

We are going to continue talking about relationships today by talking about what many say is the number one issue in marriage, and for that matter, all relationships

- It is communication

I've been told the big three problems in marriage are finances, communication and sexual problems

- But of those three communication is by far the greatest
- Because if you are able to communicate you can solve the other problems
- But if not, the problems are only compounded

What we talk about today will help you if you are married or contemplating marriage

- But I think it will help you no matter where you are in life
- You will learn things from the Bible that will help you in all your relationships

There is a work book I recommend to all new couples getting married called

Getting Ready for a Lifetime of Love

Every wedding I do I ask the couple to go through this book together and spend several weeks with me in premarital counseling

- You'll learn what God says about marriage and I'll share every mistake I've ever made as a husband

But the premise of the book follows what I preached last week

- That the goal of marriage is for a husband and wife to grow together in unity
- To grow in oneness

One of the chapters is called: ***Communication: The key to Oneness***

- It says you have to communicate in order to grow as a couple

Now I know what some of you guys are thinking

- Communication is for women and not men

Maybe it's true that women talk more than men

- *Some women talk a lot more than men*

But listen guys...

- If you love Jesus you're going to communicate with your wife

If you don't communicate with her, you're abandoning her in my book

- You're failing as a Christian husband
- You're opening the door to all kinds of problems

I'm not saying you have to become an effeminate man

- I'm just saying that real Christian men know how to communicate

Have I made myself clear?

Now to get you thinking more about communication I want to read you a short quote from that same workbook about our need to communicate

- It says: *If you compare your marriage relationship to a garden, then communication is the water for the garden.*
- *You can destroy a garden with a fire hose!*
- *By contrast, a good steady rain will provide a garden with the life-giving water it needs to produce healthy growth.*

Think about that

- Some of your gardens are dying for lack of water
- There's no communication
- But others of you are drowning your gardens with too much communication!
- Maybe the wrong kind of communication!

So the quote continues:

- *No skill is more critical to your oneness than good communication!*
- *Poor communication, miscommunication, and the lack of communication will cause you enormous struggles as a couple.*

I want to see you grow as couples

- I want to see you deal with your problems correctly
- I want to see you share your joys with someone
- And God's answer to those things is you learning to communicate

So let's see what God's Word says about this subject

- We'll begin in Colossians 4:6, so if you have your Bibles turn there with me
- Remember GE Power Company
- Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians (Colossians 4:6)

I do not know of any one passage that covers everything the Bible says about communication, so today we will look at two different passages

- I do love this first verse we are about to read though
- I think it's a great verse to guide your communication in marriage and life
- It makes things plain and simple and says it in an interesting way
- **Colossians 4:6**

Just so you know, you could argue that our verse for today is aimed at how you communicate with non-Christians

- That's why in verse 5 he says, **Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders**

I want you to catch that because many times we don't treat our spouses the way God intends us to treat lost people

- Many times you treat customers at work and complete strangers better than you do your spouse
- And God wants so much more for your marriage

In particular He teaches us two things in this verse about communication:

- One, your communication is to be gracious,
- And two, your communication is to be seasoned with salt
- We'll talk about what both of those mean

First, let's talk about what gracious communication means

The simplest way to describe it is to take it at face value

- Gracious communication means you communicate with grace
- You talk to people better than they deserve

Just as God sent Jesus to die for your sins even though you didn't deserve it

- You are to talk to people better than they deserve to be treated

It means you only say that which is wholesome, fitting, kind, sensitive, complementary, gentle, loving, and thoughtful.

- That is Christian communication

Ephesians 4:29 says: **Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.**

The way you communicate, and especially with your spouse, should be gracious

- It should be kind and courteous
- It should build them up and not tear them down
- It should be beneficial to them

With that said, *how would you describe the way you speak to your spouse?*

- *Are you loving and kind or short and harsh?*
- *Would God describe the way you communicate as gracious?*

I'll confess to you

- My conversation many times is far less than gracious
- Even talking about this subject today I feel a bit like a hypocrite

My time of greatest weakness is when I pay the bills and balance the checkbook

- *Why did you buy this?*
- *What are we going to do?*

Or maybe there is a problem at home

- *Well why did you do that?*
- *Whose fault was it?*

Do you hear the blaming, the fault-finding, the attacking?

That kind of talk is not from Jesus

Talking about this subject today reminds me of my great need for a Savior

- One who is able to save me from my sin

The reason we even have to talk about this subject in the first place today is because of the sinfulness and hardness of our hearts

- The human race fell into sin and one of the things that fell the hardest and acts the most wicked is our tongue
- We gossip, we gripe, we complain, we argue, we talk harshly, we stab people in the back, and that's on a good day

So studying this subject of communication reminds us that we need a Savior

- And that's why Jesus died on the cross
- He died in our place to pay the penalty for our sins
- He calls us to repent of those sins and to trust in Him
- When He makes us born again He begins giving us transforming grace
- He allows us to begin thinking and acting and even speaking like redeemed, saved people

See...you need Jesus in your life to enable you to do this

- Seek Him and trust Him and ask Him for help with your speech
- His Spirit is what allows your communication to be gracious

And not only should your communication be gracious

- Notice also in this verse
- Second, your communication is to be **seasoned with salt**

I've always liked that phrase because I think it teaches us a lot about how couples communicate

Salt can be used for good and salt can be used for bad, just like communication

On the one hand, we talk about rubbing salt in a wound

- That's when we say reckless things, hateful things, mean things, the wrong thing at the wrong time

Proverbs 12:18 captures this when it says: **Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.**

Many marriages are hurt by careless and reckless words

- You insult your spouse
- You hit them with words when they are down
- You nag them relentlessly
- You don't forgive and move on
- You belittle your spouse

None of those things are how you **season with salt**

- All of those things describe how you hurt with salt

That's like giving a thirsty person a glass of salt water to drink

- They want water
- They want conversation
- They are dying for your love
- Yet you show them hate

And that's not just in marriage either

- That's in all communication

Instead, God wants your conversations seasoned just right

- That's what it means to season with salt

He wants you to experience the right kind of edifying, encouraging talk together

- He wants you to experience the right amount of conversation

Now think for a minute about how you prepare food

- *Isn't it interesting that I can turn any sermon into a discussion of food?*
- *My last name in Swiss-German means good cook...*

If you add too much salt to your food it can't be eaten

- If you don't add enough salt it is too bland
- You want to get it just right

That is how God wants the communication to be in your marriage

- Just right, seasoned perfectly
- It makes both of you happy

You see, some marriages aren't doing enough communicating and it is causing things to be bland at home

- You need to spice it up a bit
- You need Emerill Lagasse to come in and give you some of that **Bam...**
- You need to have better and deeper conversations with your spouse

Others of you may be putting too much communication into the mix and it is more than your spouse can take!

- You need to slow down some and take your hand off the saltshaker!

No marriage is the same, God made each of you uniquely

- There is no set amount of communication that works for every marriage
- But you need to know you spouse and their communication needs and find a balance that's just right for both of you

Now think about your marriage for a second if you are married

- *Have you found the right mixture of communication?*
- *Are things seasoned just right or are they too bland or too salty?*

And this isn't just for married couples

- *So how do you talk to the people around you?*
- *Your brothers and sisters?*
- *Your parents or your children?*
- *Your friends?*
- *Co-workers, students, on and on...?*

What kind of speech do you use?

- *Do you talk crudely like so much of the world does today?*
- *Do you tear people down or build them up?*

What is the Holy Spirit saying to you about the way you speak?

I know my own heart and I think I know other people as well

- Every one of us needs to ask someone for forgiveness for how we talk
- Every one of us needs to seek the Lord in repentance

Will you please do that today?

If you are married, have an honest, open conversation about how things are going

- And please be kind about it when you sit down to talk
- Don't unload 20 years of frustration on him or her at once
- Don't attack each other or get too defensive
- Just get the conversation started and do it in a kind and loving way

Rome wasn't built in a day

- Your communication patterns can't be changed overnight either
- But you can get the ball rolling by talking about your marriage and the way you communicate
- Have a discussion on whether or not your communication is full of grace and seasoned with salt

Now before we move on to the second passage we are going to read there is one more thing I want to talk about for a minute

One of the most helpful things I've learned on this subject of communication was to learn more about how God made each of us differently

Generally speaking, men and women use language differently

- We've already joked about this some

It is said that women tend to enjoy communicating more than men and go into greater detail than men

- Men on the other hand often tend to use communication to just give and receive information

If a man isn't saying anything it doesn't mean something is wrong

- It could be that he has nothing to say
- However *if a woman isn't saying anything it could be that she has a whole lot to say and she is waiting to share it with you brother!*

Now you know those are just generalities

- Sometimes these roles are reversed and the man is the one that talks more and vice versa

This is not an issue of right or wrong; this is just how it is

- But you need to learn to communicate effectively in spite of your differences
- You need to have more understanding for how God made your spouse and love them accordingly
- Being different is no excuse for not communicating effectively

Many times these differences in communication cause problems in the home

- Think about this with me:
- Let's imagine that a problem has come up at home
- Often one person will want to withdraw and think everything over before speaking
- However the other person may want to talk it through to find an answer

Neither one of you is right or wrong

- What it means is that God created you both uniquely
- You need to figure out a way to combine the best of both of you in way that grows you closer together

As a couple you have to work at growing in oneness

- It doesn't just happen automatically
- In particular you have to work at communicating better

Amen?

Well there's one last short passage I want us to read before we close

- So turn with me now in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 6:11-13

In this passage Paul illustrates the truth that without these healthy patterns of communication there can be no closeness in any relationship

- This is a very honest passage that you may have overlooked in the past
- But it shows that the problems we have in marriage and in life often come from our problems communicating
- **2 Corinthians 6:11-13**

Here Paul is talking about his often strained relationship with the church in Corinth

- What you see is that it was their lack of communication that was leading to the strain

In verse 11 Paul says he has been speaking freely with the people

- He has opened his heart wide to them

The first half of verse 12 in the NIV says he was not withholding any affection at all in the relationship

But we find the problem in the second half of verse 12

- Notice what he says: **but you are restricted in your own affections**
- The NIV says: **but you are withholding your affection from us.**

That's where the problem often lies in relationships and especially marriage

- One of you is withholding affection from the other

How many marriages today are not able to be all God wants them to be because one person is holding back?

It is through communication that you are able to grow in closeness

- It affects all relationships, from husbands and wives, friends, even missionaries like Paul and the churches they start

If you have no communication, you cannot achieve closeness

- Your relationship will never be able to reach it's potential

So what is the answer?

Well, I've already told you that you need to trust in Jesus, you have to be saved

- But look also at verse 13... once you are saved, we have to start loving and communicating properly
- He says: **In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.**

This is the answer for all relationships:

- Friends and co-workers, husbands and wives, churches and pastors

What he is saying is this: Look, I'm giving you my best

- I'm doing every thing I know to do
- Now make a fair exchange with me – you give me your best as well
- Look at the end of verse 13: **widen your hearts also.**

I think if we were all honest with ourselves about modern married life

- We would see a lot of people who are married together, but who are not sharing a lot of life together
- They may be sharing a roof and they may be sharing a bed, but they are not always sharing their hearts
- And that's what I'm asking you to do

If you aren't communicating to the best of your ability, you're not only hurting your spouse, you're hurting yourself as well

- You're missing out on the good times that will come if you would only give more to your spouse

I try to tell people that if they will only give more to their spouse, they will also receive a whole lot more back

- I'm not saying you should do the right thing for selfish reasons
- I'm just telling you the truth
- When you treat your spouse the way she or he is supposed to be treated
- She or he will respond back to you with even more love and closeness

A few years ago Trish and I taught a small group marriage class that met on Sunday afternoons

- It was one of my favorite small group classes we've ever offered
- I'd enjoy doing one here in the Fall if anyone was interested
- It met a big need in the church and it had lots of people coming to church on Sunday nights, including the men
- I think the men and women both really enjoyed it

We used Gary Chapman's book called ***Covenant Marriage: Communication and Intimacy***

- And he has a section where he discusses communication and he gives this definition
- *Simply put, communication is sharing life with another person*
- *It is the process by which two individuals choose to reveal their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with each other.*

Think back to what we just read in 2 Corinthians 6

- Think about how Paul wanted their communication to be:
- The NIV says: **We have spoken freely to you, We opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you**
- **Open wide your hearts also**

If you are married, what God is asking you to do today is to no longer withhold yourself from your spouse any longer

- To open your heart to your spouse
- To share your thoughts, feelings and experiences with them so you can grow closer together as a couple

Not to unload on them

- Not to yell at them
- Not to belittle them or berate them
- But to share your heart with them in love

This is not a guy thing or a girl thing

- This is a married thing
- This is a Biblical thing

God's will for **every** marriage is that you grow closer together in intimacy and oneness

- God gave you communication to allow that growth to occur

So if you are married God tells you to open up to your spouse and give them the very best you have to give

And if you are single, don't think this has nothing to do with you

- Just think about how important communication skills are in life
- See communication as something you need to be aware of
- Use it for good and not for bad
- Ask God to take control of your head, your heart and your tongue

And think about the way you speak to people

- *Can you see Jesus talking the way you talk?*
- *Using the words you use?*
- *Treating people the way you treat them?*

And if you're here and this talk about communication being redeemed is new for you

- Maybe you're not sure what this is all about
- Maybe you're not even sure if you've been saved from your sins
- Then I want to see you trust in Christ so God can begin working in your life

I ask you to trust in Christ

- Repent of your sin and come to Him by faith
- Believe that he died for your sins at the cross and rose again
- Commit your life to Him and follow Him

One of the things God will do for you through the Holy Spirit is to transform your tongue

I believe God's desire for you is that in all your relationships, and especially your marriage, that you have good and godly communication

I think if you are honest with yourself

- You'll say that's your desire too

May God give us the grace to learn to communicate better...

Pray with me please...