



*CREATING A CULTURE
FOR COMMUNICATION*

BOB FROESE



FAMILY MATTERS:
CREATING A CULTURE FOR
COMMUNICATION

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FAMILY MATTERS

Family Matters: Creating a Culture for Communication
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CHAPTER ONE

TOP TWO COMMUNICATION KILLERS

What is it that kills the desire to communicate, both in yourself and in others? Have you ever considered this question? Nothing will squelch communication more quickly than *guilt* and *bitterness*. The weight of past sin suffocates the desire to connect. Guilt over one's own sin or bitterness over the sin of another both cause severe communication gaps. Our culture finds itself floundering beneath these feelings of guilt and bitterness, unsure what to do with them.

It's amazing how often we encounter obstacles to communication. Yet oftentimes we understand little about those obstacles or the roots from which they spring. Despite our lack of understanding, these obstacles pose a real threat to our ability to communicate with others, particularly with those closest to us. In our most important relationships, the communication stakes are highest, and guilt or bitterness can cause the greatest harm.

When struggling to communicate, we are often tempted to create solutions out of thin air. There are many faulty world views and patterns of thinking regarding forgiveness,

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bitterness, and guilt which ultimately offer nothing more than a temporary fix to a deep-seated problem. It is easy to follow popular communication models offered by the world when attempting to deal with the sin in your own past and in the past of another. Grounded in earthly-minded, humanistic thinking, these models unfortunately lead many astray, offering no true, lasting change.

Every day, we are in a struggle to communicate. Satan would like nothing more than to see us isolate ourselves as emotional islands, cut off communication-wise from others. Sometimes we embrace this isolation. It can be comfortable to live life according to our own desires, unconcerned with what others think, say, or feel. At other times we are tempted to despair when we find ourselves unable to bridge the divide between ourselves and others, so weighted down by sin that we are unable to connect. Yet God's Word will set us free from living as castaways.

Jesus Himself said, *"If you abide in My word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free (John 8:31-32)."* Obedience to what God's Word has to say regarding communication, guilt, and bitterness is the only way to find true freedom from our self-imposed exile. We must resist the lies the devil tells about communication, turning to the Bible, which will ground and protect us from being led astray by *"every wind of doctrine"*; in this and this alone lies the key to defeating Satan. Our adversary wants nothing more than to see Christians abandon hungering and thirsting for righteousness, living instead in hopelessness and despair. So let us *"fight the good fight"* in all things, and *"rightly divide the Word of truth"* in regards to this key issue of communication!

Communication Killer #1—Guilt

Proverbs 28:1 states that *"The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion."* Guilt in a person's life ushers in fear. It produces paranoia. When you feel guilty about something you've done or said, you'd rather not communicate about it. You may have found yourself in the situation before of calling someone to apologize, secretly

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hoping their phone would go to voicemail. Or better yet, in this technologically advanced era, you could skip the call or face-to-face conversation and simply send a text message or an email rather than communicating directly. Guilt produces fear, which makes us want to hide, thereby cutting off communication.

In order to avoid having the lines of communication in our lives cut by the knife of guilt, we must deal with our pasts. But how do we go about it? The devil's lie is this--"All your attempts to change are useless! You've gone too far. In fact, you've already committed the unpardonable sin, so you might as well live it up, because you're way beyond saving." God's Truth, however, commands us not to be deceived by the adversary.

What we must first understand in dealing with the guilt weighing us down is that guilt comes from God Himself. Guilt is doled out by the Holy Spirit, not by the devil as many wrongly believe. And if guilt comes to us from God, it must be good! This may seem strange to you, but here is what Jesus Himself has to say about guilt and conviction. *"And when he (the Holy Spirit) comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."* (John 16:8) There is no one on this earth who is free of the conviction of the Holy Spirit. He convicts as to what we shouldn't do (sin), what we should do (righteousness), and warns us of the future judgment to come.

A guilty past marred by unconfessed sin produces inward torture in a person. These days, we often refer to such a painful state as "burn out." King David himself experienced such spiritual burn out and described it in Psalm 32:3-4.

"For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer."

David's silence described in verse 3 is spiritual stubbornness, a refusal to confess his sin. This rebellion leads to the inward torture of guilt lying heavy on him "all day long." What a wretched state in which to find oneself!

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But the Bible never leaves us hopeless. Here we are taught the beautiful freedom to be found following confession to God and the appropriate people. David's psalm goes on in verse 5 to say: *"I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin."*

The word *"acknowledge"* here means that David held nothing back. He entirely emptied his pockets, so to speak, confessing every last sordid detail of his sin to the Lord. His was not a partial confession. He *"did not cover"* his iniquity; there was nothing David tried to hide from God. The blessed result is that he received complete forgiveness from the Lord for his sin.

Why is confession so important? Apart from confession, we cannot experience the joy of forgiveness! Psalm 32:1-2 has this to say:

"Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."

The word *"blessed"* here refers to an overflowing abundance of inward peace and joy. When we confess our sin and rebellion to God, He forgives it, and that forgiveness is final. It is *"covered"* and no longer before His sight. If we are ever tempted to think we've committed a sin too big for God to forgive, let us remember the writer of this psalm. David reflects on his experience of confessing the sins of laziness, lust, adultery, and murder. There is no sin too horrible for God's great forgiveness to cover! The Bible is not a book about incredible and morally perfect people—it is a book about wretched men and women who abide in the joy of serving a forgiving God. David himself experienced this great joy when, after nine months of concealing his sins, he came clean before God and received the blessing of complete forgiveness.

As King David learned from his experience, failure to confess sin places our fellowship with God in jeopardy. In Psalm 32:6-7 he goes on to rejoice in the restoration of fellowship brought about by his confession of sin.

"Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at

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a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance."

When we walk in regular confession of sin, our fellowship with God is unhindered. He makes our roads smooth, preserves us in times of trouble, and when we seek for Him, we are certain to find Him. If we put Him first, He promises to make our paths straight, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in (Proverbs 3:5&6).

Allowing ourselves to become loaded down with guilt kills communication. Guilt separates friends, robs joy and peace from our lives, and cuts off our fellowship with God. But praise the Lord, He has provided us with a way to be free of burdensome guilt. His promises are good and true, and in 1 John 1:9 He provides the promise that *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* When we walk in confession, the lines of communication between ourselves and the Lord and ourselves and others will remain open, free from the killing influence of guilt.

Communication Killer #2—Bitterness

Bitterness at its root is nothing more than unforgiveness. When we are bitter towards others, we will be critical of them, never offering them the benefit of the doubt and unconsciously looking for reasons to grow angry with them. At every chance we get, our thoughts and speech towards that person will be negative.

If bitterness is unforgiveness, then in order to combat it we must understand the true nature of forgiveness, which requires a biblical consideration of who we are as people. The world today persistently presents humanity as basically good, but the Bible disagrees. Romans 3:10 tells us that *"none is righteous, no, not one."* According to God's Word, we are NOT inherently good, but rather inherently sinful. The lie of humanity's innate goodness has not only permeated worldly

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thinking but is increasingly common among churches as well. How often do we hear someone say “he (or she) has a good heart”? Truthfully, *“the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)”* We and the people around us are not good-hearted. Every one of us is desperately ill with the disease of sin. Understanding these circumstances, we must lower our expectations of others, realizing that they are not naturally inclined to goodness, but rather that we are all fallen individuals in relationships with fallen people, all of whom live in a fallen world.

If we are all sinful to the core, our only hope to overcome bitterness is not to hold others to impossibly high expectations, but rather to extend forgiveness. Jesus had much to say on this subject! In Luke 17:1-2 he addresses his disciples, saying,

“temptations to sin are sure to come, but woe to the one through whom they come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.”

Understand that contextually speaking, the millstone is not hung around the neck of the initial sinner—it is hung around the neck of the non-forgiver! The sin which Jesus is concerned with here is unforgiveness.

In verses 3 and 4 Jesus goes on to say,

“pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him, and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times saying, ‘I repent,’ you must forgive him.”

Our temptation is to pay attention to the sins of others, but here we are expressly commanded to focus on ourselves and our own sin, rather than dwelling on the sins of those around us. In fact, forgiveness is not based on change in others at all, but on the shed blood of Christ. If someone asks for our forgiveness, we as Christians **MUST** give it, regardless of how often a person has sinned against us or if they offer proof of their repentance. If you think this seems impossible, you’re not alone!

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Our ability to forgive depends entirely on who we trust as the source of our forgiveness. If we rely on ourselves, we'll never be able to forgive as God commands. The disciples understood the impossibility of their situation and said in verses 5 and 6 of Luke 17, *"Increase our faith!" And the Lord said, 'If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.'"*

The disciples missed the boat. Our ability to forgive is not dependent on the size or strength of our faith. As Christ points out, all we need is *"faith like a grain of mustard seed."* The deciding factor is in what, or rather whom, we place our faith. What is required to forgive when it seems impossible is not a big faith in a small god (ourselves), but rather a small faith in a big God, Christ Himself. True forgiveness and grace are foreign to the world in which we live, because they are gifts bestowed by the Lord.

Forgiveness begins with an attitude and culminates in a transaction. Every day you will be given the opportunity both to confess and forgive sin. Attitudinal forgiveness towards someone who has sinned against you precedes the transaction of forgiveness which occurs immediately after the confession of sin. Even if a person never seeks your forgiveness for sin and transactional forgiveness cannot occur, attitudinal forgiveness must still be present in your mind and heart. In other words, if someone never asks forgiveness, you don't announce that you forgive them for such and such a sin. However, you must have a spirit of forgiveness at all times as God does, following Christ's example on the cross (Luke 23:34). Our forgiveness of others is directly linked to God's forgiveness of us. Mark 11:25-26 says,

"and whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses."

Forgiveness is something we as Christians must take very seriously!

Thankfully, true forgiveness is not a warm fuzzy feeling we

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must force ourselves to muster up, but rather a matter of obedience which reveals the state of our relationship with the Master. In Luke 17:7-9 Jesus says,

"Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table'? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what he was commanded?"

Just as the servant in Jesus' analogy does no more than he is ordered to, so when we forgive we are doing no more than the Lord has commanded. We don't forgive others because we think we're more righteous; we forgive based only on the blood of Jesus Christ and the fact that we owe Him our lives.

Anytime we grant forgiveness, we recognize that God and what Jesus did on the cross is bigger and more important than us. We agree with Christ who concluded his conversation with the disciples by saying *"So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'(Luke 17:10)"* We realize that we forgive because we are unworthy servants extending grace which we ourselves received, not because we are in any way more righteous than those around us.

Forgiveness is the hallmark of a Christian. If we walk in an attitude of forgiveness towards others, we will stay free of the snare of bitterness, which looks for the worst in others, having no desire but to communicate their faults.

Breaking Free

The communication killers of guilt and bitterness both have biblical antidotes. All it takes to break free of them is faith in Jesus Christ and dependence on His strength rather than our own. The question everyone must ask him or herself is this: "Am I humble—do I trust Jesus in my life or do I listen to my own selfish and self-righteous feelings?" It is when we listen to ourselves and our own hurt feelings that we become mired

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in the past, caught in the mentality of a victim rather than a victor.

Entrapment in the mire of guilt and bitterness indicates that we have been exhibiting shallow and worldly sorrow over our sins rather than godly sorrow, which produces repentance leading to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:8-10). Rather than sorrowing because we hate our sin, we sorrow because we've been caught. We haven't truly forsaken our sin.

Another cause of bondage to guilt and bitterness is unbelief in God's promises of forgiveness. A popular concept today is that we must learn to "forgive ourselves." Nowhere in the Bible is such an idea mentioned! What we must do is trust God, taking Him at his word. We have already looked at 1 John 1:9 where the Lord promises that *"if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

Finally, underlying self-righteousness may bind us to bitterness and guilt. Believing that we are better than others, we indulge in a bitter and critical spirit. Such an attitude damages relationships, leading to defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling in those on the receiving end of our critical attitude.

Rather than wallowing in the mire of guilt and bitterness and indulging in the mindset of a victor, we must live in the victory of Christ Jesus! Each and every day we must be rejoicing in God's gracious forgiveness, for *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."* (Psalm 103:12) The door of grace is open to all who come through Jesus. We in turn, out of gratitude to our merciful Savior and the superabundance of God's forgiveness, must be forgiving others as we are forgiven (Colossians 3:13). Only when we walk in the joy and peace of forgiveness through Christ, freely extending it to those around us, can we truly be free of the chains of guilt and bitterness.

Practical Application:

Dealing with Broken Communication in the Flesh

Further into this book, we will be looking at Spirit-led ways in which you can approach and begin to rebuild broken communication and damaged relationships. For now, though, let's take a look at the typical way in which we approach broken communication while walking in the flesh. View this as the "thou shalt not" section of this study, soon to be followed by the "thou shalt" portion.

When dealing with broken communication in the flesh, we are continually reminded that a relationship needs to be fixed. It nags at us—whenever we stop to consider the relationship, we realize that something must be done about it. This may go on for some time, until finally we realize that the relationship has reached a "critical" level. It is important and can no longer be put off. Our desire to communicate becomes heightened, and we resolve to take decisive action in an attempt to repair the relationship.

We then proceed to take an initial step in repair by examining the damage in our relationship. This may take the form of reading self-help books or watching a so-called relationship guru such as Oprah or Dr. Phil in hope that they might offer some clue as to how to fix our problem. We rummage through our relationship books in search of some magic that may heal our broken relationship, then rush off to put it into practice.

When all our self-guided efforts to mend our relationship fail, we seek out counsel, perhaps even biblical counsel, as a last-ditch effort. After coming to the conclusion that we can't find the necessary relational solution on our own, we look for help. At this point, we may become extremely proactive in repairing the relationship, implementing new principles and experiencing a brief feeling of joy. Ultimately though, this change is only exterior. We have altered our behavior but not our hearts. Eventually all our new fervor will die, and we'll be left with the realization that we're committed to this relationship—that we've reached the point of no return. At this point cold feet, the "what ifs," whatever you want to call

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them, set in. We wonder “What if the other person in this relationship doesn’t respond positively?” and “What if after all this work, things don’t pan out? I’ll end up looking like a fool!”

In order to protect ourselves and our own pride, we come to the conclusion that the relationship is ship-wrecked. Rather than taking the blame upon ourselves, though, we lay it upon those who tried to help. It is all their fault for leading us to believe we could do it when we can’t, and for promising they would help when in reality, no one showed up. We decide all this effort put into the relationship was a waste of time after all, and cut off communication with the other person. We convince ourselves that we’re better off without this relationship anyway and return to life as we know it, untouchable in the “safety” of our own emotional bubble.

As I’m sure you can see, this is NOT God’s good plan for relationships! His plan for us is much greater, but it involves humility, confession, and forgiveness. It’s messy, it’s contrary to what the world teaches, and it makes us vulnerable but also offers lasting peace and joy. Read on as in Chapter 2, we look at the two communication crowns of influence and honor.

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CHAPTER TWO: COMMUNICATION CROWNS: INFLUENCE AND HONOR

In Luke 6:43-45 Jesus says “

...a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of his heart his mouth speaks.”

Communication is a fruit of relationships. The type of fruit (or communication) your relationship produces depends on its roots. Just as an apple tree cannot grow oranges and an orange tree cannot grow grapes, so a relationship rooted in guilt and bitterness will be unable to produce good communication. Fruit growing from such roots will be unappetizing, shriveled, and rotten.

When we think of communication, we generally think of some proactive form of verbiage. Communication to

us means something that we're saying. But that's only half of the equation. Communication is both give and take. We're to be slow to speak and quick to listen! When communication breaks down, wives often feel like they're speaking, but no one is listening. Husbands feel like they're hearing the same old thing over and over again, like a scratched CD replaying the same pointless noise. In order to help you avoid such a breakdown, we are going to look at the heart of godly communication and help you form a biblical plan of action.

Negative Effects of Nagging and Not Listening

Before looking at our communication crowns of influence and honor, let's quickly discuss their antitheses, nagging, and not listening. Traditionally speaking, women are more prone to the former habit and men to the latter. This is a fact that the Bible recognizes!

Proverbs 19:13 says *"the contentions of a wife are a continual dripping."* That constant nagging is as annoying to its recipient as the sound of a leaky faucet that just won't stop. Proverbs 21:9 says *"Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman."* It's preferable to live exposed to the elements than to the constant irritation of a nag! Finally, Proverbs 21:19 states *"Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman."*

Now, how would you define nagging? Simply put, nagging is saying something more than once. As soon as you do so, you take the responsibility right back in your own lap. The others know you'll carry it. Every procrastinator has an enabler. Picture the mother who calls her child down to prepare for school...after a few minutes she calls again, until a pattern is formed and the mornings become a constant battle to roust her child from bed! Junior has figured out that the responsibility to be up on time does not really lie with him. His mother took it upon herself the moment she repeated her instructions.

On the other end of the spectrum lies the response of not

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listening. The Bible says husbands are to honor their wives (1 Peter 3:7), which means to hold them in high regard. The behavior of not listening displays the opposite mindset. By disregarding and not paying attention to their wives, men dishonor them. Women greatly fear being taken for granted and unappreciated. The husband who fails to listen to his wife confirms these fears. Men, remember this. While time well spent for guys may consist of being in the same room, watching the same television, saying little and definitely never touching, for women it looks like being in the same room with the television off, making eye contact, holding a conversation, and touching is very acceptable!

Now that we've addressed the predominantly female sin of nagging and the primarily male sin of not listening, let's look at our communication crowns—*influence and honor*.

A Wife of Influence

How many women would like to be a wife of influence, now or in a future relationship? The first step is to pray and fast. A wife's respect can influence her husband towards God's will, but first she must take the time to fast and pray. In Esther 4:16 the queen says *"After I have fasted and prayed for three days, I will go in to my husband the King."* Before you speak with your husband regarding something that he is making a decision on, take time to fast and pray. This is not our natural bent! We want to get in there right away and air our own opinions, but the Bible cautions us to take time to get our hearts in the right place and seek God's counsel.

If what you need to advise your husband on is a public danger (as in the case of Esther and her husband), ask an older woman who respects her husband and the elders of the church to fast and pray with you. Titus 2:3-5 lays out the character traits of such women. They must be

"reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own

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husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed."

In regards to a public danger, find a woman who fits these specifications to serve as your ally in prayer.

Once you've fasted and prayed about the matter on which you wish to speak, take time to be at your best. Esther 5:1-2 says,

"Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace, across from the king's house, while the king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, facing the entrance of the house. So it was, when the king saw Queen Esther standing in the court, that she found favor in his sight, and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. Then Esther went near and touched the top of the scepter."

Just imagine Esther wearing not only her most beautiful royal robes, but also a calm and peaceful spirit. Long before they were written, she followed the words of 1 Peter 3:3-4 which command

"Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."

Note this, ladies. A gentle and quiet spirit is not a soft voice or timid behavior. Many of the women of the Bible who wore that precious adornment behaved boldly, such as Esther and Ruth. A gentle and quiet spirit is the result of resting in the Lord and His provision—its bearer will be calm in the face of trials, not making a catastrophe out of every little problem.

When Esther's king husband saw her waiting for him, adorned in her royal robes and a peaceful spirit, he welcomed her into his presence. There is a lesson to be found here, ladies. If you are a wife whose husband has turned away from you when you put on seductive clothing for him, next time wear a gentle and quiet spirit. Its allure is irresistible.

Once Esther had found favor with the king, she recognized that timing matters!

"At the banquet of wine the king said to Esther, 'What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request, up to

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half the kingdom? It shall be done!’ (Esther 5:6)”

Esther waited for just the right day and time when she knew her husband would see and notice her. Then she didn’t speak first, but waited until he had spoken with approval. After he told her she could ask for anything she wanted, she still waited for days. A wise woman waits until she is sure her husband is thinking well about her before saying a word. If he doesn’t feel like talking, be quiet! Wait for a better time and perhaps a better day. Be gentle—don’t ram your opinion down your husband’s throat.

Before making her petition, Esther prepared a setting of honor. She prepared a feast before presenting the information! This is a good way to let your husband know that you respect him. Pour energy into cooking a really great meal and think of creative ways to serve it. As you work to prepare the meal, the issue may recede in your mind, and you can simply bless your husband. But if not, keep asking God whether your timing is right. Then, while your husband eats the wonderful meal you’ve prepared, ask God again if this is the best time to present your petition.

When the time finally came for Esther to speak, she humbly begged for favor. Borrow Queen Esther’s technique! When her husband asked her what she wanted, she asked for a chance to bless him one more time, in a beautifully respectful manner.

“My petition and my request is this: if I have found favor in the sight of the king, and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, then let the king and Haman come to the banquet which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said. (Esther 5:7-8)”

When the right time comes to express your concern, phrase it using Esther’s example. “If I have found favor, may I please ask you to grant my wish and fulfill my request that you reconsider _____.” That’s not preaching or nagging, and it gives the husband a chance to refuse if he so chooses. It asserts his headship. If he doesn’t want to grant the wish or hear the request, a wise woman doesn’t carry on and force her will.

If your husband chooses to hear you, present the information in the manner Esther modeled. At her second feast, she gave

her husband factual information pertinent to her request for his consideration.

“Then Queen Esther answered and said, ‘If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we have been sold, my people and I, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. Had we been sold as male and female slaves, I would have held my tongue, although the enemy could never compensate for the king’s loss.’ So King Ahasuerus answered and said to Queen Esther, ‘Who is he, and where is he, who would dare presume in his heart to do such a thing?’ And Esther said, ‘The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!’ So Haman was terrified before the king and queen. (Esther 7:3-6)”

Esther communicated clearly and respectfully, letting the king know that she wanted his good success. The only reason she presented the information to him was because he was thinking of making a decision that would be dangerous to many. Think carefully about your request. If no one is being endangered, is it necessary for you to confront your husband? Always remember that God is in control. He can use any situation and any response to grow you so that you become more like the One whom it’s really all about—Jesus Christ.

Women, Proverbs 31:23 says that *“her husband is known in the gates, where he sits among the elders of the land.”* He’s respected because of her, because of her lifestyle and behavior. Seek to be wives of influence, whose gentle and quiet spirits and wise decisions bring respect to their husbands, rather than nagging wives who make a room unpleasant just by walking into it.

A Man Who Honors His Wife

Just as women must seek to be wives of influence, men must strive to honor their wives. The fact is, most husbands could be successfully tried and convicted in a court of law for lack of understanding. The root of this problem often lies in a lack of desire to understand. However, the Bible commands,

“Husbands, likewise, live with your wives in an understanding

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way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)"

In this verse, husbands are briefly but forcefully addressed. Written in the imperative, the contents of this passage are not optional! Let's break it down piece by piece.

Husbands are to *"live with their wives."* When a husband is home he must make it the goal to be 100% engaged spiritually, physically, and emotionally. Home is more than a place to eat, unwind, and sleep. When you step through the door, it's *"Lights, camera, action!"* This is when your most important work of the day begins; it's not where you leave your important work behind.

Husbands are also to live with their wives *"in an understanding way."* They are to battle ignorance with understanding. An age-old legend says that a man can't understand a woman, yet the Bible says men must understand their wives. This doesn't mean that men and women don't think differently; they absolutely do. For example, a husband generally desires physical affection in the way that a wife wants communication and romance. A husband looks to be admired the same way a wife wants to be understood. He wants to be respected in the same manner that she wants to be appreciated.

So how does a husband live with his wife with understanding if the sexes think differently? First of all, it begins with an understanding of God's purposes for marriage. Ephesians 5:25-27 says,

"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."

The first commandment in this passage is to love your wife sacrificially—to make every decision based on what's best for her. This is a struggle, as a man's biggest struggle is selfishness! The second commandment is to be constantly washing your

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wife in the water of the Word, continually reminding her of what the Bible has to say. The goal of these commands is that husbands may present their wives to Jesus Christ as pure, spotless brides. This distinguishes Christian love from pagan lust, which is all about taking. Sadly, the world has confused love with lust and lust with love. When your focus is taking, you're lusting. When your focus is giving, you're loving.

Also integral to living with your wife with understanding is a knowledge of her specific desires, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Find out what motivates your wife, what frustrates her, what she's passionate about, and what her greatest concerns are. You can only go about this by applying your life to God's Word and by regularly seeking intimate, face-to-face communication with your bride. Asking questions is important, but listening is the key! Yes, it might take awhile and she might go down some rabbit trails, but this is not optional. Find out what it is your wife wishes you knew about her.

Peter goes on in 1 Peter 3:7 to command husbands to show *"honor to the woman as the weaker vessel."* This is a big deal and encapsulates the heart of the matter. Honoring your wife means holding her in high regard, being sensitive to her, and deeming her precious. Understand that generally speaking, men are built up through what they accomplish while women are encouraged by the relationships that they're involved with; husbands must affirm them in this. Husbands want to say "I love you" by doing something for their wives, such as mowing the lawn, but wives desire to hear the words! They want to be honored both privately and publicly. The words used and the tone they're spoken in are very important. Women read a great deal through body language and tone of voice.

Warren Wiersbe put it this way; "The husband must be the 'thermostat' in the home, setting the emotional and spiritual temperature. The wife often is the 'thermometer,' letting him know what the temperature is."

When Peter refers to women as *"the weaker vessel"* he is referring to the fact that they are weaker in terms of authority, in their role of falling under the husband's headship. A

husband isn't to take advantage of his physical or authoritative strength when dealing with his wife. Honoring wives carries with it the connotation of not being harsh in conflict by criticizing or comparing, but rather being encouraging, positive, and solution-based.

Peter goes on to remind husbands that their wives *"are heirs with you of the grace of life."* Men and women are equal in status and importance. Wayne Grudem states that this passage "reminds husbands that although they've been given greater authority within marriage, their wives are still equal to them in spiritual privilege and eternal importance—they are joint heirs."

The commandments spelled out for husbands in 1 Peter 3:7 end with a warning. Husbands must live with their wives with understanding and show them honor so that *"your prayers may not be hindered."* This cannot be taken lightly, as it's impossible to walk with the Lord apart from prayer! The Greek verb here is a strong word, referring to making a road impassable. The hindering of prayers is a form of God's fatherly discipline (Hebrews 12). God is so concerned that Christian husbands live in an understanding and loving manner towards their wives that He actually interrupts His relationship with them when they're not. Husbands, don't be deceived! Don't assume that any spiritual good will be accomplished by your life without the effective ministry of prayer, which requires that you live with your wife in understanding and honor.

Practical Application:

Husbands and Wives, Your Spouse Desires Your Full Attention!

Husbands, how do you make time for your wives? How do you sacrificially spend time with your wife in order to reveal that you love and honor her? What do you do that she knows you do especially for her? Let her know that she's number one, not just in words but in actions. John Piper tells the story of a man who shows up at home on his anniversary with flowers and

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chocolates. When his wife tells him how much she appreciates his gift, he mumbles that it's what he's supposed to do, so he's doing it. This is not the heart from which men ought to sacrifice for their wives! It's not a duty to be checked off the list but should be viewed as a joy and a privilege.

Husbands, how do you honor your wife as the weaker vessel? You must be washing her with the water of God's Word, leading her and the children in devotions both together and separately. You must lead in prayer and in discernment about what you watch, listen to, and read. You must halt any inordinate relationships with women, compliment your wife on her inner beauty and watch out for perfectionism in her life, lovingly channeling her away from it.

Wives, how are you respecting your husband as the leader of your family? Are you joyfully submitting to his decisions, even when you may not see eye to eye? Do you speak positively of him in front of your children and those outside the home? Do you seek to accommodate his preferences, his likes and dislikes, and do your children understand that daddy comes first?

Husbands, how do you "agapeo" love your wife? How do you show 'benevolence' to her? You can do so by opening doors, allowing her to enter first and by carrying heavy things. Benevolence your wife by helping her with her coat, hanging her coat up, pulling out chairs for her and leading her through a crowd. Love her sacrificially by shoveling the walkway, mowing the lawn, chopping the wood, taking out the garbage, and saying thank you for the little things she does. Be courteous when interacting with her and work together in getting the kids ready for church and in disciplining the children. Proverbs 29:15 says *"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother."* Husbands, if you love your wives, you will be taking an active role in the discipline of your children.

Wives, how do you love your husbands? Love them above your children, above your home, and above your work. Make them your number-one priority.

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Husbands and wives, how do you speak of your spouse? What do your children hear? Do you speak honorably of your spouse, defending him or her both in public and in private? Take seriously the injunction given at weddings, "What God has joined together, let not man separate!"

So much of our conversation takes place on the run. We live in a frenetic, fast-paced culture, and it is easy for most of our conversations to occur without genuine interest or attention. Why is this? Because husbands disregard living with their wives in an understanding way, and wives have ceased respecting their own husbands. Men, your wife should be able to say something once and have your attention. Women, be careful in how you present your requests, seeking to be a wife of influence like Esther rather than nagging. Bring something up one time, and then carry it yourself. Your husband will notice.

Here is an easy acronym you can use to assist in ensuring you're attentive during conversation. Just remember "SOLER."

S-Sit up straight!

O-Open stance—no crossing arms or legs.

L-Lean forward with interest—you want to hear what the other person has to say.

E-Eye contact. Look at one another, rather than at the TV or your phones.

R-Relax.

Now you have a practical tool to carry with you when making conversation; ask yourself this final question; "Do I pray with my spouse?" This is an indicator of the success of your marriage. Something is wrong in a Christian marriage if husband and wife do not join together in prayer. And remember, husbands, if you're not treating your wife with honor, your prayers will not be heard!

Love is a commitment, not a feeling. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said "It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage sustains the love." Are you committed to communicating biblically? Wives, are you committed to

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communicating as a wife of influence, saying what you must one time without nagging? Men, are you listening, paying attention to your wives, and treating them with honor? If so, your communication will be blessed.

CHAPTER THREE

IT TAKES TWO TO TANGLE

Have you ever found yourself thinking that another person “makes you so mad”? Perhaps you feel the same way about traffic jams or long lines. Is this true, though? Can a person or circumstance really “make you so mad”?

Faith Fellowship received a flyer in the mail some time ago advertising a seminar for “Conflict Management Skills for Women.” The seminar purported to teach women “how to keep your cool, stand your ground, and positively resolve conflict.” It also ran through a laundry list of pointed questions, asking women, “Do you ever back down on an important issue instead of sticking to your guns? Overreact and make a difficult situation even worse? Allow unresolved anger and resentment to hurt an important relationship? Become angry or frustrated when dealing with difficult people? Let people take advantage of you? Find yourself in the middle of an argument and wonder how it got started in the first place? Feel trapped in a seemingly unresolvable conflict?” The advertisement then posed one final question: “Isn’t it worth \$99 and one day to learn how to coolly and confidently manage the conflict in your life?” This seminar promised to teach anger management to all who attended. But is anger

management really the answer? Anger management is all about behavior modification but not heart change. It's about clenching your fists and grinding your teeth and muscling down as you pretend a conflict doesn't affect you. However, conflict stems from within rather than without, and the truth is that the problem lies with you and me, and not the other person. Your problem is not the problem; your response to the problem is!

Do You Have a Biblical Mindset Regarding Conflict?

If you've ever said, "That makes me so mad!" you don't have a biblical mind-set regarding conflict! Second Corinthians 10:4-6 has this to say on our internal struggles when faced with external conflicts.

"For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete."

The "strongholds" this passage refers to are the unbiblical ways in which we think, which must be destroyed and made captive to the Word of God. While an unbeliever will pick and choose what they do or don't believe, a believer does not have that option. We must believe and obey the whole Word of God. Logic and reason say it's impossible for two radically different beings (such as a man and a woman) to successfully thrive and grow together in a relationship. Today's divorce rate is very high, but it is as high within the church as it is without. Clearly something has gone wrong in Christian thinking regarding relationships. We're allowing the world to dictate how we approach them.

The divorce rate in the Western world is by some estimates around 50%, while the divorce rate among arranged marriages is less than 10%. How is this possible? Might we be focusing too much on other people and their contributions to a relationship, and not enough on ourselves? The Bible says conflict arises out of personal desire for some created thing

that outweighs your desire for a sovereign God who's planned your life.

The Results of Conflict

John MacArthur has said "Continuing habitual friendship with the world is grounded in human wisdom and is evidence of unbelief. Such ungodly friendship inevitably results in personal conflict." Let's take a look at James 4:1-6 which carefully explores the causes and consequences of conflict.

"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us'? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'"

In verse 1 of this passage James examines conflict with others which takes the form of volatile personal relationships. He mentions "*quarrels*" which are extended combat, or an ongoing interpersonal war. Next James lists "*fights*," which refers to specific arguments or battles. The relationships James describes look much like the fabled feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys—a lifestyle of constant conflict. James goes on to say that such things take place "*among you*"—this is happening among members of the church, who may or may not be saved. Already in James' day, what was considered normal human conflict among unconverted people had sadly entered the church. How much more so in our day!

In John 17:21 Jesus prayed, "*that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*" What Jesus is

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saying is that if we don't get along and instead allow conflict to exist within the church, we are giving the world a reason not to believe!

In order to give the world a reason to believe, we need to look inward, not outward, to understand our anger. In the James passage, conflict within oneself is examined as well as conflict with others. At its heart, conflict with self is a conflict between your kingdom and God's kingdom. External conflicts among people invariably arise from internal conflicts within each person. Just look around you! Psychological disorders are rampant, and at their root they are nothing more than internal conflict occurring within a person. Impatience, anger, road rage, and hostility all have their source within a person, not with an outside circumstance.

Conflict is often the result of uncontrolled passions, those natural fleshly desires and pleasures which have been allowed to usurp God upon the throne of our lives. These pleasures *"are at war within you"* (James 4:1), the physical and mental elements of the flesh. The war is between the desire to fulfill these passions and guilt. Romans 2:14-15 says,

"For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them."

Ever since Adam and Eve, both believers and unbelievers know what is right and wrong, as we all have a conscience. But the war is to fulfill our wrong desires or to do what's right. Often people succumb to such passions under the guise of freedom and anarchy, but in fact they succumb to lives as slaves of corruption and will eventually spiral out of control.

Another source of conflict listed by James is unfulfilled desires—a lust for what we do not have and cannot obtain. James details a sobering progression among those who focus on their unfulfilled desires. *"You desire and do not have, so you murder. (James 4:2a)"* Murder in this passage refers to an

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intense hatred, even to the point of killing another. Next James mentions those who *“covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. (James 4:2b)”* This could take the form of marital conflicts, family disputes, disharmonious job relationships, etc. The main root of this problem is coveting things you do not have. Yet in 1 John 2:15-16 we as Christians are warned

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.”

You can't love the world and love God. That doesn't preach very well in the 21st century church, because everyone wants to have as much as they possibly can and still be blessed by God. But you can't do it! How are you going to react when someone has something that you want? Will you fight and quarrel or will you remember that it's impossible to love the world and still love God?

The third source of conflict James mentions is selfish desires. This refers to unbelievers who do not have because they do not ask. They live for the moment with only the desire to gratify the flesh, believing all their wants will be met through personal diligence and wisdom. Many do ask, but with the wrong motives, striving for their glory and not God's. James 1:5-8 says,

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

If you have ever been tempted to grumble because you prayed about something and did not receive an answer from the Lord, remember that He's not a cosmic vending machine in the sky dispensing answers to prayer requests. In fact, the Bible says, *“If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” (Psalm 66:18)* If we are walking in unconfessed sin, God will not hear our prayers. As we've

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already studied, if men do not live with their wives with understanding, treating them with honor, the Lord will not hear their prayers. There is a prerequisite to a prayer life, and that is obedience to the Lord. When someone living in sin says they prayed about something, we as Christians need to teach this truth, painful as it may be.

So far we've looked at two types of conflict found in James 4:1-6: conflict with others and conflict with oneself. The third conflict listed is the most important: conflict with God, the ultimate consequence. It is hostility to God which flows from spiritual adultery and is the result of an idolatrous heart. Sex, drugs, alcohol, power, things, materialism; the human heart can make an idol of anything. James 4:4 says this,

"You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

All human conflict is rooted in spiritual adultery.

These days a lot of people are riding the fence, unwilling to choose between God and the world. What this passage begs of you is who are you going to love? The world or God? You cannot love both, and you must make a choice. *"Friendship with the world"* here refers to the world's value system. You're more interested in housing, finances, and the acquisition of goods than in obedience to the Word of God, and will disregard that Word in order to obtain what you want. This makes you an enemy of God. The way you live your life and fulfill your roles opposes Him. A *"friend of the world"* is someone focused on self-glory, self-fulfillment, and self-satisfaction, doing only what he or she wants to do. Such a person *"makes himself an enemy of God."* In choosing to pursue these things, you choose to be an enemy of the most high God.

John MacArthur says, "When unbelievers outwardly identify themselves with Christ and His church but do not truly belong to Him, they eventually become uncomfortable within the church." Such a person will eventually leave. They don't want the church to have authority over their lives and will not genuinely serve.

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The question is this: Do you love God? Do you choose Him? Do you love the body of Christ? How do you speak about your local church? How do you serve? Is it only when it feels good to you or fits into your schedule, or do you truly serve sacrificially? Do you love God's Word? What happens when your life and the Bible disagree? What do you adjust? Most people will adjust God's Word to somehow fit into their life, but it is our lives that must be adjusted to line up with the Word of God.

Disregard for Scripture and hostility towards it reveal enmity with God in a person's life. James 4:5 says *"for do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us?'"* There is a battle waging within each one of us between what the Bible says and what we want. Our human spirits are never satisfied and always want their own way. As long as we walk according to those human spirits in disobedience to the Bible, other people will never be able to live up to the impossible standards we set for them. Ask yourself this—Do you trust the Bible? Do you obey God's Word? Do you surrender to the Bible? When is the last time you read the Word and changed in order to better obey it?

When you are in conflict with God and disregarding Scripture, you will quickly be caught up in a lifestyle of pride. James 4:6 says, *"But he gives more grace, therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"* The grace of God is available for this battle to the person who comes on bended knees. Are you consumed with worldly lusts? Ambitions? Pride? Are you caught up in creating financial security for your family? In appearing as if you have it all together? If so you have no claim on this *"more (greater) grace."* God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Practical Application:

Creating a Culture of Communication

By now you are probably asking yourself, "How do I go about

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creating a culture of peaceful communication in a world that is driven by selfishness, bitterness, and hatred?" After all, Jesus and His kingdom are all about peace and joy. A disciple of Jesus is characterized by peace and joy and by choosing to endure suffering him/herself rather than inflicting it on others. The trouble, according to Scripture, is in the heart of man. You will never be able to experience peace and joy until the inner man is changed. Surface manipulations and behavior modification will not go far enough.

Our concept of relationships, whether it be marriages or friendships, basically focuses on the other person. For instance, popular online dating services focus on finding the "right person" rather than on being the right person yourself. We are deceived into believing that marriage is about finding the perfect mate rather than being involved in the process of being perfected. In order to better examine yourself and to foster peaceful communication in your relationships, here are "Seven Questions to Ask Yourself Before Bringing Up a Sticky Situation."

1. Am I responding to gossip I shouldn't have listened to? Only dishonest people listen to, respond to, or spread gossip. Proverbs 16:28 says, *"A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends."* Don't tell someone what another person said about them if it's negative! If you do so, you are spreading strife and separating friends.
2. Do I have the facts right, or am I emotionally driven? If you're bitter with someone, you will immediately approach conflict assuming the worst about them. But Proverbs 18:13 says, *"If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame."* Make sure you get the facts before jumping to conclusions.
3. Should I let love cover it? Is it my biblical responsibility to talk about it, or to lovingly bless the person? As 1 Peter 4:8 says, *"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins."* When we let love cover a sin, we are showing that we think people are more important than problems,

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that we prioritize relationships over offenses. Jesus said reconciliation takes precedence over worship! Remember that the only way to approach someone is with Scripture, not with opinions. Doctrine unites, opinions divide.

4. Is my timing right? Proverbs 15:23b says, *“and a word in season, how good it is!”* Is it a time when Jesus would respond with silence? Read Matthew 27:11-14. In this passage, Jesus only responded when confronted with something true about Himself. When confronted with lies, He refused to respond. How often, though, do we do the opposite, taking offense when faced with false accusations?
5. Is my attitude right? A familiar passage in Matthew 7:1-5 describes a hypocrite trying to remove a speck from another’s eye when there is a log in his own. Are we behaving the same way in confrontations? Examine yourself first, and follow Jesus’ leading.
6. Are my words loving? Keep in mind the words of Ephesians 4:15. *“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”* Speak the truth in love, and be aware of the particular weaknesses of your gender. For the most part, men can be very truthful but lack love, while women can be extremely loving but lack truth. We must all work toward the middle, speaking the truth in love.
7. Have I prayed for God’s wisdom? When approaching a conflict, we must follow the example of Christ in the Garden, who, when faced with His trial and death, prayed *“Not my will, but Thine be done”* (Luke 22:42). When is the last time you offered up such a prayer?

Do I Have a Problem?

Hebrews 12:14-15 says:

“Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.”

There are consequences to allowing bitterness a place in your heart. Bitterness is described as a “root” because a bitter person always looks to their pain (how they’ve been hurt) rather than to the grace of God. According to the verses above, you and I are responsible to pursue peace and holiness with everyone. When you’ve been wronged (or feel you’ve been wronged), what can help you pursue peace and avoid or let go of the root of bitterness? The sure and certain fact that God’s grace trumps sin!

Be careful of who you allow to influence you. Proverbs 22:24 warns, *“Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man.”* If you spend a good deal of time with an angry person, you will soon become like him. First Corinthians 15:33 promises, *“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company ruins good morals.’”* Uncontrolled anger isn’t circumstantial; it’s attitudinal. Romans 12:14-21 teaches this truth.

Remember that we love not based on how other people love us, not based on our earthly relationships, but based on our relationship with the Lord. Andree Seu puts it this way; *“A dependence on, and a commitment to Christ-like love creates a new reality that conditional commitment never can.”* Jesus Himself must be the source of our love, peace, and joy if it is to last.

Examine yourself. Are you involved in little conflicts that escalate into big arguments including accusations, criticism, name-calling, or bringing up the past? Do you get critical, belittling others’ opinions, feelings, and desires? Do you get cynical, often viewing others’ words and actions negatively? Does it often seem to you that when there’s a problem to solve, you’re on a different team than everyone else, with different goals? Do you hold back from what you really think

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and feel because you're unsure of how it will be responded to? Do you fantasize about what it would be like to be in an intimate relationship with someone else? After arguments, do you withdraw and find that communication is blocked by anger? Do you feel lonely even though you're in a relationship?

If you said yes to several of these questions, you're in need of help. There are two ways to go through life. Galatians 5:16-17 says,

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."

There is a war going on inside you, between the flesh and Spirit, and sometimes bitterness towards God keeps people from the throne. The emotion of bitterness needs to be confessed as sin, because when you've been wronged by others you're failing to acknowledge that the One on the throne is completely just, and injustice is His to repay.

If you've let bitterness, frustration, or resentment keep you from God's throne, will you go to the throne now? Will you give God any bitterness you carry and humbly ask Him for the peace only He can give? Are you willing to submit to the Bible? Do you believe there's hope and help for you? If these are sins you're struggling with, you don't need to struggle alone. If you'd like help along the way, call the Faith Fellowship Biblical Counseling Center at 716-759-0591.

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CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNICATING THROUGH THE GOSPEL GATE

Are you seeking God's blessings in your relationships? Ask yourself what your world view is regarding communication. Do you have your heart wide open? Do you say what you mean and mean what you say? What restricts your communication? Are you given to secrecy and deception? And lastly, what does it mean to communicate through the Gospel Gate?

So far we have studied the top two communication killers of guilt and bitterness. Guilt in communication manifests itself through shame and embarrassment over interacting with others, which leads to avoidance. Bitterness manifests itself as hurt and spite, which lead to ignoring other people. We've also looked at the two crowns of communication: influence and honor. The negative effects of nagging are combatted by a wife of influence, and those of not listening are combatted by a husband who lives with his wife with understanding, showing her honor by making decisions based on what's best for her. Finally, we've studied communication in conflict. We looked at conflict with others, which leads to volatile personal

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relationships, and how we must look inward (to ourselves), not outward in order to understand our anger. We looked at conflict within oneself, when your kingdom clashes with God's kingdom. Conflict among people invariably rises from such internal conflicts. Lastly, we looked at conflict with God, the ultimate consequence of a rebellious heart. All human conflict is rooted in spiritual adultery—the fact is, your problem is not the problem. Your response to the problem is!

In this chapter, we will look at communicating through the Gospel Gate. We will examine how, when you truly believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you will think and speak differently. We'll start with the negative—what happens when your priorities are out of line, then move on to the positive—what communication looks like when your heart is in the right place, and finally move on to application—how you can practically implement what you've learned.

Closing the Clasp on Communication

The first thing we'll look at in this chapter is how we block biblical communication by allowing our priorities to get out of line. Deuteronomy 4:23-24 says,

"Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the Lord your God has forbidden you. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

Upon reading this passage you may be wondering, "Why is God a jealous God?" Well, God's jealousy is designed to keep us close to Him and to comfort us. He is so aware of and interested in our hearts, we can be confident that He will not endure us allowing anything into our hearts that would distract us from Him.

So why is it okay for God to be jealous and not for us to be? Romans 3:3-4 holds the answer to this question.

"What if some were unfaithful? Does their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means! Let God be true though everyone were a liar, as it is written, 'That you may be justified

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in your words, and prevail when you are judged.”

God’s prerogative to be jealous comes down to the fundamental difference between His nature and our nature. God is faithful; we are unfaithful. God is jealous for our love because of His nature to be absolutely faithful, while if we are jealous we would be hypocritical, for we often walk in unfaithfulness to Him and others. We allow many things to invade our lives and sway us from a faithful course. Unfaithful as we are, how exactly do we stifle and choke communication from God’s perspective? The answer is, by loving anyone or anything else more than we love the Lord.

Ask yourself this: Did God choose you? In John 15:16 Jesus says,

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

In Ephesians 1:4 Paul answers this question as well, saying, *“even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.”* In 1 Peter 1:1 Peter refers to the *“elect,”* meaning those that God chose from before time began. Since God chose us, He cannot bear to see us choose another.

This fact of God’s choosing us is called the doctrine of election. There is perhaps no Christian who hasn’t rebelled at the thought that they did not choose God. But God’s sovereignty drives us to proclaim a clear Gospel, rather than falling to the idea that a person can produce salvation by their own will. Charles Finney, for example, said that when it came to evangelism, he would do *“anything to manipulate the will,”* hammering emotions and setting the mood until people were worked up enough to pray a prayer with no real understanding of what they’d done.

John MacArthur has said in regards to those who discard the doctrine of election and seek to stir up the emotions of others, that *“truth becomes minimized and manipulation becomes maximized.”* You cannot manipulate someone into truly submitting their will to God. Those who follow this path focus on style and technique, seeking to prime the pump rather

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than clearly presenting the Gospel. They rely on the fact that people will get caught up in the flow, a sort of mob mentality. If you believe that you can manipulate the will of people, this is exactly what you'll try to do.

Brothers and sisters, we must proclaim the truth rather than seek to manipulate emotions and will. As Romans 10:17 says, *"so faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."* Be concerned with the clarity of the Gospel rather than manipulation techniques. Remember this; when evangelizing, you and I do not bear the full burden of the hearer's response. When sharing the Gospel you should never be disappointed that others don't come to Christ; it is not you who saves! You should only be disappointed if some point of your presentation was in error. You cannot control the response of others. It is not your ability or your charisma that leads them to Christ. God is the converter of sinners, but we must have a passion for the Truth!

Postmodernism, which preaches watered-down, seeker-friendly messages that focus on God's love at the cost of all else misses the mark. There is no ministry apart from the truth of the Bible! John 17:17 says, *"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth."* You cannot preach a part of that truth at the expense of the rest.

Now that we've answered the question of whether or not God chose you, let's look at another: did the Lord buy you with His blood? The answer is yes! And since He bought you, He cannot endure for you to think that you are your own. First Corinthians 6:19-20 says,

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."

God loves you so much, He'd sooner die than see you perish! What a marvelous truth! This means He cannot endure that anything come between your heart's love and Himself.

We must abide by the command of 1 John 2:15-17.

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone

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loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

This is a message that does not preach well today in our world of materialism, but it is the truth! We all need to change in order to more fully line up with this command.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon put it this way: “Oh that we may have the grace today to keep our hearts in sacred fidelity for our Beloved alone, and may we with sacred jealousy close our eyes to all the enticements of the world!” We don’t hear this message today. Today we hear, “I want to have everything I possibly can on earth, and then I want to have Jesus.”

Let’s look at another heart question. What if you put your trust in a human being rather than the Lord? Second Chronicles 32:8 says,

“In him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us and to fight our battles. And the people took confidence from the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.”

We are more than conquerors in Jesus Christ! It doesn’t matter how big the opposing army is, we win.

However, those who trust in people rather than the Lord will be cursed. Look at Jeremiah 17:5-8.

“Thus says the Lord: ‘Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is in the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and it is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.’”

God is pleased when we depend on and lean on Him alone, because He is the only One who will never let us down. When

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we look to another for safety, strength, and hope; when we rely on the world's wisdom; when we rely on our strength, wisdom and works, God is displeased and He will discipline us. Why? To bring us back into fellowship with Himself.

So what will happen if a human relationship takes precedence over God? We are all tempted to allow relationships to do so. Exodus 34:12-16 says this;

"Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods."

At its heart, this passage is a commandment not to love the world. Ask yourself this—who do you talk to the most? If it's anyone other than God, you're missing the boat! Spurgeon put it this way; "To abide in Him alone shows true love, but to commune with the world, to find satisfaction in worldly comforts, or even to prefer the fellowship of fellow Christians above private communion with Him grieves your jealous Lord."

Do you desire to please the Lord? Live life flowing out of your relationship with your Lord. Enjoy constant fellowship with your Lord. Many of the painful trials we endure as Christians are to wean us from the created and put our focus on the Creator. God isn't about torturing us with struggles; He is about getting us to look upward towards Him.

Swinging Open the Gospel Gate of Communication

In the book of 2 Corinthians, Paul defends his apostleship against a church who is trying to discredit the messenger (him) in order to undermine the message (the Gospel). He informs his detractors that, "We have spoken freely to you,

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Corinthians; our heart is wide open. (2 Corinthians 6:11)"

Once you've put your heart in the right place, with God on the throne of your life, you must approach communication with others honestly. Be open—communicate what you mean and mean what you communicate. Paul spoke freely to the Corinthians in this passage. Remember this: love holds back nothing that would be of profit to its object. When you love someone you will speak openly and candidly regarding the following.

First of all, you'll speak openly and candidly regarding God and His Word. Rather than offering up your own opinions, you'll refer to the Bible and God's standards which are found therein. Be warned—if you do not spend time in God's Word, you will have nothing but your own opinions, often fueled by the world. Your counsel to people will be fueled more by a fascination with their problems than a desire to offer hope.

Secondly, you'll speak openly regarding sin. Romans 15:14 says this; *"I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another."* We should be instructing one another in the church, lovingly confronting one another about our sin. Love and truth are inseparably linked! Ephesians 4:15 says *"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ."* As Christians, our desire is to be more Christlike. We cannot do this apart from speaking the truth in love. We must be looking for sin in our own lives first, however. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 13:5,

"Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?--unless indeed you fail to meet the test!"

You cannot be walking with Christ unless you're dealing with sin on a daily basis.

Third, you'll speak openly regarding compassion. In the verse we're looking at, 2 Corinthians 6:11, Paul says *"our heart is wide open."* We must be open, candid, and vulnerable with one another. When Christ is the source of our love, our hearts will enlarge, remaining "wide open" as God's boundless love flows through us.

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Paul goes on to say to the Corinthians, *“You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. (2 Corinthians 6:12)”* This word, *affections* has everything to do with compassion and the inner workings of a person. Are you compassionate to others? Do you care enough to communicate with them?

When Paul says the Corinthians have not been *“restricted”* by him, he means he has left no stone unturned, done nothing to hinder the relationship between them. He’s taken time to see things from their perspective—to walk in their shoes. Do you do this when communicating? Or, like the selfish Corinthians, do you want what you want and make things all about you? Is your focus defending yourself or demonstrating compassion and empathy? When Paul says *“but you are restricted in your own affections”* he refers to the fact that the Corinthians’ own desires were negatively affecting communication.

In verse 13 Paul goes on to offer a solution to the problem. He says *“In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also. (2 Corinthians 6:13)”* Paul here speaks about being a team; about communicating like a body. When he says *“In return,”* Paul is referring to the fact that love longs for a response. Obviously the Corinthians fail to respond to Paul’s love, yet he doesn’t abandon them. They betray and back-stab Paul, yet he perseveres in showing them the love of Christ. When he pleads with the Corinthians to *“widen your hearts also,”* Paul is asking them to love him as he loves them. He speaks to them as his spiritual children, which makes their rejection of him all the harder to swallow. He begs them to make room for him in their hearts. However, as long as someone keeps their heart closed (for whatever reason) the love relationship cannot be restored, nor can it flourish.

Practical Application:

Does Your Communication Promote Christ?

Let’s look at some practical illustrations of how communication looks when promoting self versus when

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promoting Christ. For instance, when promoting self, your response to a cutting comment made about you in public by an acquaintance might sound something like this: “What are you talking about? You should see yourself! Everybody knows about that time you did something even worse!” This is how the world would respond.

When communicating through the Gospel Gate, our response will sound something like this: “Hey, when you said that to me, I didn’t want to look at myself. But now I’ve taken time to examine myself, and I’m really thankful for a friend who’s willing to sharpen me. Do you think next time you have a criticism of me we could talk about it alone with the Bible in front of us? I’d really like us to have a relationship where we grow together and encourage each other to be more like Jesus.”

Let’s look at three questions in regards to communication. The first is: who do you love the most? Matthew 22:37 says *“And he said to them, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’”* Is this true of you? Do you abide by Jesus’ words in John 15:14, *“You are my friends if you do what I command you”*? Remember—lips will lie but lives won’t. Ask yourself this: Are you a complainer? Do you complain about the weather? Do you complain about the government? Do you complain about your boss, your spouse, your parents or your children? Complaining is love of self! It will suck the joy out of your life and indicates that you are sitting on the throne of your heart, where God Almighty ought to be.

When you love yourself most, your response to a demanding employer will be to grudgingly say, “Okay, fine!” while in your mind you grumble and complain. When you love God most and communicate through the Gospel Gate, your response will look something like this: “Sir, I’m so thankful for this job. I wanted to do what would please you, so I went the extra mile.” When is the last time you thanked your boss for your job? This sort of reply is all but unheard of in the working world today.

The second question we’ll look at is, whom do you trust? Do you place your trust in people? Have you ever said

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"But I trusted you!?" The response of a wife who trusts in her husband rather than God, then catches him viewing pornography, will sound like the following: "Pervert! Do you realize what you've done? You're driving me away! I'm going to find a man who'll treat me right, not like some second-rate woman!" A woman communicating through the Gospel Gate will respond like this: "Darling, I need you to know that what I saw on the computer really hurt me. But because of Jesus, I want to keep working at being a better wife. Please tell me how I can help you." When you trust in God above all others, your thought life will move to attitudinal forgiveness before the one who has sinned against you even asks. You will quickly confess bitterness in your own life and extend God's grace to others.

The third and final question to ask is, what relationship takes precedence in your life? Romans 1:18-25 says this; "

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."

Note the defining characteristics of those under God's wrath in this passage. They "*suppress the truth*," namely God's Holy Word, the Bible. If someone claims to be a Christian but does not respect the Scriptures, watch out! They "*knew God*." These people may have all the right answers and talk the lingo, but

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as the verses go on to say, *“they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.”* The result is that *“their foolish hearts were darkened.”* God judicially blinds people who choose not to acknowledge His glory. Finally, these people go on to *“serve the creature rather than the Creator.”* Ask yourself: am I serving the creature rather than the Creator? Do I allow a relationship here on Earth to take precedence over the relationship I have with my heavenly Father? If you hold bitterness in your heart, you’re serving the creature!

What relationship does your communication flow out of? Look at the example of Paul, who communicated out of a love relationship with his Lord. He gently and compassionately confronted and counseled those he ministered to. In Acts 20:31 he confronted a group of elders with tears. In 1 Corinthians 4:14 he confronted the Corinthian church as though they were his beloved children. In 2 Thessalonians 3:15 he warned the church of a serious situation, counseling them as a brother. In Ephesians 6:4 he exhorted fathers to love their children, bringing them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

A divorced parent confronting a teenage child will sound something like this as long as he or she is only focused on earthly relationships. “Hey, quit being so upset with me! You know it wasn’t my fault that we got divorced. Your mom/dad cheated on me and I have proof! I had no other choice. So quit thinking I’m to blame for tearing up your life. I did the best I could under all the suffering I had to endure.” The same situation will look quite different if the parent communicates through the Gospel Gate. Then he or she will respond along these lines: “Honey, I don’t blame you for being upset with me. Your childhood has been hard because mom/dad and I weren’t there to parent you together. God has shown me my own sin in the relationship which I’ve confessed to God and He’s forgiven me for it. Would you please forgive me for the hardships that I’ve been part of in your life?”

Are you seeking God’s blessing in your relationships? If so, be open. Communicate what you mean and mean what you communicate. Secondly, be compassionate. Walk a mile in the

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other person's shoes. Quit defending your communication and strive to see where they're coming from. Finally, be a team. Communicate like a body. If others hurt, hurt along with them. If they rejoice, rejoice with them as well. Let's all train together to communicate through the Gospel Gate.

CHAPTER FIVE

PARENTS OR POSERS

If you listen carefully, you can hear a lot of the world's philosophy coming from the lips and lives of professing Christian parents. You'll hear things like, "Young people have to go out to learn 'real life'. They can't experience real life under their parents' authority. They need the college experience" or "I want to shield my child from any hardships. I just can't stand to see my child upset. It bothers me too much to see my child struggling." You may also hear something like "There is real value in dating; in fact, it's good to try many different relationships...all experience is good experience" or "They're just teenagers—they'll grow out of it. Hey, I did things a lot worse. I sowed my wild oats before I decided to settle down."

Experience: God's Whisper or the World's Holler?

Ephesians 6:1-4 says this;

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and you may live long in the land.' Fathers, do not provoke

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your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

If you want to get the hair standing up on the back of someone's neck, talk about how they're training their children. As you read this chapter, the Word of God is going to confront your opinions and ideas regarding parenting. You have one of two choices to make: you can ask the Lord to show you how you need to change, or you can pick and choose what you obey. Remember what we've studied in previous chapters: if we love God, we'll obey His commands.

In this section we will be studying whether you're training your children to listen to God's whisper or the world's holler. Let's address the first example from our introduction. "Young people have to go out to learn 'real life.' They can't experience real life under their parents' authority. They need the college experience." The underlying factor here is where is your child's focus? Is it on what God can do in their lives or on what they can't or don't want to do while living at home? Experiencing God necessitates heart change—no one in the Bible ever encountered God and remained the same. Philippians 2:13 says this: *"for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."* What are your children really striving for in life? In Matthew 16:26 Jesus asks *"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"* What is it your child desires to get away from in leaving the home? Henry Blackaby put it this way; *"A self-centered life will have a tendency to confuse its selfish desire with God's will."* We need to teach our children that God is more interested in making them holy than happy.

Trials: Friend or Foe?

Secondly, do you teach your children that trials are friends or foes? Our next illustration says "I just want to shield my child from any hardships. I can't stand to see my child upset. It bothers me so to see my child struggling." We often hear from parents that they want to give their children the things they didn't have while growing up. The biblical fact is that

confidence and hope are the result of persevering through trials.

Romans 5:3-5 says this;

“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

According to God’s inerrant Word, trials produce perseverance, which produces character, which produces hope, which we would think of as confidence. By shielding your child from trials, you prevent them from developing hope and confidence! Keep this in mind: God always develops character before He presents a task.

Not only do you prevent the development of hope and confidence by shielding your children from trials, you also keep them from learning contentment. Contentment is learned by not getting everything you want. Look at Philippians 4:10-13.

“I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

Contentment is a learned character quality that does not come through giving your children everything they want. If you allow them to complain, you are cutting off the growth of contentment in their lives.

Obedience: Ordered or Overlooked?

Next we’ll look at obedience. Is it something you order or overlook? Our illustration is as follows. “They’re just teenagers: they’ll grow out of it. Hey, I did things a lot worse. I sowed

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my wild oats before I decided to settle down.” This statement makes us, the parents, the standard by which we measure our children, rather than the Word of God.

Once again, Ephesians 6:1-4 says,

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

God’s Word commands children to obey the Lord. It also, however, commands parents not to anger their children by nit-picking and harping at them, and to work on shepherding their minds and hearts rather than changing their behavior.

Contrast this passage with Romans 1:30 which provides signs of a depraved mind; *“slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents.”* According to the Bible, disobedience to parents is a sign of depravity! It is not acceptable before God. Second Timothy 3:2 says *“People will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy.”* In the book of Isaiah God rebukes Israel by saying *“My people—infants are their oppressors. (Isaiah 3:12a)”* News flash: your children will try to manipulate you. It may sound like this: *“everybody’s doing it”* or *“you don’t trust me.”* God’s Word, however, never tells us to trust our children. It tells us to trust in the Lord!

In Revelation 2:1-7 Jesus speaks to the church at Ephesus, and the pattern He uses provides a biblical basis for behavioral contracting, or for laying out expectations to your children. In verses 2-3 Jesus commends the church’s toil in ministry. If we’re going to confront our children, the first thing we should do is commend their efforts. Jesus then goes on to contend with the Ephesian church because they have lost their first love. When your child disobeys, you must point that disobedience out. Next, Jesus corrects the Ephesians, saying they need to remember where they’ve been, to repent from where they are, and return to where they once were. We can

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follow the same model when correcting our children. Finally, Jesus warns of consequences, telling the church they must straighten up or there will be punishment. In this passage He provides a template for communicating what is acceptable and what isn't.

James 3:13-18 provides further guidance for laying out rules and guidelines to your children. It reads as follows;

“Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

We must be instructing our children in regards to the content of this passage, which lays out the fruits that will be evident in the life of a believer.

The basic premise for biblical family relationships is that husbands lead, wives submit, children honor and obey, and parents do not provoke their children to anger. We have already looked at the roles of husbands and wives in Chapter Two of this book. Here we examine the roles of a child. It is important to note that while wives submit to their husbands, children must still submit to the authority of their mothers. It is equally important that husbands and wives strive to present a united front to their children, acting as members of a parenting team and backing up what the other member of that team says.

Here is a practical, point-by-point example of what a behavioral contract with a child looks like. If we don't provide clear, concrete guidelines for our children, obedience is left in the abstract, and both parents and children will become frustrated by uncommunicated expectations.

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In less intense situations situations you will...

- Identify undesirable behavior(s) and the cause(s) of those behaviors.
- Identify present payoffs (ex.-attention) and costs for poor behavior.
- Identify new behaviors to put on and methods to accomplish.
- Agree upon structure.

For more intense situations you will...

- List problems as you see them, along with the child's current responses.
- List five or less positive expectations of observable and measurable behavior, along with what positive responses you are willing to make towards encouraging the accomplishment of these goals.

Your child will...

- Examine your problem list and be given the opportunity to respond.
- Examine your list of expectations and create his/her own list of what he/she is willing to do to meet goals and expectations.

Together you will...

- Meet to compare lists and agree upon a common list, creating a contract to reach goals. Include clear minimums for both what will be done and not done.

After having drawn up this contract, you the parent will develop a contingency plan in the case that the contract is not abided by. While we would never counsel parents to kick a child out, in extreme situations children may need to be given the choice to abide by house rules and remain in the home, or to leave. The decision is your child's to make. Finally, you will

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establish regularly scheduled conversations in which you will assess the child's behavior in light of the contract, providing encouragement or consequences accordingly.

Communication between parent and child is key in this process, and something sorely lacking in our culture today. A recent New York Times article cited a number of alarming statistics regarding familial communication. The book "Talk With Your Child" by Harvey Wiener references a U.S. Department of Education study which indicates that American mothers spend less than 30 minutes a day talking with their children. The average father spends less than 30 minutes a week talking to his children. The "Read Aloud Handbook" by Jim Trelease points out that the average adult in this country spends six hours a week shopping and 30 hours a week watching television, in contrast to daily time spent in one-to-one conversation in homes with school-age children. One-to-one conversation averaged 9.5 minutes per day for at-home mothers, 10.7 minutes per day for working mothers, and less for fathers. "Raising Lifelong Learners: A Parent's Guide" by Lucy Calkins states that most parents find the time to put in a full work day, take numerous coffee breaks, eat lunch and dinner, read the paper, watch nightly newscasts or a ball game, do the dishes, talk on the phone for 30 minutes, drive to the mall, and never miss that favorite prime-time show. What are they missing, though? Communication with their children.

Prove to your children that you care. Communicate with them. Create a culture of communication. The number one complaint of children is that their parents don't care. Prove them wrong.

Relationships: The Word or the World

Our last example of a worldly viewpoint regarding parenting relates to dating. "There is real value in dating," the world says, "In fact it's good to try as many different relationships as possible. All experience is good experience."

Proverbs 31 is the teaching of a mother to a son regarding

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what sort of woman to look for, which is a role all Christian mothers should fulfill. It begins,

"What are you doing, my son? What are you doing, son of my womb? What are you doing, son of my vows? Do not give your strength to women, your ways to those who destroy kings. (Proverbs 31:2-3)"

The men at the time this proverb was written slaved their days away. All they wanted was a little break in the monotony... after all the work they put in, there was never anything left for themselves. There didn't seem to be a future for them. This "Promised Land" stuff wasn't all it was cracked up to be, so why not live a little? All the girls at the synagogue were the same old same old. There were women out there offering a good time, though. The way they dressed and laughed was so compelling and attractive. Surely they knew how to make a man feel important and special!

But then the preacher started preaching. Ezra 9:14 and 10:3 say,

"Shall we break your commandments and intermarry with the peoples who practice these abominations? Would you not be angry with us until you consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape? Therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all these wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God, and let it be done according to the Law."

That preacher had the courage to stand up and say it, "You have been unfaithful in the wives you have chosen." It was time to be separate. You can check out Ezra 9 and 10 if you want to see what happened.

Let's get this straight. We are not to be mismatched with unbelievers. Second Corinthians 6:14-18 says very clearly,

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I

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will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”

The choice you must make is simple. God, or not God? Jesus, or not Jesus? New covenant of blood, or not? God is dishonored by parents' approval of boyfriends and girlfriends who do not evidence belief. Here are some questions to ask yourself.

First, am I being like Eli, who neglected teaching his own sons? Am I too busy seeking personal comfort to take time to instruct my children? Second, am I fearing my children rather than God? Am I busy making idols out of my sons and daughters, too afraid to confront them on the decisions they make because they'll be mad at me?

God asks, what does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? In other words, you are who you date. So never date, court, "hang out with," or have an association with someone that you wouldn't marry. The idea of getting together is not to have a good time; it's to look for a life partner who will encourage you to look more like Jesus Christ.

Proverbs 31 lays out seven elements moms teach sons to look for in a bride.

1. She fears God (vv. 10, 29-31).
2. She is trustworthy, loyal, honoring of authority (vv. 11-12, 28).
3. She is never lazy, but rather works diligently (vv. 13-19, 27).
4. She is generous and kind (vv. 20, 26).
5. She plans ahead and views the future with optimism (vv. 21, 25).
6. She uses her abilities to create beauty/bring financial

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gain (vv. 22, 24).

7. The purpose? That her husband is respected by the elders (v. 23).

As parents we do not want to see our children looking at us in the other line on Judgment Day, desperate, despairing, and inconsolably headed for Hell together with the ones who lured them away from the merciful blood-covering that is the only way to Heaven. That is why we must be obedient regarding the issue of boyfriends and girlfriends, upholding God's Word by His grace and in Christ's mercy, because we love our children. In our homes, any boyfriends or girlfriends *who evidence salvation* will be welcomed with open arms, but those who do not are not welcome.

Basic fundamentals for Christian parents on boy/girlfriends to welcome into the home:

--Any friend who has obeyed Christ through baptism after salvation (not as an infant). Infant baptism evidences unbelief that God saves and belief that baptism saves, which it does not. However, refusal to be baptized as a believer is evidence of unbelief that God alone saves and of disobedience.

--Any friend who partakes regularly of the Lord's Supper after examining his/herself and confessing sin.

--No friends who follow other gods or who elevate a man or man's teaching to the same level as Christ. Example: Allah and Islam; Joseph Smith and Mormonism; Rev. Moon and the Unification Church; Buddha/Buddhism; Joseph Rutherford and Jehovah's Witnesses; Pope and Roman Catholicism; any other cult that values a man or man's teachings as much as those of Jesus Christ.

--Finally, ensure your children communicate with you about what they are studying in the Bible together with their boyfriends/girlfriends.

Discuss these fundamentals with your children, seeking their response. Find out if they agree or disagree. If they agree, let

them know that you are thankful and praise God, and that you'll do everything you possibly can to help them get started in their adult lives as they give glory to the one true God.

Practical Application:

To Those Who Keep His Covenant and Remember to Obey His Commands

Our desire for the children, young men, and young women under our care must be that long after we are dead and in the Lord's presence, they would be part of the chain raising and training generations who remember God's covenant which is sealed with Christ's blood. Our desire is for the young people we watch over to keep God's commandments.

Keeping God's covenant and obeying His commands will stand forever (Psalm 103:17-18). Keeping His covenants and obeying His commands has cosmic significance (Ephesians 3:10-11). Keeping His covenants and obeying His commands is love; everlasting, strong, steadfast love from which you cannot be separated (Romans 8:28-39). We must teach young people that this love of God is desperately needed to keep any marriage from violently shredding the hearts of those involved.

Lives lived together in faithfulness to God and obedience to His Word can provide a beautiful picture of selflessness and love. Take the example of Dr. Robert McQuilkin, who had been president of Columbia Bible College for 22 years when he walked away from that position to care for his ailing wife, Muriel, who had Alzheimer's. Ten years earlier, she repeated a story to friends while vacationing in Florida. That began a process of medical attention which ultimately proved she had the disease. Dr. McQuilkin suggested the school begin searching for a successor, yet everyone hoped he'd continue until retirement. Some wise and godly friends encouraged him to consider institutional care. They too loved Muriel, but they also saw God's hand and calling upon his leadership at the school. For several years Dr. McQuilkin tried to juggle the

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challenge by utilizing a caregiver during the day when he went to the college. With amazing love, Muriel would try to follow him to school. The walk was half a mile and she would make that trip as many as ten times a day. Sometimes while preparing her for bed, he would find blood on her feet from the incessant walks. He knew a decision had to be made, yet in his mind the decision was resolved 42 years prior when he vowed, "in sickness and in health, till death do us part."

Dr. McQuilkin walked away from a thriving ministry and many unfulfilled dreams, but there was no regret. He said, "I don't have to care for her, I get to. If I took care of her for 40 years, I would never be out of her debt." Those who have heard this story have been deeply touched, yet Dr. McQuilkin didn't at first understand why. It became less of a mystery when a distinguished oncologist told him, "Almost all women stand by their men; very few men stand by their women." Maybe this unfailing love explains the uniqueness of Muriel's communication. After losing the ability to speak in intelligible sentences, she retained the capacity to regularly tell her husband, "I love you."

May our communication with others also be marked by love, tempered with the strength of truth.

CREATING A CULTURE FOR COMMUNICATION

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