



(Leaders Guide)

THE WIN

Poor communication is incredibly disruptive in a marriage. Our goal this week is to give our group members some tools and motivation to communicate better and handle conflict well.

Leaders: Do your best to draw Singles who are in your group into the discussion. Although our focus may be primarily on married couples this week, God's Word has meaning for singles in their relationships as well.

3-5
minutes

SERMON RECAP: WHAT DID THE TEXT MEAN? WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Read this aloud:

In this week's message, our primary text was Ephesians 4:29. From the message, we learned three basic truths about our words.

- #1: Our words are fruitful. (Proverbs 18:20-21)
- #2: Our words are revealing. (Matt. 12:34-35)
- #3: Our words are powerful. (Matt. 12:36-37)

Ask: What surprised you most from the message this week?

5-10
minutes

WARM UP

As we learned on Sunday, one of the most common reasons that marriages fail is poor communication. It takes discipline on our parts to know our spouses well by taking time to ask questions and listen to them.

Activity: Let's get warmed up with a few questions to get to know each other a little better. Ask each person in your group to talk through each question briefly with their spouse (singles, think of an answer for yourself for the last question to share)

1. My funniest memory of our dating days is when we...
2. If I could spend 24 hours doing anything in the world with you, it would be....
3. In my life, I wish I had learned to...

Ask for volunteers in the group to share their spouse's answer. Singles are encouraged to share their answer with the group as well.

THE TEXT: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?

Have someone in your group re-read **Ephesians 4:29**.

Read the following:

According to the author Paul, the purpose of our language should be to build up and give grace.

However, as we learned in Sunday's message, we often do the opposite when talking to our spouse by spreading "viruses" to each other such as:

- Criticism
- Sarcasm
- Uncommunicated expectations
- Blame

1. Which one of these viruses do you find yourself spreading most often?
2. Are there common situations when you seem to be most vulnerable?

Where do these ugly tendencies come from? Have someone in your group read **James 3:6-9**.

3. What are some of the words James uses to characterize our tongues in this passage?
4. According to James, does it appear that the tongue be tamed simply by trying harder?

Have someone in your group read **Luke 6:45**.

Ultimately, Jesus says that the mouth speaks "from the overflow of the heart." Our communication issues can be traced directly to the deeply rooted problems of our heart. As the prophet Jeremiah states, "The heart is more deceitful than anything else, and incurable--who can understand it? (Jer 17:9). The war to build up and give grace to our spouse begins with the heart.

Although our fallen hearts are incurable on their own, God has provided the means for transformation. In love, Jesus came to heal and cleanse us from the sickness that plagues our hearts. "Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.'" (Mark 2:17)

"[Jesus] died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." (2 Cor 5:15) Jesus died to free us from slavery to sin so that we can live for God and give our lives away to others by the power of His Spirit that lives in us.

5. How should the gospel change the posture of our hearts in the way that we interact with our spouse (and others as well)?
6. If you are a follower of Christ, God says you are fully approved because Christ performed perfectly in your place. By grace, you now possess what Christ earned with the fruits of His obedience. How should that affect the way you respond when your spouse says something unkind to you?

In response to the love Christ has for us, we can build up our spouse and give grace through the following "anti-viruses":

- Compliment generously (as opposed to criticism)
- Encourage openly (instead of using sarcasm)
- Communicate clearly (rather than being vague with expectations)
- Take responsibility (not passing the blame)

Choose one of the above "anti-viruses" that you will focus on during this week in your communication. Take a few moments and enlist a partner in your group (of the same gender) that can help encourage you to be faithful in the area you have chosen. Plan to touch base at least once during the week to check up on each other. God has designed us to become holy with the support and accountability of Christ-centered community, not in isolation.

DIGGING DEEPER

Read this:

Success in communication is more likely when we invite God to be an active participant and guide. No scenario is beyond prayer. We often tend to overestimate our own ability to communicate well and righteously. We will eventually and inevitably sin in our communication with each other. When it begins to drift from God's intended purpose, we have a choice: will we be puffed up with pride or will we have the humility to stop right where we are and ask God to help redeem our conversation?

R.A. Torrey said this on prayer:

"The reason why many fail in battle is because they wait until the hour of battle. The reason why others succeed is because they have gained their victory on their knees long before the battle came...Anticipate your battles; fight them on your knees before temptation comes, and you will always have victory."

End your time together tonight by praying as a group for communication in your marriages. Lift up your respective "anti-viruses" to God and ask for His help to fight the battle.

Couples: let's face it. It can be awkward praying together. But there is an easy fix: just start praying together! Begin with 30 seconds of prayer as you go to bed each night. Pray regularly as a family when eating. Pick one night a week to pray for your children, your LifeGroup, and your marriage. Among the enormous benefits that you'll see in your family, the regularity of prayer will make praying in the midst of communication breakdown more probable.

(Excerpts taken from Rob Flood's "Five Communication Tools that Saved My Marriage")