

Life Coach: Marriage

Communication, Part 6

Introduction: The four golden rules of communication found in Ephesians 4:32 set the tone for all communication. They are especially important in marriage, as no relationship demands greater love and respect. As seen in the last lesson, kindness focuses on the outward tone and content of speech. The second golden rule focuses on the inward attitude of tenderheartedness. Internalizing the golden rules so that they become automatic—a matter of character—comprises the essence of successful communication skills.

II. The INWARD rule: Tenderheartedness

- A. The word translated “tenderhearted” literally means “gut level sympathy and compassion. In the ancient world, the deepest emotions were connected to the core of the human body—what we refer to as the “gut.” Western culture focuses on the “heart” as the seat of emotions, but the meaning is essentially the same.
- B. The ideal of internalizing the golden rules of communication is inherent in the very word “tenderhearted.” A genuinely tenderhearted person has this characteristic at the very core of his being. His compassion is not forced; it is natural and consistent with his entire being.
- C. Because tenderheartedness is the core of a person’s being, it is nearly impossible for tenderhearted people to respond in ways inconsistent with that value. On rare occasions where an inconsistency arises, the truly tenderhearted person is uncomfortable with his behavior.
- D. Like the word “kind,” the word “tenderhearted” is unique in the New Testament in that it appears only in Ephesians 4:32 and I Peter 3:8 where it is translated “pitiful.”
- E. Practical Characteristics of Tenderheartedness
 1. Compassion—often defined as “your pain in my heart,” compassion genuinely feels the sorrow, disappointment, and hurt of another. It is not the casual “sorry about your loss” sentiment expressed in polite but detached company.
 2. Community—tenderhearted people think and feel beyond themselves, taking into account the feelings of others. Beyond mere consideration, tenderhearted people adopt the feelings of others as their own. They walk proverbially in the “other man’s shoes.”
 - a. I Cor. 12:26 describes tenderheartedness as inherent to functioning church members: “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it.”
 - b. The false “just Jesus and me” brand of Christianity denies tenderheartedness.
 3. Connection—tenderhearted people feel strong connection with others. They view life as the ultimate team effort. Obviously, this connection

should be strongest in the marriage relationship. Tenderhearted people don't feel good when others around them don't feel good.

- a. The sense of connection in marriage assumes shared feelings. One should never be happy when his spouse experiences sorrow.
 - b. Tenderheartedness, therefore, never inflicts sorrow upon another because the pain would then be mutual. When spouses hurt one another, they should feel the pain of the hurt inflicted and immediately seek to remedy the situation.
 - c. Paul emphasized the emotional connection between husband and wife in Ephesians 5:28-29. Note that when a man loves his wife, he loves himself. Anything less than love for one's spouse is completely incongruent with the Christian ideal of marriage.
4. Correction—when one violates the rule of tenderheartedness, he will immediately desire to correct the transgression. People who are comfortable with hurting others (or, worse yet, who gloat in it) are not tenderhearted.
- a. When an otherwise tenderhearted person acts out of character, the issue that pushed him to his transgression fades into the background. The main issue then becomes repairing the damage inflicted on another.
 - b. People who hurt others as a tool of manipulation to win an argument are not tenderhearted people. Such people sometimes attempt to “smooth over” the hurt inflicted, while being inwardly satisfied that they won the argument. This type of behavior, if effective, easily becomes systemic—becoming the “go to” strategy for winning arguments.
5. Control—genuinely tenderhearted people exercise control of their communication automatically. Their compassionate responses are consistent and predictable because tenderheartedness is at the core of their being. Beyond mere personality, tenderhearted people control their communication as a matter of character.
- a. Tenderhearted people restrain hurtful speech. Their goal is always to help and to heal—never to hurt.
 - b. Tenderhearted people do not bring up the embarrassing or painful failure of others as a tool of manipulation. They recognize their own shortcomings and extend grace to others.
 - c. Tenderhearted people restrain their anger, keeping it well within Biblically allowable boundaries. They hold their views firmly, but guide their communication by gauging the feelings of others.
6. Compromise—tenderhearted people always seek the “win-win” in a disagreement. They are not satisfied with conquering others and leaving them in a pile of tears.
- a. Value relationships above issues.
 - b. Know that issues are rarely either/or—there's often a mutually satisfying middle ground.
 - c. Give up preferences in deference to the feelings of another.