

Single & Single-Again TUES NITES Meal, Message & Mixer

Friendship, Romance, and Relationships That Work

Jane Stolz' video teaching, handout, and audio Mp3 file of this message will be online to share with others at www.christiansinglesindenver.com

*Nobody realizes that some people
expend tremendous energy merely
to be normal...*

Albert Camus

It was in God's plan from the moment He imagined us to make us different from each other.

Our differences can be a starting point for building fulfilling relationships. Unfortunately, what was intended to be an advantage often turns out to be a universal source of frustration.

Despite the frustration, the vast majority of us have an undeniable desire to have great relationships with the opposite sex. We want both male and female friends; we want successful business relationships with both men and women; and we want to meet just the right person, fall in love, and live "happily ever after."

Many singles however; have become frustrated trying to bridge the gender gap.

What are the differences?

Men process life in boxes. The boxes are all separate from each other and make convenient holding places. These boxes resemble how a man typically processes life. His thinking is divided up into boxes that have room for one issue and one issue only. The first issue of life goes in the first box, the second goes in the second box, and so on. The typical man then spends time in one box at a time and one box only. When a man is at work, he's at work. When he's in the garage tinkering around, he's in the garage tinkering. When he's watching TV, he's simply watching TV. That's why he can look like he's in a trance and ignore everything else going on around him.

As a result of experiencing life in boxes, men are by nature problem solvers. They enter a box, size up the "problem" that exists and formulate a solution. In their careers, they consider what it will take to be successful, and they focus on it. In communication, they look for the bottom line and get there as quickly as possible. In decision-making, they look for an approach they can "buy into" and apply as often as possible.

You might find men saying things like "Is there any point to this conversation? Is this conversation leading anywhere? Can you just get to the point?" These are generally statements a man makes out of frustration because he doesn't know how to make conversation with the women in his life work.

Men are hunters, so they tend to stay focused on what's in front of them.... Women are gatherers, they gather everything around them.....

Women, well we are all over the place! Women process life where every thought and issue is connected to every other thought and issue in some way. Life is much more of a process for women than it is for men.

This is why women are typically better at multitasking than men. A woman can talk on the phone, prepare a meal, do the laundry, make a shopping list, work on the planning for tomorrow's business meeting, watch her favorite talk show and not skip a beat. Because all her thoughts, emotions and convictions are connected, she's able to process different strands of information and keep track of different activities all at once.

These gender differences aren't limited to conversation. God made men and women different in many ways. They think differently, they process emotions differently, they make decision differently, and they learn differently. And yet men and women complement one another so beautifully that healthy relationships will enhance both genders.

What we Love, What We Hate:

The biggest frustrations single women had with single men were:

- They won't talk
- They won't listen
- They won't commit

Men may have at least one reason they don't commit. The relationship advice they say they have received more than anything else is, "Don't be in a hurry. Take your time."

Single women said the traits they appreciated most in men were their ability to be objective even under pressure, their strength and protectiveness, and vulnerability – nothing was as attractive to a woman as a man who was vulnerable enough to share his feelings.

Single men said their biggest frustrations with single women were.....

- They give mixed signals
 - They have different expectations at different times.
 - I never know what she's thinking
 - They never say what they mean. They want us to know them, but the clues don't make sense!
- They're oversensitive

"They read something into everything! If I don't talk as much, or if my phone conversation is shorter, she think I don't love her as much and the relationship is in trouble – but I didn't talk as long because I had a boring day so there just wasn't much to say!"

- They have too many long, detailed conversations!

What do single men appreciate most about single women?

- Caring
- Beauty (Nearly every man added an apology for this – “ I know I’m shallow for this....”)
- Good listeners

Developing a good sense of humor is one of the best ways to break the tension that exists between sexes!

Don’t Overcook Communication

Men and women have very different approaches to communication. When a man starts a conversation, it’s generally to fix a problem. If there is no problem, there is no need to talk. The man is comfortable here, and so everything must be ok. In fact, he enjoys his box so he assumes the person he’s talking with enjoys it too. Computers, sports, his favorite hobby, or his personal philosophy of life – if he finds someone who wants to be in the box with him, he can talk at length.

Gentlemen: When an important woman in your life begins a conversation with you, assume that she needs to connect the issues of her life together. She doesn’t need you to work your male logic into her thinking process. She simply needs you to help her make the connections. You will do well if you view the conversation as a journey she’s going to lead you on. Pack your bags, go on the journey, and encourage her to take the conversation wherever she wants. Many men refuse to do this because they’re afraid that if they ever give a woman permission to talk until she’s finished, the end will never come. This just isn’t true. Most men don’t know this, however; because they have never helped a woman finish a conversation.

Women are driven to connect. Because they’re aware of all the issues of their lives and because it’s impossible to fix every issue all at once, they approach things differently than men do. Before they look for solutions, they interact with each part of their lives and experience the appropriate emotion of each issue. Things that should be upsetting get them upset. The things that are sentimental bring soft words and flowing tears. Things that are exciting bring giggles and enthusiasm. Things that are intense bring focused concentration. Each issue gets its own emotional reaction. That’s why women can experience such a range of emotions in one conversation. Just because you, as a man, cannot keep up with them doesn’t mean your way is better. If you’re willing to encourage this need of hers, you will develop much healthier friendships with women. You may not really understand what she’s going through, but it will definitely make her life better.

Ladies, when it's the men's turn to talk, you need to practice staying in the box they want to open. You see, when a man brings up an issue for discussion, he actually intends to talk about that issue. So when he says to you, "Do you like your job?" he most likely wants to have a conversation about work. If he says he wants to talk about your upcoming vacation, he probably wants to talk about your vacation, and so on. He's hoping this time will be different. He wants to have what he considers to be a reasonable conversation with you. He wants it to stay on track.

Ladies, we are very impatient listeners. We often think that because men don't process life like we do they're unfeeling or uncaring, but nothing could be further from the truth. We just don't let them stay in one box long enough to discover their feelings.

If we stay focused on one topic and resist the urge to open up all the surrounding boxes, we buy our men the time they need to work through their box. They may even trust us enough to share with us their well of emotions that are deep in the box. It's a lot like drilling for oil. When you drill deep enough you can reach a valuable gusher. Remember, we are not interrogating a prisoner! Patient listening will sometimes bring to the surface the emotions that we love to see.

Instead of taking turns listening to each other, most people spend their time trying to change one another. Taking turns is hard work, but not taking turns is agonizing....

In order to become better communicators, you must become good listeners.

- Listening is NOT an Attempt to Understand the Opposite Sex.
- Listening is NOT an Attempt to Become Each Other's Counselor
- Listening is NOT an Attempt to Fix Your Friends
- Listening is NOT a Personality Trait
- Listening is NOT easy for Anyone

Levels of Communication:

Level One – Small Talk

- Deal with straightforward stuff of life.
How is the weather? Going to the Super Bowl Party?

Level Two – Thoughts and Opinions

- Where would you like to go to dinner tonight? What is your favorite color?

Level Three – People share their opinions and convictions

- Spiritual and moral convictions are revealed to one another.
- Compatibility is discovered and friendships are made.

Level Four – Emotional Intimacy

- This level reserved for your very closest friends and those with whom you are romantically involved.
- This is where you give insight into what makes you the unique individual that you are.
- Share dreams, fantasies, fears, the ridiculous ways you think and feel
- Things in life you are most proud of

Life requires us to communicate on the first three levels. You only reach level four if you choose to go there, and you will only choose to go there with a few very close friends in your lifetime. We are afraid that people won't like us if they really know who we are.

Listen to Key Words and Phrases

Learn to listen in a way that creates intimacy. We tend to throw out hints rather than boldly telling our friends how we are doing. As we learn to respond to these hints, we encourage others to reveal more of what is really going on in their hearts. People reveal themselves slowly and in stages.

You have to be a safe person for friends to share more risky and vulnerable truths.

- Repeat key words or phrases with the voice inflection that says “I have heard what you said, and I’m ready to listen to more”
- Summarize their thoughts and encourage them
- Describe a time in your life when you felt the same way and ask “Is that what it’s like for them?” If you can’t relate, let them know that, but let them know you are there for them...

How do we get men to open up?

- Men like to feel successful. To get him to open up give him a topic ahead of time – he might get out of the blank box and into one with thoughts and opinions
- Talk to him in an environment he likes or feels comfortable in. (might be the garage)
- Go to his favorite box (could be about car parts)

Look for the positive

Communication is a challenge. As you get older you may be tempted to just give up or accept less than the best.

Table Discussion Questions

1. What are some apparent differences between the genders that you noticed as a part of your life before you heard this tonight?
2. What are the benefits you can see of God creating us male and female?
3. What new information did you learn tonight that you think will benefit your life?
4. How do you think you can communicate differently after tonight?
5. What changes do you think you should make To better relate to those of the opposite gender?
6. Why do you think conversing with the opposite sex can be such a challenge?
7. What did you find most helpful tonight?

For Further Study: What kind of words should we use when talking with one another? Read the verses below and see if you gain any wisdom on your vocabulary and use of words in your relationships:

Philippians 4:8
Ephesians 4:29
1 Thessalonians 5:11
Ephesians 5:4
James 1:19

HELPFUL TIPS for Great Table Discussions Each table should have a designated Table Host.

1. Use God's ear-to-mouth ratio:

Listen two times more than you speak. 1 or 2 people should not dominate the time, and EVERYONE should contribute during the discussion.

2. Smile and be friendly.

Avoid excessive complaining about people or personal problems.

3. God's grace rules the day

Recognize that everyone will not always agree – be gracious and give grace to one another. People are at different places in their spiritual walk and in their life journey.

4. Moving the discussion along.

Table host/facilitators are to move the discussion along. They have permission to limit any negative comments, to invite people to answer a question, to ask someone for their perspective, to limit the amount of time some people speak, and to move on to the next question.

5. Help for the hurting:

This is a supportive group, but it is not a support group or a therapy session. But if someone is really hurting, take a moment and have someone in the group specifically pray for them.