

# Peacefakers, Peacebreakers, and Peacemakers

## Pt. 7, Speak the Truth in Love

\*For those willing to share, what's one life change you experienced during our first 7 weeks?

### Introduction

Words play a key role in conflict. When properly used, words promote understanding and agreement. When misused, they drive people further apart. God knows the power of words – He's a God who speaks and has revealed himself through words. God can help you learn to communicate constructively.

When people disappoint or offend me, I tend to approach them with “the law” – lecturing about what they did wrong and how they can make things right. This typically makes them defensive, withdrawn, and reluctant to admit their wrongs, which worsens the conflict.

Although I imitate him imperfectly and inconsistently, Jesus has taught me, instead, that it's better to handle these situations by bringing the gospel – the good news about what God has done and is doing for us through Christ.

Although we certainly will need to show people where they have fallen short at times, this need not be the main focus of our words – because judgment inevitably discourages. Judgment, contrary to popular belief, does not produce repentance. Instead of bringing the law, we must learn to offer hope by drawing attention to the wonderful news that God has forgiven our sins and enables us to change.

E.g., When addressing how someone's gossip hurt someone and created a conflict in the church:

“Joe, I don't think you meant to hurt Bill, but your words may have damaged his reputation. The good news is that Jesus died to deliver you, me, and Bill – all of us – from our sins. I get it, I get caught in the moment and also say things I shouldn't. But I wanted to remind you that God has given us a warning and wonderful promise: if we conceal our sins, he will continue to discipline us until we repent, but if we confess our sins, he will forgive us and restore our relationships. We have great hope in Jesus! If you ask for his help and deal with this like he teaches, the whole incident can be completely resolved.”

I've seen this approach open the door for repentance and peace. When you offer hope by focusing on what God has done, others are more likely to listen, admit their wrongs, and move toward reconciling. And this is the way God has modeled it for us as the preeminent Peacemaker.

\*How do law and gospel usually play out in the way you handle conflicts?

\*Which do you normally emphasize? What's the result?

\*What would it look like for you to change and begin addressing conflicts with grace and truth?

### Group Discussion

#### 1. Be Quick to Listen

Listening carefully to others is an important element of good communication. Speaking the truth in love requires you to, first, lovingly and attentively listen. Listening shows respect for the person and shows that you're trying to understand his or her perspective. This is necessary for making peace.

# Helpful listening skills<sup>1</sup>

**Waiting:** Wait patiently while others talk. If you don't, you may fail to understand the root of a conflict and act inappropriately. Avoid jumping to conclusions, discipline yourself to not interrupt, do not respond the moment you hear a pause, and avoid offering immediate solutions. Often people already know what's best to do but merely need to talk it through.

**Attending:** Pay attention to what others say – maintain eye contact, avoid negative body language, eliminate distractions, lean slightly forward to show interest, and nod occasionally to show you understand. Give the other person an occasional response. E.g., “I see” or “Hmmm.”

**Reflecting:** This involves summarizing or restating the other person's main points. It may deal with the content and/or feelings of what was shared. This is probably the most unnatural skill, but it's one of the most important for being an engaged listener. When you reflect what someone says, it shows them that you understand and hear them. It enables them to feel seen, which will make them feel safe. Only when they feel safe will they open up their lives and get to places of genuine repentance.

Examples:

- “You felt hurt by my comment about this project.”
- “You must really care about this project.”
- “I get the impression I've really disappointed you.”
- “Yea... when she yells at you, you get this feeling and overwhelming sense of failure – that you've disappointed her.”

**Clarifying:** To listen well, you need to participate in the conversation without overtaking the conversation through your own monologue. You also need to dive deeper into the details – which most people are uncomfortable doing. One of the most helpful ways to do this is to ask clarifying questions. This will enable you to go beyond the surface level to discern underlying emotions, issues, or idols more clearly.

Examples:

- “Are you saying that...?”
- “You mentioned that he's “just so mean sometimes.” Would you mind sharing an example of how he has been unkind to you recently?”
- “When he does that and gets so loud, how does that make you feel?”

**Agreeing:** You acknowledge what you know is true before you address points of disagreement. First, resist defending yourself (this is the most challenging battle). Then ask yourself, “Does any truth exist in what this person says?” If so, identify common ground before you move to your differences.

Examples:

- “You're right. I was wrong when I said...”
- “I can understand why you would be upset with my being late again.”

**\*Of these five, which is the easiest for you? Which is the hardest?**

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to peacemaking, these are helpful skills for all relationships. For those of you who struggle with feeling like you don't have deep, meaningful relationships, consider the degree to which you've incorporated these principles in your conversations with your friends. By engaging in this way, you'll find yourself able to get to a depth of relationship you haven't yet experienced.

## 2. The Tongue of the Wise Brings Healing

**Prov. 12:18** – The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Good communication involves speaking to others in a clear, constructive, and persuasive manner.

# 15 Skills for Wise Communication

***Breathing Grace:*** We breathe in and are filled with God’s grace through studying and meditating on his Word, prayer, worship, thanking him, and fellowship with other believers. Then we can “breathe out” grace to others by confessing our wrongs, forgiving, lovingly showing them their faults, and bringing them hope through the gospel.

***Making Charitable Judgements:*** Believe the best about others until you have facts to prove otherwise. If two ways exist to interpret what someone has done, God calls you to embrace the positive interpretation out of love until facts prove otherwise.

**1 Cor. 13:6-7** – Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

***Speaking the truth in love:*** Ask God to put a love in your heart that isn’t naturally there. Ask him to help you communicate this love by speaking to others gently and patiently by showing genuine concern for their well-being and interests. When a firmer manner is required, do so in a loving spirit (1 Thess. 5:14-15)

***Helping others examine the desires of their hearts:*** Start by describing the idols in your own heart and confess how these have caused you to sin in this conflict or in others. If the person seems receptive, graciously suggest that perhaps good desires have gripped his or her heart too strongly as well. Remember our X-Ray Questions from lesson 3.

***Choosing the right time and place:*** If possible, avoid discussing sensitive matters with someone who is tired, worried about other things, or is in a bad mood, or when you are short on time. Avoid talking in front of others about such matters. Find a distraction free spot or place where the person could feel secure.

**\*When was a time you used one of these communication skills in an effort to resolve a conflict?**

***Talking from beside, not from above:*** Avoid talking down to the person, as though you are faultless and the person is inferior. Your tone of voice will predominantly determine how the other person receives you. Tell how you have wrestled with the same or other sins; give hope by describing how God has forgiven you and is working to help you change.

***Talking in person whenever possible:*** Face-to-Face conversation usually is better than talking by telephone or email. Seeing facial expressions and body language is important. Letters may help if the other person declines to respond to a personal conversation or phone call.

***Engaging rather than declaring:*** Bluntly announcing someone’s faults often makes the person defensive and retaliatory. Instead open a conversation in a way that shows genuine concern for the other person. Try to capture others’ attention to appeal to their values rather than bluntly declaring their wrongs.

***Planning your words:*** In delicate situations, careful planning can make the difference between restored peace or increased hostility. Consider writing out the issues to discuss, words or topics to avoid, analogies

or metaphors the other will understand, words that describe your feelings, the effect it has on you and others, your suggestions for a solution, and benefits by their cooperation.

**Using “I” statements:** A “you” message (“You never listen to me! Why did you...”) invites defensiveness and counterattack. Instead, give information about yourself. If someone understands the behavior’s effect on you, the person may be more willing to discuss and deal with the problem. E.g., “I feel hurt when you make fun of me in front of other people...”

**\*Which communication skill is used in each of the following case studies?**

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Kevin’s first reaction when he realized that his boss filled the section manager job without notifying him was to storm into his boss’ office and say, “You made the appointment without even consulting me. How could you do that to me?” Then Kevin stopped himself and asked himself the question, “What do I really feel about this situation? What about it makes me angry?” He then realized he needed to approach his boss in this manner: “I feel embarrassed because everyone in the section knew about the section manager appointment before I did.”
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Clare wanted her brother, Brian, to know how hurt she felt when he missed her birthday this year – for the second year in a row! She typed an angry, lengthy email to him and was about to send it to him at his office. Then she paused and decided instead to call Brian to make an appointment to meet with him over coffee.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Carter was furious because Mom had called his home, demanding to know why he and his wife wouldn’t be spending Christmas with her and Dad against this year. He wanted to rush over to her house and tell her to stay out of their business, but he knew she would be angry and defensive. He wasn’t sure how to help her understand her meddling without rupturing their relationship. Then he thought about her passion for gardening. Perhaps he could talk about how he and his wife need space to grow in much the same way that her jonquil bulbs need to be planted a certain distance apart so they had adequate growing space.

**Being objective:** Avoid subjective opinions and judgements; use objective facts if possible. Avoid words like “you always”, “you never”, and “every time”. Exaggerations keep people from taking you seriously.

**Using the Bible carefully:** Use it only to build others up in the Lord, not to tear them down or “preach” to them. The way you frame and setup a passage can be very helpful. You can also suggest that they read a passage on their own so that you can follow up with them to see what they think it means.

**Asking for feedback:** To insure that what you meant to say has been communicated completely and accurately, ask for clarification. This will help you measure how the other person is responding to you. E.g., “I’m not sure I’ve said this clearly. Would you mind telling me what you think I said?”

**Offering solutions and preferences:** Showing a person a reasonable way out may prompt cooperation. E.g., “My first choice would be to get the whole family together to discuss Dad’s will in person. What do you think?”

**Recognizing your limits:** You can raise concerns, suggest solutions, and encourage reasonable thinking, but you can’t force others to change. Only God can bring about true repentance. God calls us to be faithful, not to achieve results. He will honor our efforts in *His* way and in *His* time.