

# A Letter to the Church at Providence in 2023 Part 7

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*Letter to Providence Church*

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Amen. Please turn within your Bibles to the fourth chapter of Ephesians continuing a topical series of messages that has taken us away from our exposition of 1 Peter for a couple of months, and we want to continue looking at a text we looked at last week and a subject we looked at, began to look at last Sunday, one that's very important to our well-being and to the Lord, and that is the title of the message last week was "The Vital Importance of Redeeming Our Words." The vital importance of redeeming our words and that's the topic again. Today we're going to talk about redeeming our words that we speak to others, our conversations, our bitter words, words of anger, hostility, hurt. How can we replace and redeem those words that are hurtful and make them words that breathe grace? We want to replace words that tear down in our conversations with others and replace them with words that build up. So that's the focus today. Lord willing, next Sunday we want to talk about the importance of redeeming our words about others. We speak about others. We do a lot of damage with our tongue to people directly when we speak to them, but we also can do damage as we speak in the third person about other people.

So this week, the importance of redeeming our words to others. In our text that we took as a starting point was Ephesians 4:29 to 32. Let's read that again. Ephesians 4:29.

29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, we come to You this morning to continue to exalt You. We thank You, Lord, that the word we heard earlier from Isaiah that reminds us of our great need is to have our pride humbled. We think more highly of ourselves than we ought. And Lord, even in our relationships with one another, we're quick to judge, we're quick to place ourselves above others. We come asking You today to help us, Lord. We need grace. Make us like Christ. Lord, show us how the gospel, true understanding of who we are in Christ*

*changes everything and make us people who breathe grace. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So the vital importance of redeeming our words to others. I want to quickly just summarize what we saw from this passage last week. We saw three main points from the passage last week, that is, we saw that we have a problem with our words. There's a problem with our words. He is dealing with the fact that we tend to let unwholesome words come out of our mouths. We saw that unwholesome means putrefying, rancid words, that is, words that bring decay, words that bring infection, words that are poisonous in a sense, and that we tend, in the way we speak, to serve up that kind of diet to people around us with the things that we say. When we speak harsh words, unkind words, we are actually serving up things which promote the tearing down of others. And so Paul says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth. Stop that coming out and instead replace it with words that are good for edification." It's the building up.

So we see not just the problem with our words, but the power of our words. Our words have the power either to destroy or to build, to be in a realm of death or to be an impartation of life. God has made us like himself to be able to speak. I mean it's part of what it means to be a human being is to speak, someone who speaks. You think about that, you know, in the creation God created man and the first thing he did was he talked to him. So much in that. Man created by God in the perfection of Eden, before sin entered the world, desperately needed to hear from God his word. Even though he had no sin in him, he needed God's word, and God spoke to him in human language, and through that relationship, and we see that God is a God who speaks. It's a wonderful thing about the Lord is he's a God who speaks.

I had the opportunity this week to hear, Patty and I went to a pastor's retreat in North Carolina and got to hear Al Mohler and he was sharing about one of the influential books in his life was a book by Francis Schaeffer, and he said this is the best book title he's ever heard. This was what Mohler said. Schaeffer's book, and I've read the book, is "He is There and He's Not Silent." Schaeffer was a great Christian apologist who was able to reason with unbelievers and to draw them to consider the implications of their unbelief and then to powerfully present the gospel. And he wrote this book, "He Is There and He's Not Silent," to those who believe there is no God. No, there is a God who is there and the wonder of it is he is not only there as a Creator, he's actively involved, he speaks. He's a God who's not so involved in maintaining his rule of the world that he's busy with other things. No, he made man to speak to him and that's the first thing he does when he creates man. He says, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it." He gives it meaning. This is why you're here. This is what you're to do. God's words are precious and he keeps speaking. He speaks through creation. Every day, the creations are telling of the glory of God. Day after day, they pour forth speech. Night after night, they pour forth knowledge. The language there pictures a pouring out. God is just pouring out, inundating us with knowledge of who he is, his greatness. Romans 1 interprets that a little bit and says, "His eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen through what is made."

So God is a God who speaks through natural revelation. You pick up the smallest thing, you look at the smallest creature, you look at a leaf, and you see the handiwork of God. The seasons, the beauty of the seasons, God in his wisdom making known his glory. He's a God who speaks continually. This is who God is. It is a part of his nature to be relational and to speak. But he not only speaks in nature, he speaks in his word. The great passage to read to see this is Psalm 19, verses 1 to 6 speak of him speaking in nature. That's where you read, "The heavens are declaring the glory of God, the firmament declares his praise. Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they pour forth knowledge. There is no place where their utterance is not heard." But then in verse 7, he changes the direction and he says this, "The law of the LORD is perfect converting the soul. The testimony of the LORD is pure, making wise the simple." And then you read description after description after description of God's written word.

He's not only a God who speaks in nature and is continually speaking, he's a God who has spoken in the holy word of God, his Scripture. He's a God who speaks and he makes us in his image and what do we do? We speak. I mean, little children, I love when kids are, you know, getting to be six, seven months old and they, it depends on the child and they start jabbering, you know? And you know, I think a lot of times they really think they're talking. They hear this stuff and people are interacting and yeah so they just start jabbering and they think they're talking, you know, and they're saying something that sometimes you can even see it in their face. You know, like, "Am I making myself clear?" You know, "Mom, I'm telling you what I want." They haven't figured out that the words actually have to fit together a certain way yet. But they're made to speak, and think about how many words you say in a day. Some of us are more wordy than others, but all of us speak. If we're able, unless physically we're unable, we speak. We are made to speak. This is what makes us different than the animals.

One of the things that you see at the very beginning of the Bible is we're different than the animals. There's a distinction between man and every other created being. Man alone is in the image and likeness of God, the crown of creation. Man alone speaks in this way, language, communicating with God. So we are people who are made to speak, and so every day we pour forth speech, don't we? And the question is, is our speech honoring the God who made us to be like him, or is it dishonoring him? Are we speaking things that build up and edify, or things that tear down and destroy? And so this passage is dealing with that issue. We need to corral our words, control our tongue, bridle the tongue, as James says and he actually says in James 1:26, if you're not able to bridle the tongue, your religion is worthless. This is what Christians should be about. When you're saved, you should work on bridling the tongue.

Now think about that bridling. It doesn't mean you should be quiet. I don't know about you, but sometimes when I think about the things that I say and put my foot in my mouth, at times you feel like it'd just be better if I just don't say anything, right? There are times where it's appropriate to be quiet and silent and wait and listen, but it's not appropriate not to speak in general but it's that we speak edifying words. We breathe grace with our words. That's what we have to do. God intends us to speak and there are many times you're going to find yourself in circumstances where the person across from you, though

you may not know what to say yet, desperately needs you to speak to them. God has put you in that moment to speak to them but you've got to get yourself ready to speak to them. That's what we have to do, bridle the tongue. Bridle the tongue doesn't mean silence the tongue. I love that image. Bridle it. He says that even after he talked about bridling a horse, the bits in horses' mouths. Bridle the tongue, because he says the same thing later in that chapter. You use a bridle to control a horse, and think about that. Well, bridle the tongue. The tongue is a tremendous, powerful, implement, but it needs to be controlled.

So that's what we want to talk about this morning, how do we control the tongue, particularly in the words that we say to others? You know, back to our passage here, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." Do you see that? I mean, don't let poison come out of your mouth. Don't let putridness come out of your mouth, but instead words that build up and that meet needs, the need of the moment. You can speak words that speak directly to someone's need and and that it'll give grace. Our words, God means our words to give grace. Grace comes from God. Grace is his unmerited favor. Grace is his kindness. The idea is that which only God can give, and yet he's saying your words can give grace. The Lord uses your words to give grace. The power to change is in the tongue. In fact, Proverbs 18:21, the power of life and death are in the tongue. Death or life?

We have to speak. In fact, just looking at this in context. We're reading Ephesians 4:29 to 32. Look back over at chapter 4, verse 15, in the middle of this wonderful section where he's talking about how the church, the body of believers are like the body of Christ. He's the head. We are the body. We are to grow up into all things, into the head. Look how we grow up as a church. How do we grow up? How do we build up? Look at what he says, verse 15, "but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." You have to be speaking the truth. We have to speak but the question is what we speak. Are we speaking truth? But it's not just what we speak, it's how we speak. We speak the truth in love. When that happens, our words breathe grace and promote life.

So we must redeem our words. We also saw last time, it's not just the problem that we have with words and the power of words, but it's the birthplace of the words that the issue is the heart. The logical flow, the way verses 31 and 32 connect to verse 29, he said, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification," that is, replace the bad words with good words. How do you do that? He's giving us a window into it in verse 31 and verse 32. "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." If you can get the anger and bitterness and wrath and clamor and slander and malice out of your heart, what happens is it's out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks. If your heart is full of malice, what's going to come out of you? If your heart is full of bitterness, what's going to come out of your mouth? If your heart is full of anger and clamor and slander, what's going to come out of your mouth is what's in your heart. Luke 6:45, "out of the fullness of the mouth the heart speaks."

So Paul is agreeing with that and saying what you've got to do is the way you're going to not let unwholesome words out of your mouth and instead replace them with words that breathe grace is you're going to have to get rid of the... you've got to change the attitudes of your heart. Change the attitudes of your heart and you change the words of your mouth. If you don't change the attitudes of your heart, you're only masking or putting a veneer over. You're not addressing the real issue. And the words of your mouth will eventually line up with what's in your heart. You may hold it and hold it and hold it and hold it, but if you don't change the attitudes of your heart, eventually you're going to be speaking what's in the heart. So he says, you have to replace bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander, verse 31, along with all malice, with kindness. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other. You replace malice with kindness, bitterness with forgiveness, tender-hearted forgiveness that flows from the gospel. We talked about that last time. The gospel is key. We realize who we are in Christ, it changes everything.

Now let's get practical today and look at how do we actually do this? How do we apply what we've seen in this passage? We want to apply this in the area of words we speak to one another. We want to replace words that promote death with words that promote life. We want to replace words that tear down with words that build up. How do we do that? How do we replace destructive words with constructive words? How do we replace selfish, arrogant words with words that serve and meet the needs of others? So we're redeeming the destructive words we speak to others. Redeeming the destructive words we speak to others. I'm going to give you five points that I think are helpful in trying to apply this, five things that we can do. And the first, the first is something we need to do every day. What I'm going to get at is when we find ourselves in conflict, when we find ourselves tempted to let those words out of our mouths, because this remaining sin, the good news is we're all going to have opportunity to apply this message this week. Isn't that great? You don't have to wait. In fact, you might be able to do it on the way home from church today, or even before you leave because we're speaking all the time and you're going to have an opportunity, I'm going to have an opportunity to apply it.

Now, that said, one of the things we want to do is cultivate... so we're talking about when that temptation comes, how do we do it? Okay, so we're going to get at that, but I want to... the first point is something that's really something we should do every day with regularity, not just in the moment when we find ourselves tempted to say something. You see what I'm saying? The first point is foundational. The next four I'm going to give you for five, one plus four, five points total. The first is foundational. The first is this, preach the gospel to yourself daily. Preach the gospel to yourself daily. It is the gospel that transforms the attitudes of our hearts. This is exactly what Paul is saying here. How can you replace bitterness? Now, when do bitterness and wrath and anger come up? When somebody wrongs you. When you perceive that they wrong you. Sometimes you perceive incorrectly that they wrong you, but a lot of times, most of the time you perceive a wrong, there's usually something in it. You may be 20% right about what you're perceiving or 80%, but either way, there's some slight or some offense and bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and malice come up from that. So how do you

respond at that moment? Well, the best thing that you can do is have already prepared your heart for the day by preaching the gospel to yourself, and not just daily, really regularly, but at least daily because what he says is, the way that you put bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander aside is replace with kindness, tender-heartedness, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. The reason that you can show kindness to someone else and forgive them is because God has forgiven you of so much worse sin than they have committed against you.

You hear those words that we read earlier, Ted read before we started the worship service from 1 Timothy, where Paul says that he is the chief of sinners. He said, "I'm the greatest sinner. And the reason God saved me as the greatest sinner is so that everybody would know that he can save you." You know, Paul was a great sinner, but I think what he's saying there in some sense is he knew himself better than anybody else, and what he knew of himself was worse sin than he knew of anybody else. Now think about that. I think a gospel-driven understanding of our hearts, that should be true of us. Who do you know better than yourself? You don't know yourself perfectly, but you know yourself better than anybody else than you know anyone else if God's at work in your life, if you know the Lord truly. Without the knowledge of God, you can't know yourself but if you come to know God and you come to know Christ in a saving way, you have the opportunity to know yourself, you've come to know yourself and what I know of myself, I am the worst sinner I know. I know my own heart, my own selfishness, my own insensitivity, how easily offended I am, and when I look at my own life, I marvel that Christ could save me.

So remembering that every day, that he saved the chief of sinners when he saved me, he's forgiven me so much, he continues to forgive me so much. Isn't it amazing as a Christian, the longer you walk with the Lord, this remaining sin is still there. We know more than we did yesterday if you're growing, you've grown in grace, and yet there's still so much more that is still there. It's actually becoming less, truly it is, but what's happening is, if you're growing in grace, your knowledge of what is there is becoming greater and clearer so that what you see, you're even more appalled about than you were yesterday. "Look at this, oh wretched man that I am." Well, when you preach the gospel to yourself, it humbles you. That passage we read from Isaiah earlier, the Lord exalt, I mean, he alone will be exalted. He abases the pride of men. Everything lifted up, he knocks down, and we who belong to Christ know the best place in the world is to be humbled before God.

Well, so preach the gospel to yourself. That means you go into the day knowing that I've been saved by grace and I'm a servant. I'm a slave of Jesus Christ. I don't have any rights. I belong to him. So that then sets your mind now when you now encounter a situation where the flesh begins to act up and you see that you've perceived some offense here and you're tempted now to speak unwholesome words, the second thing that we should do, preach the gospel to yourself daily, that was the first, the second is pray immediately. When you find yourself, something's landed, something happened here, I'm perceiving an offense, something's bothering me, the first thing to do is pray. Pray at all times, pray without ceasing, pray continually, but pray immediately in that moment. "Lord help me. I need Your help right now." And even in praying, you may be reminding yourself of the

gospel in that moment. "Lord, help me remember who I am. Remember that I'm not here to get my way. I'm not here to win arguments. I'm here to serve others." I mean, I may have to sort of win an argument in service of someone else, but it's not about winning. It's about truth. It's about Christ. Pray immediately. Cry out to God.

I mean, James chapter 4, we looked at James 3 last week, the passage on the tongue and the power of the tongue, James 3, and James was dealing with this issue of communication in a big way. But chapter 4, look what he says about the source of quarrels and conflicts. "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" What does it come from? Where's this hostility, these fights come from in your marriage, in your family situation, in your relationships with others at work, in school? Where do these quarrels and conflicts come? "Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have, so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel." He's saying the reason that we get angry is we want something that someone else is hindering us from getting, or they're not giving to us what we think they owe us, we think they're taking something from us that belongs to us and we want that and because we want that and they then now are taking that, or we want and they're not giving to us, they become the enemy and we strike out at them and we murder them with our words. He's talking figuratively. We, in our hearts, we see them as a fool, we see them as an enemy, and we have a violent, malicious heart to them. To have a heart of malice is to be a murderer. Truly, that's to violate the sixth commandment, thou shalt not kill. That's what Jesus said in Matthew 5, if you've been angry with your brother in your heart, you are guilty of murder.

So this happens. He says, what does he say? "You are envious and cannot obtain, so you fight in quarrel," look at that last line of verse 2, "you do not have because you do not ask." I love that. When you're reading that, first time I was really reading that saying, I just didn't expect that to come right there. He's basically saying, okay, I need to not want things too much. I need to humble my desires. Yes, he's saying that, but he's saying really what you need to do is learn to pray and ask God for everything. Pray and ask God for what you need. The thing that you think you need that this person is taking away from you, pray even then and ask him, "Lord, if You want me to have this, I'm asking You." He puts it in God's lap where it belongs. Say for instance, you may feel like I want my husband to get home when he said he's going to get home. Reasonable. Some of us have not done that very well for our wives. I don't know about you, but I know about myself. It's a reasonable thing. You want your husband to be home when he said you got the meal prepared, and you want to serve it when it's good, you did his favorite meal or something he likes, or whatever, or you just want to be appreciated. And so you want him to be there, and it's reasonable. I want that. So I want my husband to appreciate me and to honor me by doing this, you think, as a wife. Well, when he's not, pray and ask the Lord, "Lord, if You want my husband to do that, then do that." It's up to God. Put it in his hands. But in doing that, praying immediately, you're also crying out to God for help. "Lord, don't let me now act in anger against this person who may be offending me. Help me."

So pray immediately. Thirdly, we're having a conversation now. This person, some kind of potential conflict is happening. I have preached the gospel to myself daily. I'm praying immediately. Now, listen patiently. Thirdly, listen patiently. One of our biggest problems is we don't listen. We all want to talk. In fact, you're in James, turn back to chapter 1, verse 19. I mentioned that James is really dealing in a big way with communication. It starts out here in verse 19 of chapter 1, "This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger." This is the way we're to live, we're to be quick to hear, that is, we're to hurry to hear. Now, sometimes we want to hurry to hear so that we can get to what we want to say. That's not what he's getting at. He's not saying listen and be ready to give your reply and you're ready for your point in the argument and just get done what you need to say so I can now give you what I need to tell you. No, be quick to listen means to really labor to understand. The goal of our heart should be to listen to understand. Understand the other person fully before you try to correct them. It's something about our pride, we think we automatically know what they need to hear. We think quickly we know the problem that they have. Sometimes we've been thinking about it on our own and maybe it's something that's happened repeatedly and I've got it all figured out. We're so prone in our own hearts to judge others with inadequate information.

Proverbs 18:13 says, "He who speaks before he hears, it is folly and shame to him." He who speaks before he hears, that is, that if I'm ready, if I'm going to start speaking and telling you what I think you need to hear, but I have not heard you out carefully, that is foolishness and shameful in God's eyes. And a lot of times, I mean, we're motivated by good things even but the pride there is the biggest problem. But I confess that I struggle with this as a pastor through the years, I felt like, okay, when I'm talking to somebody, I'm a pastor, I need to have something to say to them from the word. And so I want to encourage them, I want to help them but a lot of times I'm not labored at listening. And I may give them some stuff that's, yeah, it's true, but it doesn't really address the need of their heart because I haven't yet heard the need of their heart. Remember what Ephesians 4:29 said, that you replace those words with words that give grace, but according to the need of the moment.

We need to discern what the need is. We need to assume we don't understand what they're saying so quickly. We need to make sure we're understanding what they say, what they're saying. Labor at it. How do you do that? The goal is to understand, how do you do that? Well, you stop interrupting? Watch yourself how quickly you interrupt somebody else, how quickly we talk over others. They're talking and we start, you had conversations and it's not you're a victim, the other person does it. You're talking and you both are talking and you're talking and somebody's gotta stop, so I stop now, he keeps talking, right? And then you say something and he does it again and then he talks over you. Or maybe you're the one doing that, I'm the one doing that. Communication's not really happening very well there. Listening is key. Listening is like God. And God doesn't need to listen, does he? Think about that. Does he need to listen to anything we have to say? He knows our thoughts before we even know what we're thinking. He knows everything in our hearts. Jesus didn't need to listen but you watch Jesus' ministry, read the gospels and look how many times he asks, think about this, he asks questions of people. I mean,



that's really mind-blowing but it's consistent. Think about God, God asks questions. In the first few chapters of the Bible when Adam sins, God comes to walk with him in the cool of day and God says, "Where are you, Adam?" Does he need to know? Does he not already know? The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. The eyes of the Lord are right behind Adam, hiding behind that tree. The eyes of the Lord are right there, looking at Adam. He knows exactly where Adam is. He knows exactly what Adam has done, but he says, "Where are you, Adam?" Isn't that amazing? Why? He doesn't need the information.

Now, you and I need the information when we ask questions, because we're not God. We don't know half of what we think we know but think about even God's, what's he doing, why does he ask the question? Because Adam needed to consider the question. He could have said, "Adam, come out from behind that tree. I know what you've done." He says, "Adam, where are you?" "I was hiding from you because I was afraid." Second question, "What have you done?" Two questions. Isn't that amazing? He knows what he did. Not like the Lord was watching TV and he wasn't paying attention for a minute. He knows everything and so he asked him. Why? Because Adam needs to wrestle with where he is and what he's done. What's happening in questions like that is the heart of Adam is being brought out for Adam to look at, and now, after drawing out the heart, and he's going to ask Adam, and he's going to ask Eve, and he's going to ask the serpent questions, God doing that to let everyone's heart come out, then he's going to speak. The wisdom of God. We tend to speak and give sometimes even really good direction to people. Sometimes you hit it and you may even know what the need is. You know, sometimes you're pretty good at like, I think I'm about 95% sure what this person needs to hear is this and what's tempting for me to do is to launch into a little mini sermon. "Let me kind of give you two points on how to handle this situation you're dealing with. I'm going to just give you two." And it may be a good message, but it doesn't land because their hearts haven't been opened. So it just skirts across the top of the surface.

So listening is the key. Listening helps us to draw out the heart of the other person, because we all need our hearts drawn out, and listening helps us, because we're not God, to actually understand, to come closer to understand what's really going on, what the need of the moment is. So listen patiently. In fact, we had a Wednesday night Bible study this fall. We've been doing a series called "From Conflict to Companionship" based on Ken Sandy's book, "The Peacemaker." You can watch all of the videos online on our website. Just look up providencedeluth.org and you can watch all of the sessions. I think session was session eight or nine, Wednesday, I was out of town, dad taught it, and it was on, the big part of it was on, what does it mean to listen? How do we listen well? Sandy had some great suggestions. He talked about listening is attending is a word he used, and that means attending means to think about the fact that you're listening and give your attention fully to the other person. Not halfway, I'm listening but I'm also thinking and computing what I'm going to say. No, listen to understand, give your full attention to understanding the other person and trust the Lord that he'll give you what you need at the end when it's time for you to speak. He talks about attending is give eye contact, good eye contact, body language, lean toward the person. Don't sit there like, I'm just waiting till you finish. No, attend. Ask clarifying questions. "Now help me understand what

you're saying, what you meant by this. Tell me what you meant by that. Okay, okay." He talks about reflecting. Reflect back to them. "Now, am I understanding you correctly that this is the problem? You were offended because I said this. Am I understanding that rightly?" You see how that's really respecting the other person? "I want to make sure I understand what your concern is, what your perspective is before I speak." He gives a number of other things I'm not going to take time to deal with.

So listen patiently. Patiently. The goal's understanding, "Lord, I know that the heart's gotta be drawn out. I don't have to speak. I don't know what's going on here like I think I do. I tend to judge that I know more than I do know. Help me be humble and listen and be patient to listen fully to this other person." That doesn't mean you let them just go on and on for hours and hours and hours. Some people might do that. There's a wisdom about, okay, okay, okay, you may have to interrupt at some point. There's some people who will just keep going, right? But you pray for wisdom about that, and then you graciously, kindly say, "Okay, I think I'm understanding. I need to stop you right there. Can I ask and see if I'm understanding correctly? I've got to leave. I've got an appointment. I told my wife I was going to be home in a few minutes. I've got to get home. Something I'm working on."

Fourth point: speak graciously. Speak graciously. Now you've been doing some speaking because you've been asking questions you're reflecting in the listening time, but now when you begin to actually talk about more directly what you think the issues are that have come up, think about grace and speak graciously. Four sub-points under this fourth point. Replace inflammatory words with clarifying words. Replace inflammatory words with clarifying words and part of this is also tone, tone of voice. So replace inflammatory tone with a gentle tone. A lot of times you're in situations where somebody comes with very strong tone and strong words. Proverbs 15 says a gentle answer turns away wrath. Respond gently. "Hey, I'm here to serve the Lord. I don't know what this issue that you have is in your heart. Lord, help me." And you've been preaching the gospel to yourself, and I want to now, or maybe I forgot to, but I want to preach it to myself right now. "Help me, Lord. Help me be a blessing." You prayed, "I want to hear them out carefully," but at the very beginning, you may have to just use some tone, a gentle tone. "Hey, I can see you're really concerned and upset. I want to understand what's going on." Do you see how dramatically that is different than, "Hey, what are you talking about? Who do you think you are?" I mean, that's inflammatory language. You've got a fire that you're coming at with me, let me throw a little gasoline on it. Let's really get this thing hot.

Or we say things like, not just tone, replace inflammatory words with clarifying words, one of the ways that we inflame conversations is we use words like always or never. "Well, you never treat me with respect. You always say things like that." You hear tone and content, always, never. Those things are exaggerations. There's never a place, never is only used except to say, never say never. It's accurate there. Only time. Because it's never true that someone never does something. Maybe 87 out of the last hundred times you didn't do it, if we really had an accounting of it. That's a lot. That's actually pretty bad. 13 out of 100 you missed, but never still is wrong. Don't say never. Or always. No always. Even if you think that every time you can remember, it's not helpful.

So get rid of inflammatory language. Don't exaggerate, that only escalates the emotion because now you're giving the person a reason to be indignant. You're actually accusing me of being even worse than I am. You want to deescalate. You want to speak with clarifying words. You want to understand. Second subpoint, 4B: replace judging words with engaging words. Replace judging words with engaging words, words that we tend to want to pass a verdict but we should pose questions. We want to stand in judgment and say, "No, why are you the way you are?" Make a judgment like that when we need to say, hey, what's, we need to pose questions, "Tell me what your concern is. Let me understand."

One thing Sandy mentions in this vein is we need to, in our minds, this is a really helpful image, I think, in our minds, we need to approach the other person even if they're coming at us, and we may feel like because the way they're coming, we almost need to put our dukes up. You know, somebody's coming at you punching, you naturally put your guard up, right? Well, as Christians, we don't have to do that spiritually. We can trust the Lord, we can be meek. But another aspect of it, somebody comes at us hard, we tend to want to judge, and we're, you know, we know they're not coming the right way, so we feel vindicated in, "Hey, you're wrong right now." You see how that, "you're wrong right now," that's a judgment. Sandy says this, when you want to have a conversation with someone if you speak graciously, speak to them not from above them but from beside them. Not above them. You want to come alongside them. It's not why are you doing this? In fact, he points out also that it's good to examine how much we say the second person pronoun "you" anyway, that if you use the phrase "you," you tend to be saying things like, you know, even if you're actually now sharing something you're concerned about, now the conversation's happening, you say something like, you know, "You are just always so angry You are an angry person. I think you are a foolish person." You see, you are, those are, watch out for "you are." You're making pronouncements on them. You're judging their character. Instead, someone comes and says, they come at you like that, and you want to say, "You always come at me like this, or you come at me like this so much," rather than, "Hey, I'm having a little trouble." Think about the difference to replace "you" with "I, I'm having a little trouble with the energy you're coming at me with. I'm not understanding your anger. I am not understanding." You see that? Rather than "you are being, I'm not understanding. Help me understand what's going on."

So replace judging words with engaging words. "Help me. I want to help you. We're together in this. You have a problem, apparently, with me, but let's work together to solve the problem." The third subpoint 4C: replace subjective opinion with objective statements. Here we also that we can use things like you, we say "you never keep your word. You're always angry." But if you want to have a helpful conversation, you would replace that kind of subjective opinion that you're rendering with objective facts. You say, you know, to your friend, you know, "You've lost your temper twice in the last month in significant ways." You see, that's a fact. "You've spoken really harshly to me three times this week." Facts. Facts are less threatening and they're more helpful.

D, 4D: replace condemning words with hope-filled words. These are things that we should never say, but they can come out of our mouths, "You will never learn. Are you ever going to change? You always do this." Those things should never come out of our mouths. That is completely unhelpful. Think about what you're saying. If I say that, what I'm saying, that's really devilish talk for me to say, "You will never change." What a wicked thing to say. We feel that way. We feel like, "Gosh, we just keep on dealing with this situation. Are you ever going to change?" That's not the way to say it. That's hopeless. We have the gospel. We replace that with, "Listen, I see that you've struggled with this. You struggle with this often and it must be really hard for you to be struggling with this as much as you are, but Christ is able to help us, even in the areas where we wrestle so greatly. The gospel's able to change us. Let's work on it. If you want to work on it, let's work on it together. There are areas where I need to change. I'm not changing as fast as I want to. Let's work together."

You speak graciously. You're pointing out grace. You're pointing to Christ. Satan is the accuser of the brethren. Satan says things like, "You will never change." In fact, this is one thing in your own heart, it's important to even recognize God's voice in our heart as he speaks to us versus Satan or the flesh. We have these different voices that speak in our hearts and the Holy Spirit never says things like, "You will never change." He will say things like, "You really need to change," but not, "You will never change." That's Satan. That's sin in you. That's not of God and so recognize that and, you know, the thoughts that come from our flesh, whether it's the flesh or the devil himself, however it is, we have these thoughts that are not from who we are in Christ that come and bombard us, we need to reject them and we certainly don't need to voice them because they come to us about other people. And if we do that, we're really in the same place Peter was when Jesus said to him, "Get thee behind me, Satan." We're voicing what the accuser of the brethren wants us to voice. We're using our instrument, our tongue, to steal, kill, and destroy. But we can replace those words with hope-filled words. Christ is able.

And fifthly, not only pray immediately, listen patiently, speak graciously, I mean, preach the gospel daily was the first one. I was trying to come up with five and I came up with four. Preach the gospel daily, pray immediately, listen patiently, speak graciously. Fifthly, love fervently. Be fervent in your love for one another. And back to our Ephesians passage, one of the things he says, he leads into after he says that about, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, replace that bitterness with kindness. Be kind to one another tender-hearted, forgiving each other just as God also in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children. Walk in love just as Christ also loved you and gave himself up for us in offering and sacrifice to God. Love one another fervently from the heart." This is where you pray, "Lord, love this person through me right now. They're not being lovable, just like I'm not lovable and You love me anyway. Love them through me with Your love." Pray for that. You're praying again. "Lord, please help me love them."

And life's complicated. It's not easy. Things don't get better right away but it's this kind of attitude in these kind of conversations that actually advance the building up of the body. Little by little, day by day, lives are transformed. Doesn't happen in an instant. Salvation

happens in an instant, but sanctification is a lifelong war. But let's get together and help each other. That's what God wants us to do. And then our words will breathe grace. Our words will be life. It all's in the heart. If we get our hearts right, we can be a blessing at any moment, any circumstance, because Christ is able.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we thank You for the glory of the gospel and how it changes everything, that Jesus died for us when we were completely ungodly people. There's nothing in us to make us worthy of His love, but He demonstrated His love for us that while we were yet sinners, He died for us. We're so grateful that His death makes us righteous, imputes His perfect righteousness to us, and we stand robed in grace. And Lord, even as we think about, as we've considered this morning, how much damage we do with our words, how often our flesh, we yield to the flesh in the way we speak, and we damage those that we love, we need grace, we need Your mercy. Lord, help us to be broken before the cross, to realize that we of all people are the chief of sinners and the person that we are wanting to rail at or to speak unkindly to, it does so much less to us than we have done to You and yet You have lavished Your love on us. You love us as if we had never sinned because You love us as if we had lived the life of Jesus Christ. Let us take the overflow of that love and share it with those around us. May we show grace and kindness and may our words more and more and more be words that are good for edification according to the need of the moment, and may they breathe grace. All for the glory of our Savior. We pray in His name. Amen.*