

Say What? Effective Communication

Grace for The Family

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I'd like us to begin by thinking about a story from Scripture. A long time ago people spoke the same language. They developed an aggressive strategic plan. They built a city and a tower that reached all the way to heaven. The tower would be so impressive that this people would make a name for themselves. They would have a great name, known to all generations. It sounds like an awesome plan, doesn't it? Well, the problem was that this plan was in direct contradiction to what the Lord had told them and so the Lord judged them. He judged their pride and arrogance and wrongful ambition by confusing the languages of the people. One man spoke English while his neighbor Spanish and his neighbor Russian while the guy across the street spoke German and in that moment cooperation, collaboration and relationships were lost. The engineers could no longer communicate with one another. The foreman could not communicate with his team and the project came to a screeching halt. The end result is that they abandoned their plan and dispersed over all the earth according to the language that they spoke. That event was called the Tower of Babel or Confusion, when God brought confusion to the language in Genesis 11.

That story explains a number of very important lessons, one of which is significant for our time this morning. You see, being made in the image of God means in part that we are communicative beings. Human beings have something that no animal or bug or bird has ever had and that is language. We were designed by God to use language to communicate with him and with each other and when we cannot do that, we suffer tremendous loss. You see, language and communication is what allows us to understand one another, to express our ideas and our feelings, to encourage one another and to work together. That is why the overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that communication or language is actually powerful. That is why Proverbs 18:21 records these words, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." You see, I can bring death to my relationship, I can bring death to my marriage, I can bring death to my parenting or, on the other hand, this text tells me that I can bring life, they're in the power of the tongue.

Similarly, James 3 records these words, "Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of

the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!" Those are powerful comparisons, are they not? I mean, life and death, a bit to a horse, a rudder to a ship, a spark to a great fire and all of us know this to be true because we have experienced it. I mean, after all just think: did you know we invent languages? We invent languages. Think about sign language for a second; those who are born deaf still want to communicate. They want to express their thoughts, their feelings, their desires just like everybody else does and so they have worked out a system of signs and facial expressions that allow them to communicate with others. In fact, those who are parents who have a deaf child learn sign language so that they can understand one another, so that they can express their thoughts and encourage one another and work together.

We also see the significance of language in that we invent sayings to cover up the pain associated with hurtful things. Have you ever heard the saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me"? I mean, whoever invented that was an idiot. I mean, the truth of the matter is that's what hurts the most. When someone that we love says something very hurtful to us, those are the things that many people remember for an awful long time. When a father tells his child that he or she will never amount to anything, it hurts. When a husband is critical of his wife, it hurts. When a wife complains about her husband, it hurts. You know, we even find translators or people to travel with when we go to other countries. Have you ever been in a country where you did not speak the language? I mean, here you are and there's all sorts of things happening around you that you don't know exactly what's going on. You're not sure if every time people laugh they're actually laughing at you because you can't understand them.

So that's why we want to have translators around us so that we can communicate or we want to have people that we travel with so that we are able to at least have relationships with each other, otherwise we feel very lonely, very much like an outsider. There are few things more important to a human being than the ability to communicate, to speak to others and to be understood by others. Communication is essential to our very purpose. It is how we pray and speak to God. It is how we relate emotionally with one another. It is how we encourage, complement, build up and grow relationships and it's how we cooperate to accomplish common goals. Communication is the grease, if you will, to all human relationships and it is part and parcel with what it means to be human.

So I can think of no more important area for us to think about how grace impacts than communication. You know, our annual theme is "Finding Grace" and we have latched onto Hebrews 4:16 that says, "Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." And beginning this week, we're actually taking that idea and applying it to the family and we're asking ourselves the question: is there any grace for the family? And this is the beginning of a 7 week series that is going to be unpacking various ways in which grace needs to impact family relationships and the first of those areas, the one that we're going to think about today is not surprisingly: effective communication. Say what? Effective communication. If communication is so important, if it is so powerful, if it is so crucial to our purpose, then how can ours be effective? Well, rather than talk about one single

passage which is certainly my normal preference, I have a lot of passages that we're going to be considering this morning in order to paint a picture of what effective godly communication looks like. We're doing at least partially a biblical theology of communication and that means we're trying to pull together what God has to say in a number of passages in order to create a series of truths, meaningful statements that help us.

So here's the first thing: I'd like us to think about the fact that we have to set our hearts on Christ because all of our communication originates in the heart. Now, let me say that again: that we must set our hearts on Christ because all of our communication originates in the heart. When Jesus was confronting the religious leaders he said this to them, "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good?" You see, he was raising a very important question. He said, "Your character is evil and so therefore how can a person who is evil produce something that is actually good?" Then he explains, "You can't and the reason you can't is because the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart." The heart is always going to come out. "The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil." He simply explains that you speak from the inside out, from the heart out. He goes on, "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." You see, Jesus is very clear: our words are a reflection of our heart because our words always flow out of the heart.

In the Bible there are so many different words to describe the concept of heart. It certainly does not refer to the organ but like the organ, the heart refers to the control center of our being and therefore in order to communicate effectively, in order to communicate biblically, we have to have our control center, our heart, fixed on the right things. The point that Jesus is making is, "You can't just simply put a Band-Aid on the kind of person that you are." I think many of us can relate to this. We understand it to be true. Just being told to speak kindly does not in and of itself result in kindness, does it? You know, when I was growing up, my mom would typically get some breakfast ready for our family and that typically meant there would be a couple of bowls, a couple spoons and a box of cereal and then there was an individualized napkin and on my napkin was the words, going back to the King James now, "Be ye kind." Sometimes I just got it straight, sometimes I got a little hangman that described it but every day was the notion of, "Be ye kind." Apparently I had a real problem with kindness growing up, so much so that I think my mom just said, "Well, I'm going to tell him that every day and then after I tell him, I'm going to go in my room and I'm going to pray that his heart changes because I know that out of his heart is going to flow his communication and out of his heart needs to be kindness so kindness comes out."

Well, you know, just being told to speak in pleasant tongues does not in and of itself result in pleasant tongues, does it? And here's why: the heart always wins out. The heart always wins out. You see, if the heart wants to be condescending, snarky or sarcastic, then that is the kind of language and the kind of tone that we will use, even if we know that we should speak kindly, even if we know we've been told 1,000 times to be kind. If

our heart wants to be snarky, it's going to be snarky. If our heart wants to be condescending, then we will be condescending. So that means we have to think about our hearts. We have to wrestle with our hearts. In order to have effective communication, we have to think about the inside first so to effectively communicate, our heart must be committed to love the Lord first of all. Matthew 22:37-40, Jesus was asked, "What is the most important commandment," and he said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these 2 commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." In other words, there is a sense in which the entire Old Testament can be summarized in these 2 words.

Sometimes when we communicate with another person, there is a tendency on our part to view our communication only through the grid of our horizontal relationship. In other words, if you speak sarcastic to me, I will speak sarcastic to you. If you are condescending to me, I'm not going to talk anymore and you can have that conversation by yourself. If you want to speak with harsh words, then I'm going to speak with harsh words right back. But, you see, each of those statements effectively eliminates the Lord's place in our life. At least at that moment, for those brief moments, we're functioning like an atheist. Why? Because God is not relevant. God is not important. This is about you and it's about me and so therefore our communication is outside of the Lord's work in our life.

Well, I think it's pretty clear that if we're going to change that, then we're going to have to begin to think about the Lord as first place in our life. We're going to have to think first of all about loving him most so even if a person speaks sinfully to us, that doesn't mean that we have to respond with sinful language in return. It just simply means, "Lord, you're going to take care of that. I mean, after all, you said that every careless word will be accounted for and so if that person speaks a careless word, then you will take care of that. I don't need to worry about it. But here's what I'm going to do, I'm going to choose to put you first. I'm going to choose to love you first and therefore what's going to come out of my mouth are words that would reflect a love and a care for God." That's what grace-based communication looks like.

Well, let's add another element to this: to effectively communicate, we must want to please the Lord with our words. We must want to please the Lord with our words. 1 Corinthians 10:31 says, "Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." You see, maybe you can relate to this: occasionally someone will say something snarky, condescending or mean to me so I might be thinking this, "Well, alright, Lord, I love you but is it alright if I love you 5 minutes from now? And what I'm going to do right now is I'm going to respond with condescension, I'm going to respond to snark, after all, I have some sinful snark that is honking for the right of way. That is what is ready to come out." You see, that's when we have to stop and we have to say, "Whoa, whoa, whoa. Wait a second. Wait a second. What I need to do right now is to express my love for the Lord because he has loved me. I need to express my love for the Lord in doing what is pleasing to him and so even if there is an element where I want to respond or lash back, I'm not going to do that. I'm going to choose to give this over to you. I'm

going to choose to be honoring to you. I'm going to choose to be pleasing to you in what comes out of my mouth next."

You see, if I'm loving him, if I'm putting him first, then those are the kinds of words that come out and doesn't that have application to our families all over the place? I mean, just think about this one moment: what happens if your husband comes home, ladies, takes one look at the house and wonders what you did all day. Is grace going to come out? Or will you need next week's sermon on conflict resolution? Which one is going to happen? Is it going to be grace? Or is it going to be, "Let me tell you what I've been doing all day"? Or what happens when one of your children suddenly informs you that they have an activity and they need to be there in 5 minutes. Is grace going to come out? Or is something else going to appear? In other words, are we going to be so devoted to loving and pleasing the Lord that words of kindness and grace and love are going to flow out of our mouth because we desire to love the Lord and to please him?

I realize that takes some motivation, especially in the heat of the moment but I think having just come through Easter, we have every motivation to want to love and to please the Lord. You know, there is something powerful about being involved in both of those ministries every day for a whole week. You know, we often speak about how tired the cast and the crew and the choir is and indeed they are, and we speak about the difference that the ministry makes in the lives of those who see it. I mean, after all, it is valuable to communicate to our community over and over and over again that not everybody is okay. There is a hell to be shunned and a heaven to be gained and therefore they need to repent of their sin and they need to trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ for their salvation. And if you are here this morning and that has not been a testimony in your life, we would just encourage you to do that now or at least to communicate with us so that we could talk with you later on this week. There is certainly nothing more important for us to do than to do that.

But being in these passion plays and involved in Easter service makes a difference in the servant's life too because it is living every moment of the week with a view of the Gospel message. I mean, there is just something about hearing of Jesus, sing a song about, "Not my will but yours be done. If it's possible, could this cup be removed?" There is something about hearing that 20 times every day that just does something to you. There is something about walking through the crucifixion scene 20 times in a week that just reminds you, "Man, Lord, thank you. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sin. Thank you for choosing to walk the path of obedience to the Father. Thank you for crying out, My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? so that I wouldn't have to."

When we think about it this way, it's motivating. It's encouraging us to love Jesus. That was the point that he made to, again, another group of people. He said, "Listen, there are 2 individuals, one who owed \$1,500 and the other who owed \$15,000 and both of their debts were forgiven. Who loved him more?" And the answer was, "The one who owed \$15,000, of course." And the more that we remind ourselves that we were forgiven of this massive debt that we could have never repaid, the more we will want to please him, the

more we will want to honor him even in our speech. The Lord wants us to love him because he first loved us.

This also reminds us that we understand that communication comes from our hearts and so therefore it helps us avoid incorrect clichés. You know, over the years I have said these common things too and they're wrong. Maybe you've heard about them before. "I didn't mean to say that. I didn't think before I spoke." Well, based on the passages of Scripture that we've looked at so far, out of the heart the mouth speaks. The mouth doesn't speak all on its own, it is directed by the heart and so it may be true that I didn't think very long, it may be true that I didn't think very wisely, but it is not true that I didn't think first. That's why effective communication, grace-based communication, if you will, begins in the heart and is based on a love for the Lord and that's what's so wonderful about Hebrews 4:16, huh? That in those moments, in those challenges, we are able to say, "Lord, we are coming to the throne of grace because we need mercy and we need grace to help in our time of need to speak wisely right here."

Well, here's a second attitude. Once we get to the place where we say, well, our posture towards the Lord is that we want to please him, we want to glorify him, we want to honor him, we want to love him, then what does effective communication look like? We must use grace-based communication in our families and there are a lot of communication principles found in the word, some of them will be the focus of next week's sermon on resolving conflict but I'm going to concentrate my time on 6 particular types of communication that bring life into relationships. Here is the first one: a commitment to speak the truth. A commitment to speak the truth. Ephesians 4:25 says, "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."

That sounds so simple and so obvious and yet it's very, very important. You see, in order to communicate, we have to have some common ground rules. You have to communicate what you mean. You have to communicate what you mean. Have you ever asked somebody how they are doing and they just say, "Well, fine." Or ask your spouse, "How is it going between us?" "Fine." Or, "How are the kids doing? How are we relating to one another?" "Oh, we're good." Well, if we're not actually speaking the truth about that, we're not communicating. We may be giving various pleasantries to one another but we're not communicating because you are not communicating what you mean. In order to communicate, you have to explain what you mean and then here's what I have to do: I have to take your words at face value. Imagine if you said to me, "Well Rob, I'd like to talk about one of my struggles in life and I would just need some advice. Would you be willing to meet with me and give some advice?" And I respond, "Oh man, that's great. I love your use of irony and I'm so excited that everything is going so well," and then I walk away. You're thinking to yourself, "What? What just happened here?" You see, here's what I did: I took your words in a way you didn't mean them. I took them as you were speaking ironically and hyperbolically about how wonderful life was and the fact is you don't need to meet with me at all because you don't need advice, in fact, you are prepared to give advice. But that may not be what you meant.

You see, for communication to happen, you have to communicate what you mean and I have to take your words at face value. That is focusing on the truth. That's focusing on the truth and all human relationships are based on the truth. If you cannot trust what I say or I cannot trust what you say, then we cannot have a meaningful relationship. And in the family, grace-based communication focuses on truth and at a very minimum, here's what it implies: that when one speaks the truth, the message is not hidden or distorted. You know, in my day when I was in school, here was the way you were allowed to lie: if you crossed your fingers. Anybody remember that? You know, if you crossed your fingers, you held them behind your back, then you were freely allowed to lie and everybody was supposed to be happy about that. Well, it's pretty obvious that that doesn't work very well in real relationships, does it? It doesn't build friendships. It doesn't encourage parent relationships. It doesn't encourage marriage relationships. It doesn't encourage anything when we distort or hide our messages.

It also means we will not use hurtful exaggeration. You know, sometimes it's well understood. You know, last week when Pastor Viars made several references to the great fish in John 21 and how only a fisherman would have actually included that detail. We thought it was funny. It was a joke. We all were chuckling, right? But sometimes exaggeration is a violation of the truth. Sometimes we use words like "never" or "always" as clubs to beat down another person into submission. That's not grace-based. That's not a demonstration of a love for Christ. It's not a demonstration of wanting to please him. So it may be that our children's rooms are kind of messy sometimes but they're not always a dump. They don't always act as if the world revolves around them, even if they do sometimes. The fact of the matter is: we have to learn how not to use these kinds of words in hurtful exaggeration and maybe one of the takeaways for you is that point right there. Maybe what the Lord wants is for you to use exaggeration appropriately or just to cut back on it big time.

3. When one speaks the truth, they do so recognizing that they're family. That was what the end of verse 25 said. It says we do this, we speak the truth because we are members of one another. You know, when a husband and wife do not have the baseline of truth, then there is a sense in which the relationship is lost. They are partners together, they are more like roommates. When children are not truthful with their parents, they fertilize the soil of their relationship with deceit. They demonstrate that they cannot be trusted and therefore parenting is more about how to survive than it is about nurturing and admonition of the Lord that we are instructed to give.

Well, here's a second type of effective communication: it's commit to words of affirmation. Did you know that almost every book of the New Testament begins with a word of praise and thanksgiving? Describing what is good and how the Lord is using them and their reputation around the world? Let me just highlight one of them, it's 1 Thessalonians 1. He starts off writing to this church with these words, "We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in

the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth." Do you hear the words? Isn't that affirming? I mean, isn't that relationship just based on, "Oh my goodness, man, I've just been praying and I'm so excited for what God has done in your life." I mean, here's what he's done and here's the reputation that has resulted from that and you actually are a testimony around the world. How affirming is that? That Scripture places a great value in words like that?

You know, I saw a blog post this week that I thought was a perfect example of affirmation. A husband was writing about his wife and the title of this blog post was "I cannot afford a stay at home mom," and I thought when I first clicked on the blog to read it, I thought it was going to be an article about the need for families to have 2 incomes but that actually was not the purpose of this article. The husband in this case calculated, based on going rates, the monetary value of the shopping, cooking, cleaning and parenting training that his wife provided and ultimately concluded that he could not afford that level of care. Now, he wasn't saying anything about those who choose to have 2 incomes. He wasn't saying anything about that. Here's what he was doing: he was saying, "Babe, you're awesome." He was saying, "Hon, I am so thankful to be married to you. The fact of the matter is, you care for our children, you care for our home in such a way that I couldn't even afford this. If I tried to hire it out, I couldn't get this level of care and concern no matter what." It was incredibly touching. In fact, the only thing that irritated me about the blog is that I didn't write it. I thought, "Rats, man, Stephanie's going to see this and now I can't use it. I mean, oh man, it's way too public. Wow, man, that was good." That's what I'm talking about.

So husbands, I have a little assignment I'd like to give you: what are 3 things that you could write down right now before you leave the auditorium that you could affirm about your wife? Maybe she's a great mom. Maybe she's a sacrificial servant. Maybe she does a great job with the house. Maybe she is a skilled worker. But before you leave, to write out 3 ways in which you could particularly be affirming to her and then to tell her this week. Wives, same assignment. What are 3 things that you could affirm about your husband? Maybe he's a hard worker. Maybe he's a good provider. Maybe he's a loving husband. Maybe he's a caring father. Make a list and tell him this week. Singles, your closest friends, your coworkers, maybe your roommates, maybe your parents. For those who are parents, to do so for your children. And even if you would say that there are areas in which I would like to see my kids take a step of growth, okay fine. For now, just think about what are some ways I can affirm them. Maybe they're good students. Maybe they're really productive. Maybe they're sensitive to the Lord. Maybe they are compassionate to their neighbors. In other words, tell them some of the ways in which you are affirming and valuing them just like the Apostle Paul does in almost every book of the Bible.

Now, here's a second type of word: words of affection. Words of affection. Especially in the context of marriage, words of affection are particularly meaningful and I'd just like to draw your attention to a couple of speeches in the Song of Solomon, one by the husband about his wife and one by the wife about her husband. Notice how maybe we could take a lesson from some of them. Here's what she says about him, "My beloved is dazzling and ruddy, Outstanding among ten thousand. His head is like gold, pure gold; His locks are like clusters of dates And black as a raven. His eyes are like doves Beside streams of water, Bathed in milk, And reposed in their setting. His cheeks are like a bed of balsam, Banks of sweet-scented herbs; His lips are lilies. His hands are rods of gold Set with beryl; His abdomen is carved ivory Inlaid with sapphires." Alright, let's stop there. Now, I realize, I mean, all of us guys, we get it, alright. Our sixpack, we've got a sixpack, it's just buried deep in the cooler, alright? We get it. We understand that. But you know, she is finding ways to describe how wonderful he is, huh? And she's finding ways to be affirming to him.

Well, just a chapter later, he starts talking about her and he says, "How beautiful are your feet in sandals, O prince's daughter! The curves of your hips are like jewels, The work of the hands of an artist. Your navel is like a round goblet Which never lacks mixed wine; Your belly is like a heap of wheat Fenced about with lilies." Now again, most women would not appreciate "belly" and "heap" being in the same sentence, like I get that, okay? It's obvious, right? Then he says about her that her "nose is like the tower of Lebanon." Again, "noses" and "towers" do not typically go together in our culture, right? But here's the point: he is finding ways to demonstrate affection toward her. He's telling her how wonderful and how beautiful she is and that's exactly what she's been doing with him. You know, I think our marriages maybe could use a little bit of that, huh? Maybe some of our marriages we would say, "You know, we haven't been as as affectionate as we could've been or we haven't been as affectionate with one another as we could be," and maybe that would be a way to communicate effectively.

Here's another one: commit to words of security. Do you know the Lord Jesus has done that in your life? I mean, after all, in John 10, here's what the Lord says about you: that no one is able to pluck you out of his Father's hands. If you are a genuine Christian today, if you have put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, do you realize that there is no one that can ever take you out of the Father's hand? How encouraging is that? How secure is that? In Romans 8:35 it says, "Who will separate you from the love of God in Christ?" and the answer was, "No one." And then he asked the question, "Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And the answer is, "Nope, not to that either." In other words, there is not a who, there is not a what that can ever separate you from the love of God in Christ and there is no one who is strong enough to take you out of the Father's hand. That's security, isn't it? I mean, that is the picture of security and so even if you have a really bad day, I mean it was a a day you just decided, "I'm going to sin today." You don't have to go to bed thinking, "Oh my goodness, I think I just lost my salvation. Oh my goodness, I think God is done with me. I think God has just decided, do you know what? That goof needs to be out of here." That's not how it works. God has given you words of security and that security is what keeps

you coming back week after week after week, day after day after day. Why? Because it's secure.

Well, did you know we want words of security too? Do you think that's good in human relationships? Do you think maybe we could follow the Lord's example in that too? We're here and what we do and we have a job. What's the number 1 word of security when you have a job? That you still have one. Right? I mean, that's a word and we want to know that we have some security, that we still have a job. What about in a marriage? We want to know that we can celebrate the blessings together because it's really no fun to celebrate by yourself, is it? I mean, can you imagine a man comes home from work and his wife is so excited to greet him because something really cool and awesome has happened in her day that day and she is like, "I can't wait until he gets through the door," and she's excited about what's going to happen. So she starts telling him about it and he's like, "Yeah, whatever," and walks away. She walks to the door thinking, "Woohoo! Woohoo!" and he kind of responds and she's like, "Whoohoo! Woohoo. Woo." I can't celebrate anymore, right? Because nobody's wanting to celebrate with me.

Or let's take the other side, let's say something really bad has happened, something really rough has happened. "That's alright. We're going to link arms. We're going to hold each other. We're in this together." You say, "I don't know what it's going to look like. I don't know what it's going to be like. I don't know everything that's going to happen between now and the end but here's what I know: I know we're together. We're together." That's security, isn't it? And you wake up every day and it's like, "We're together. We're a team. We work together. We go through hard times together and we celebrate blessings together. We do it together." Friends, marriages need that. If you're a parent, it's a good thing to say to your children, to let children know there is security.

Well, let's think about another one: commit to words that are soft rather than words that are harsh. Commit to words that are soft rather than words that are harsh. Notice how Proverbs 15:1 puts it, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger." Did you know that the vast majority of circumstances in our homes can be handled with soft words or with harsh words? In other words, it is possible to say the same thing using different tones and using different words and so it is possible to communicate something very similar but here's what this passage tells us: the results could not be more different. Here's what harsh words do: they build barriers and are very difficult to overcome where soft words invite conversation. They invite self-reflection. They say that trust in this particular circumstance is here. It's safe. We're allowed to talk. Soft words invite each person to engage, to listen and to respond. Harsh words tell the other person that, "It's time for you to shut it. I don't care about your opinion and quite frankly, I am giving you a lecture."

Now, here's what happens, alright, the person who is getting the lecture, they don't say anything, right? They're not invited to say anything. They are not invited to participate in the conversation. This is one way and it's one way as I'm just going to get it. Well, according to this text, here's what happens: harsh words stir up anger. Anger you don't see because when you don't invite conversation, then they walk away from the

conversation not being able to say anything, they just hate your guts. Now, how is that helpful? How is that God-honoring? How is that part of building relationships? Harsh words stir up anger but gentle answers turn away wrath, even if you're saying the exact same things.

Marriage relationships, parenting relationships, are effective when gentleness and softness characterizes our speech. And I don't know about you but here's where I want to live most of my life, I understand that the sermon we're going to have next week on conflict resolution is important because I'm a sinner and the people around me are sinners and we're going to have conflict. That's going to be part of the deal, I get it, but I want to live 90% of my life outside of next week's sermon. I want to live 90% of my life in truth, in affirmation, in affection, in security, in words that are soft as opposed to words that are hard. And then when I need to, I will seek to by God's grace apply whatever conflict things we're going to learn about next week but I want to spend my time if at all possible in this soil of goodness and kindness and security and affirmation and affection so that only 10% of my time has to be devoted to conflict resolution.

Then I want to commit to being quiet at appropriate moments. To be quiet at appropriate moments. You know, Proverbs 10:19 says, "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, But he who restrains his lips is wise." Proverbs 18:2 says a very similar thing, "A fool does not delight in understanding, But only in revealing his own mind." You see, this last point of communication is really that sometimes it's just best to not say anything. Sometimes effective communication is refusing to allow some unhelpful things to come out of our mouths.

Well, friends, there's a lot more that we could say about communication and conflict resolution next week is going to be a very important topic for us but let me encourage you: there really is grace for effective communication in our homes. It begins in the heart, the location of all our communication for it's out of the heart the mouth speaks. So let's be committed to first of all loving and pleasing Christ and then with that attitude, then our effective communication is built on truth which engenders trust and trust and deceit just have a hard time living under the same roof. Effective communication then is built on words that affirm, words that are affectionate, words that are secure and words characterized by softness. That's what makes our homes stable and secure. And then sometimes effective communication is just not saying anything at all

Let's pray.

Father, we want to thank you for your amazing grace. We want to thank you that it is sufficient for the issues of communication. And Lord, I pray that you would help us to as Proverbs 18:21 reminds us, to bring life through our tongue. And Lord, we are asking that you would help us to take some specific takeaways this morning about being affirming, about being affectionate, about giving words of security, about using soft words as opposed to harsh words, about choosing not to say anything when we shouldn't and for our speech to be characterized by truth. So we're asking for your help in Christ's name. Amen.