

RELATIONSHIPS 101

## Communication Killers

Ephesians 4:25-32

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Communication--transmitting and receiving what was intended--is tough. A little girl walked by a dog that was growling and wagging its tail. The girl said, "Mommy, I don't know which end to believe." That is the challenge of communication for all of us! Many of you have read the statistics made famous by Albert Mehrabian (granted, some current communication experts refute the details): 55% of communication is body language; 38% of communication is tone of voice; and only 7% is made up of our actual words. And complicating things even more, here's a number for you: 247 billion. That's how many emails we send each and every day!

Those of you who are dating, married or have ever had any dealings with the opposite sex can appreciate the following words (source unknown), all over Facebook lately: Five Deadly Terms Used by a Woman--"FINE." This is a word women use to end an argument when she knows she is right and you need to shut up. "NOTHING." Means something and you need to be worried. "GO AHEAD." This is a dare, not permission, do not do it. "WHATEVER." A woman's way of saying "phooey on you" (I cleaned this one up for church). "THAT'S O.K." She is thinking long and hard on how and when you will pay for your mistake. BONUS WORD: "WOW." This is not a compliment. She's amazed that one person could be so stupid.

As usual in our Relationships 101 sermon series, scripture offers a lot of help for us. Two things to notice from our text this morning. First, healthy communication is tied to healthy community (v. 25, we are members of the same body). Second, healthy communication is tied to the person and work of Jesus Christ (v. 32). Those thoughts wrap themselves around this passage of scripture, beginning and end. And more help from the Bible is tucked in between these verses. Verse 26 remind us that feelings are powerful, so they must be acknowledged or they eat us up. We are to speak truth, and do so promptly, not letting it fester. "Don't let the sun go down on your anger." Have you ever fixed a cheese omelet and left it to stick overnight? You get the picture.

But the truth we speak is not to be brutal. Look at v. 29. A wise pastor's wife once told me her motto, "Always tell the truth but don't be always telling it." Do you know what that "evil talk" is? The Greek word means vile, rotten, putrid, thoroughly disgusting. On the other hand, the word for "building up" is the same root word that is used in Eph. 2:20, 22. How do we know what kind of communication should pour out of our mouths? Simple. Does it tear down, spread nasty poison or does it spread grace? God's grace, mixed in to ordinary conversations and duties of the day. "Words that bring a blessing" (NEB).

I have a challenge for you. Have an communication board somewhere in your house, and buy some of those smiley and sad face stickers. Based on v. 29, every time you hear yourself speaking a positive word of grace (about a person, an event, a thing), put a smiley face up. Every time you hear yourself using communication (verbal or electronic) to be negative, ugly and tear down, put up a sad face. Or you can do this on your smart phone, in the notes section. It may surprise us--how much rot comes out of our mouths (take a moment and read vv. 31-32).

So here are some ways to carry on better communication. 1) Use "I" language, not "you" language. ("I was upset by what you said" vs. "You make me mad"). 2) Talk WITH the person, not about, at or to that person. 3) Practice reflective listening. That means more than waiting your turn to talk!

4) Let's practice humility in communications. Have you ever argued with someone because you each heard different things, or remember things very differently ("Were we in the same meeting? That's not what I heard."). Brain scientists have made some amazing discoveries. Each time we recollect or retell a memory, we actually rewrite it as we put it back in storage. Even as little as 24 hours later, our recall of what happened may be in its 18th version, depending on how much we've been dwelling on it [*Difficult Conversations*, by Stone, Patton and Heen, p. 239]. You can test this out yourself. You watched a movie once, and say to yourself, I can't wait to see that red car going up and down all those dangerous mountain roads, all through the movie. You watch the movie again, and it's a blue car, and it's only in one brief scene. Your brain has changed it as it recalls it each time. So, perhaps a little humility in communication? To say, "The way I remember it is...What I recall hearing is..."

5) Be ready to accept diversity of viewpoints. Sometimes we think that the only reason to communicate is to convince others that we are right. Remember? This entire section of scripture begins with the reminder that we are the body of Jesus on earth. Body parts are not all alike, but are to coordinate around the head, Jesus. Here is a paradox. Trying to argue someone to your viewpoint rarely works; engaging in thoughtful dialogue, with the goal of mutual learning, often brings change! Author Bob Goff says, "I want to live in a new normal where I can reach out to people who are different from me and just be friends" [*Love Does*, ch. 10].

Remember: vv. 25 and 32...What if these two things guided all that comes from our mouths this week? The good of the body; the person and work of Jesus Christ.