

## MAIN POINT

Communication that flows from love and respect for your spouse happens when the Word of God takes root and flourishes in your heart.

## INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**If you were doing premarital counseling for an engaged couple, what would you tell them was the biggest surprise you experienced about marriage?**

**What about marriage has been easier than you imagined? What has been more difficult?**

**If given the opportunity, what wisdom would you share with an engaged couple about communication in marriage?**

In James 1:19-21, James pointed out some clear instructions for how we communicate. These commands are especially vital in marriage. Communication that flows from love and respect for one's spouse happens when the Word of God takes root and flourishes in our hearts.

## UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ JAMES 1:19-21.

**How are James's three commands in verse 19 related to one another?**

**What is the root issue James warned his readers against with these commands? How do you see the same root issue in your own life?**

**What do we communicate to our spouse when we don't listen well or talk too much?**

**What happens when these negative traits (fast to speak, slow to listen, quick to become angry) enter into our relationship with God?**

Christians can pretend to obey God without truly listening to His commands. The readers of James's letter knew the transforming power of God's Word, the gospel. James urged them to demonstrate this change, particularly in their speech. He challenged them to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry. The commands probably refer both to our relationships to one another and to God. We are to be quick to hear and slow to talk both toward other people and toward God. The command to be quick to listen calls for an eagerness to hear and obey God's message. The appeal to be slow to speak demands silence until we have understood and applied the message. It is a call for restraint lest we produce hasty, ill-timed reactions. The challenge to be slow to become angry warns against hostile, bitter feelings. We cannot hear God if we remain distracted with resentment, hatred, or vengeful attitudes. Being attentive and obedient to the Scripture and processing it carefully before speaking will curb any tendency toward wrath.

When we let the Word of God take root in our lives, we begin to place others' needs above our own. On our own, God-honoring communication with our spouse is not possible. Practically, it involves not only words, but also attitudes, thoughts, and actions, as Paul outlines in Ephesians 4.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ EPHESIANS 4:29-32.

**In marriage, when might we be tempted to offer negative comments? How can we demonstrate affirming speech instead?**

**How might others lead us to negative comments without our even realizing it?**

Paul disagrees with the adage, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." The truth is that words are powerful, either building up or tearing down. Sadly, our attitudes about our marriages don't always promote language and communication that encourages and edifies.

**What are some practical ways we can use our words to build up our spouse? How about others in our lives?**

**How does positive speech give grace to those who hear?**

We can help, not hurt, with our speech. When we do, we give evidence that God's grace is moving in our life, helping us extend grace to those we speak to.

**According to Ephesians 4:31, what are the wicked ways that grieve the Holy Spirit?**

**Do you think the Holy Spirit is grieving over your communication in marriage? Why or why not?**

**Discuss what Paul might mean by the terms kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving in verse 32. How are each of these terms a reflection of God's love for us?**

**Think about some of the times you've been abrupt, callous, or unforgiving in your speech towards your spouse. How could you rephrase your speech to be kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving?**

Kind means caring or showing love practically. Tenderhearted refers to being moved in one's insides in response to a need and then acting. Forgiving is literally "acting with grace" and extending undeserved favor. Paul pointed out specifically that forgiving is a God-like quality. Because He forgave in Christ, we are to forgive others.

**How often do you think on God's grace when you consider how to communicate with and treat your spouse? How might reflecting on the cross affect your words and actions?**

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What are some practical ways you can remember to be quick to listen and slow to speak when it comes to communicating with your spouse this week?**

**Thinking on all of the exhortations we studied today from James 1 and Ephesians 4, which is the major command God is challenging you with? How can you act on His challenge?**

**For those of us who aren't married, how can we apply these biblical truths about communication in other relationships this week? How do they help us prepare for a possible marriage?**

## PRAYER

Close your time in prayer, asking God to help your group look inward and be honest about the place God's Word has in their hearts. Pray that your group would be characterized by marriages,

families, and friendships marked by God-honoring communication as His Word takes root in your hearts.

## COMMENTARY

### | JAMES 1:19-21

James called his readers to three forms of self-discipline (v. 19). First, be quick to listen. Second, be slow to speak, a phrase meaning that we should be slow to begin speaking. Third, be slow to become angry or have slowness to speak up when angry, a self-discipline that helps to curb anger. An angry spirit blocks the development of a God-pleasing righteous life, the goal that James held up throughout his letter (v. 20). Such human anger may take the forms of nursed grudges, a poisonous bitterness, or a settled hatred, all possibly stemming from real or perceived offenses in the past. All have the power to block spiritual growth. Here James used the metaphor of removing soiled clothing (see Rom. 13:12; Eph. 4:22). We must eliminate everything in our lives that is contrary to God's Word and prevents righteous living. In order to experience personal transformation, we should receive the teachings of God's Word humbly rather than defensively or negatively. A humble attitude will provide an open door for God's wisdom to penetrate our minds and hearts.

### | EPHESIANS 4:29-32

4:29. Paul gave concrete examples of how Christ followers live out this worthy walk, beginning in verse 25. In each case, a prohibition is balanced with a command. Here, it is not corrupting talk but wholesome speech. By corrupting talk Paul meant what is vulgar, crude, or abusive. This is a characteristic of the non-Christian lifestyle that believers have renounced. What is to replace it? Speech that is intentionally good for the building up of others (Prov. 15:23).

4:30. Parents grieve when their children squabble. How much more must the Spirit lament when believers squabble with one another? After all, He is Holy, and He intends for us to become more and more holy. This is why He sealed us when we were converted. From the beginning of our Christian life when we were sealed until the end when we are fully redeemed, we are to grow in being like Christ.

4:31. In verses 22-24 Paul had used the notion of taking off (the old man) and putting on (the new man) in reference to the decisive change that happened at conversion. Here he used similar language to speak of six sinful attitudes and actions. Believers constantly seek to keep these removed from their lives. They are all poisonous to personal relationships. Bitterness can be

translated “sourness,” referring to a cynical or resentful outlook. Anger refers to an outburst of rage or a flash of irritation. Wrath (negatively) means “a sullen, settled angry attitude” (but see 5:6 for God’s wrath). Clamor refers to loud voices raised in a quarrel or in a brawl. Slander means “speaking evil of others, wishing to hurt their reputation.” Malice summarizes all of the preceding and can also be translated “evil” or “wickedness.”

4:32. In contrast to the six vices are three virtues by which believers are to relate to one another. These are God-like qualities He has extended to us. Kind means caring or showing love practically (see 2:7 for God’s kindness). Compassionate (tenderhearted) refers to being moved in one’s insides in response to a need and then acting. Forgiving is literally “acting with grace,” and forgiving the offenses of others is certainly one of the best ways to extend undeserved favor. Paul pointed out specifically that this is a God-like quality. Because He forgave in Christ, we are to extend forgiveness to others.