

FAMILY LIFE IS MESSY: The Art of (Mis)communication
Ephesians 4:25—5:2
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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/family-life-is-messy-the-art-of-miscommunication/>

Tom and Sally were at their first-ever marriage enrichment weekend. They were to work on their communication skills. The speaker said, "I'll bet most of you men don't even know the name of your wife's favorite flower." Tom leaned toward Sally and whispered confidently, "Pillsbury Whole Wheat, right?" The rest of the weekend didn't go well either.

Communication is central to all relationships, in the home, at work, among friends, in Christ's church. And Paul shares some warnings, such as v. 26: "Be angry but don't sin; don't go to bed angry." Unresolved anger is like dried egg yolk, left to sit in the sink overnight. It's just harder to remove.

Another warning comes in v. 29: "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths..." The word used for "evil" is the same one used by Jesus in Matthew 7:18 for bad fruit that rots, stinks and is useless. Whether we communicate online, in person, over the phone or wherever, we have to remember words have power and life. When I was a little boy and had my feelings hurt, Mom would always remind me, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Mom was right about most things, but Mom was wrong on that one!

Ask yourself: 1) Do my words build up others or tear them down, make them better or destroy them? In a book which the pastoral staff uses for premarital counseling, the authors make a distinction between complaint and criticism. Complaints are about actions and behavior and use "I" language. Criticism attacks the person, the character. It uses "you" language and is about accusation, blame and attack [Les and Leslie Parrott, *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*, p. 139].

2) Do my words meet the needs of a particular occasion? Are they timely and appropriate? A wise woman once said, "Always tell the truth but don't be always telling it." Earlier in Eph. 4, Paul instructs us to speak the truth in love (v. 15), but some of us do the "truth" part of that better than the "in love" part. In v. 29, Paul says, "as there is need." 3) Do my words connect people to God's smile (His blessing and grace)? Do my words make it easier or more difficult for the other person to feel valued and loved by God? Not because of what they have or haven't done, but only that they are valued, period.

And not only do destructive words hurt other people, they hurt God. Look at v. 30. Besides grieving others, our harsh words grieve God's tender Holy Spirit. God doesn't want to hang around a place of abusive language. God's Spirit is described here as bashful and will not hover where she does not feel welcome. God's word says we are to "Put aside all bitterness, losing

your temper, anger, shouting, slander..." (v. 31, CEB). We are to trash everything which destroys communication.

I often hear people talk about the toughest, most challenging season of a marriage. Do you know the toughest stage of marriage? The one you're in right now. Because communication takes work all the time. If you let up, you will drift. A couple checked in to their vacation rental, unpacked and were exploring their new home for a week. From separate rooms, they hollered to each other, "Shall we go outside and get some exercise before dinner tonight?" They both reached into their suitcases. One pulled out swim wear and the other biking clothes. When they had hollered at one another, he had been looking out back at the swimming pool. She had been looking out the side window at a bike trail. Was one of them wrong? No. They were just looking at life through different windows. Keep talking about your respective windows to the world. Keep communicating.

Jesus died to restore communication/relationship between God and us (vv. 4:32—5:2). How much does God love us, value us? God has a passion to communicate with us, reach us, so much so that John's Gospel calls Jesus "the Word." In Christ, God continues to work at removing every communication barrier. We are called to do no less.