldn't could we? I started getting irritated at small things...like - 'Why are the kids making so much noise?' 'The food doesn't taste very good'...I was losing my patience and had started shouting at Susan.

Susan: Yes indeed! This was not the Peter I had married, who had lots of patience- one of the qualities I admired him for. He had changed...

But I had changed too. I had started sulking and crying over small things. I found it difficult to share my feelings with Peter without blaming him...

This was not good for our relationship. Nor was it good for our children.

Then a close friend suggested that we get help from a marriage counselor - Ruth.

Ruth asked us, 'What do you think is going wrong in your marriage?' I started by pointing out Peter's faults...blaming him...and soon we began to argue and fight in front of her!

Peter: Ruth suggested we meet her separately for a while, so she could listen to both of us without the other person interfering, or getting angry or upset.

After meeting us separately a few times, she called us together and said, 'You both need to learn to communicate with each other... really talk to each other and share your feelings - honestly. She said that problems, fights and, disagreements in marriage will start when you stop sharing your feelings... honestly communicating with each other. I knew she was right!

Susan: Ruth asked me, 'How do you feel about Peter?' I gathered my courage, and began to share things that had been bothering me for the past few years. When Peter came back from work, he would just go to sleep. And I had been waiting all day to share tell him about...so many things ...'

Peter: And I said, "Oh...Susan, why didn't you tell me about these things before? I didn't know that this was what was bothering you. I thought it was because you didn't like me being at work so long...or something like that..."

I had been finding it difficult to express my emotions and really talk to my wife... Susan had got very busy with the housework and children...she started neglecting me. When I tried to talk to her...she would interrupt me...she just would not listen...she was always too busy telling me how she felt!'

Susan: Then I asked Peter the same question... "Why didn't you tell me how you were feeling?" He said it was because I wouldn't let him talk! And he was right.

Peter: Ruth explained to us that we did not know one another because we were holding back, refusing to share our true feelings.

Susan: I had good reason to hold back - I did not want to start an argument. And I was also scared of Peter's anger. Sometimes I could feel that he was upset about something. If I asked him...he would just say...'Forget it! And walk away.'

Peter: I didn't want to hurt Susan and keep complaining over small things. I had been working hard all day. I just wanted to relax, when I reached home...but Susan would have so many things she wanted to talk about that seemed so unimportant to me.

Susan: And I was bored...I had been at home all day with the children and I needed that special time with Peter. Soon we started covering up what we really thought and felt.

Ruth explained that refusing to discuss disagreements or differences of opinion had become a way of life...and now there was a large, invisible wall between us.'

Peter: But I must admit - the first step Ruth asked me to take was tough. She told us that when there are problems, both husband and wife must be willing to admit that each one is part of the problem... and both the partners must also be willing to change.

In my mind - I was the patient and quiet husband. Susan had tested my patience and provoked me. And when I would start shouting...she would start crying.

I had to learn how to share my feelings without getting angry.

I had to also learn to be honest without saying unkind things or accusing Susan of doing the wrong thing.

Susan: And Ruth had to tell me to try not to say very emotional words like, "You don't really love me."

I was quick to argue with Ruth. I said to her: "But... it's true... Peter has changed...he has stopped loving me and caring for me."

Ruth was firm with me and said, "You are responsible for how you feel... what you say... what you do... and also how you react to your husband. Don't blame these things on Peter."

I did not like Ruth telling me this... it hurt me... But Ruth firmly and gently helped me to handle my feelings. She taught me to face the truth...my real feelings. Then she showed me how to express these feelings gently without blaming Peter. It was only after I learned to take responsibility for my own feelings, that I was willing to accept that I had some faults too.

I had to learn how to be a good listener. Ruth said, 'Listen first, and then to make sure you understand, repeat back to Peter what you heard. He will tell you if that's what he is really saying.

And if Peter came home tired and, irritated and shouted at me, I realized it was because he was stressed at work. So I learned to keep quiet.

Peter: And I learned to apologize to you didn't I Susan? I was sorry for being rude to you... I didn't mean to hurt you...and thank you for your understanding.

Susan: Sometimes now when we think back, we laugh together about some of the foolish things we used to say said to each other.

Peter: We asked for forgiveness from each other and we have forgiven each other...haven't we Susan?

Susan: Yes Peter! Thanks to Ruth's help, we have become good friends.

Peter: We have a lot of fun together now – and we talk a lot together about all kinds of things. We've learned to share our lives and share our feelings. We're definitely best friends now!

Tammy: You're listening to Women of Hope. It's good that Peter and Susan learned how to share their feelings with each other isn't it? Many people have the same kind of difficulty don't they!

Carol: They do – and if they don't get help from someone they may never learn to communicate in a positive way. That's when couples sometimes decide to separate or divorce each other. They think there's no way out.

Tammy: Do you remember what Ruth said to Peter and Susan? ...It's very important in a marriage to listen to each other...to talk honestly with each other and to take time to share your feelings. And Susan said she had to learn how to be a good listener. It's not always easy is it? Some of us like to talk about how we feel – but we're not so good at listening to how the other person feels.

Carol: Do you know, it's the same with God... God wants to hear what's on our hearts – he wants us to be honest with him and tell him how we feel. But we also need to listen to him. He talks to us through his word, the Bible. That's why we come here to share with you what he says in his word.

Today, I want to tell you a story about two sisters – Mary and Martha. One was a good listener and the other was not.

Picture the scene...this is how it might have been:

It was a quiet day in the little village. Martha was very happy and may have been singing as she swept the floor. Occasionally she chatted to her sister, Mary who was mending some clothes. Martha may have decided that as there would be just the two of them and their brother Lazarus, they would not cook that night. So she was planning an easy meal - just the leftovers from lunch. But then, through the window, Martha saw Jesus and his followers coming. She probably rushed to her room and changed into her best clothes. Then she commanded Mary to put away her sewing and tidy the room. After all, this was not just a neighbor coming to visit but a very important person. She straightened her hair and rushed to open the door. She gave Jesus a big smile.

Here is the story from God's word, the Bible (Luke 10:38-42):

'Martha was pleased to see Jesus and welcomed him into her home. He sat down and started talking. Even though there was a lot to be done to prepare the food, Mary, her sister, sat at Jesus' feet, listening to what he had to say. But Martha was distracted by the big dinner she was preparing. She became upset with her sister. So she interrupted them and said to Jesus, "Lord, doesn't it seem unfair to you that my sister just sits here while I do all the work? Tell her to come and help me."

Jesus looked at Martha and gently said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her."

That's the end of the story from God's word...

Now let's think about this story for a moment:

What kind of food was Martha concerned about? ...Yes she was very keen to make a really nice meal for their special guest. Was she doing the wrong thing do you think? ...I don't think so –

there was nothing wrong with wanting to make a nice meal. So I wonder what was wrong? What do you think?...

What do you think Tammy?

Tammy: I think Martha was beginning to feel annoyed with her sister wasn't she? She was so busy and yet her sister was not helping ...and she probably started to think Mary was just being lazy and selfish.

Carol: What do you think Jesus meant when he said, "There is only one thing worth being concerned about."?...

Tammy: Well... Martha was concerned about physical food wasn't she? So I expect Jesus meant that Mary was learning from him – so she was receiving spiritual food.

Carol: Yes I think that's it. And I wonder what Jesus meant when he said, "It will not be taken from her."?...

Tammy: When we learn from Jesus, and receive spiritual food – food for our soul – no-one can take that away from us can they? It goes deep into our hearts and stays there.

Carol... can you imagine sitting at Jesus' feet and listening to him talk about spiritual things. I think any thought of physical food would be gone at that moment wouldn't it! And I wonder if he asked Martha to leave the food preparation for a while and sit with them to learn more about him...?

God has many things to teach us too – just as he did with Mary and Martha. I wonder if we are too busy to listen?

Just before Jesus went back to heaven, he told his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to be their comforter and their teacher. When we believe in Jesus, the Holy Spirit lives in us and teaches us about God and helps us in our daily lives. And he wants us to talk with him and share our happiness...and our pain.

Carol: A friend of mine told me about her pain and how God helped her through it... this is what she said:

'Our first baby, a son, died at birth because he was born 10 weeks too early. We were filled with sorrow. When I prayed, it felt like God was silent. Then I remembered what the Bible says - that "the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings which cannot be expressed in words" (Romans 8:26 NLT). I was then able relax in God's presence... knowing that he cared for me. He knew our sorrow and would carry us through.'

I wonder what is causing pain in your heart today?... Maybe God wants you to sit at his feet and learn from him, just as Mary did with Jesus. He wants you to tell him how you feel in your sorrow and pain. He is there, listening. He is always listening. He doesn't ever take time off, or tell us we have to wait until a more convenient time. Maybe you need to come to him right now and ask him to bring you comfort and hope.

Let me pray with you... you can join me if you would like to...

Father God, thank you for what we've learned today about Jesus and how he cared for Mary and Martha's feelings. Thank you for caring about how we feel too. I pray for my friend who is coming to you today to share her feelings with you. You know what is causing the pain in her heart right now – and you can take that pain away. You can bring her comfort and hope. Please do that for her now.

We ask this in the name of Jesus, Amen

Tammy: God made us. He knows all about us – and he hears us when we cry out to him. This always gives me comfort when I feel sad or hurt. You're listening to Women of Hope...

Carol: That expresses so beautifully who God is – he made you...he knows you...he loves you...and he hears the cry of your heart. He will always hear you, no matter where you are or what you've done.

Tammy: Just before we go today, let's hear from one of our listeners who found comfort in bringing her pain to God. Here is part of her story.

'Hi! I am a widow with 2 children. My daughter and I make bracelets from thread and sell them in order to make a living. My daughter is 28 years old and she is handicapped with her arms and legs, but she is able to make the bracelets. It is such a hard life for all of us. Sometimes we have food to eat and sometimes we don't, but we have God who is our strength and encouragement...'

Tammy: Yes – even when she has no food to eat, she finds strength and encouragement in God...

That's all we have time for today. If you would like to contact us you can do so at ...

Carol: I do hope you can join us next time for a chat on Women of Hope...

Tammy: I'm looking forward to it... Bye for now.

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