

Building Bridges With Our Words

I had been at our first Church – Ottawa Southside – for a couple of months when I got a call from a lady I had never met. She was very upset about something that had happened several months before I had even become the Pastor at Southside. She was in a rage and I was imagining her on the other end of the phone foaming at the mouth and at any moment a hand was going to reach through the receiver and put a choke hold on me. After several minutes I was finally able to get a word in, because I didn't know what she was talking about. I was able to get her calmed down and talking through the issue. When we finished the conversation she thanked me for my time and started going around town telling people how helpful I was. It was almost like she was my Public Relations agent.

Every one of us has been on the receiving end of words, words that hurt – that cut to the heart like a knife. Hopefully we have also received words that brought comfort and encouragement as well.

Proverbs 12:18 “Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.” NIV

Proverbs 18:21 “The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.” NIV

Proverbs 18:21 “Words kill, words give life; they're either poison or fruit—you choose.” The Message

Friend, every relationship that we have can be either improved or hurt based on the words we speak. Relationships have been broken or strengthened by words. Marriages have been ruined or enhanced by words. Children can be hurt or inspired by words. Jobs can be lost or advanced because of the things that are said.

Principle #1: Build Trust

Matthew 5:37 “Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” NIV

Matthew 5:37 “Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.” NLT

Matthew 5:37 “Just say ‘yes’ and ‘no.’ When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong.” The Message

You see friends; we begin building relationships when our words can be trusted. If I stood up here this morning and told you that 95% of what I'm going to say this morning is the truth – you would be wondering which part isn't the truth. You see, even though 5% is a small amount – it colors everything because you wouldn't know what was true and what wasn't true.

Jesus believed in and practiced honesty in speech. He could be trusted. The more people trust what we say the more open they will be to having a relationship with us. We all know someone – at work, school, or even in our family – who has proven themselves to be untrustworthy and you never believe a word they say. To illustrate, just insert the name of just about every politician in office or running for office from any party or any state. We must be the exact opposite. We must be people who have proven themselves to be trustworthy and others believe us.

Discussion: Jesus said we need to use our words to build Trust. What can you begin doing right now with your words to build trust with those around you?

Principle #2: Guard Our Thoughts

Matthew 12:34 “...For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” NIV

Matthew 12:34 “...How do you suppose what you say is worth anything when you are so foul-minded? It's your heart, not the dictionary that gives meaning to your words.” The Message

Mark 7:15 “It's not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart.” NLT

Mark 7:15 “There is nothing people put into their bodies that makes them unclean. People are made unclean by the things that come out of them.” NCV

What those verses and others like them tell us is that our words are the results of our thoughts. What we think comes out in what we say and in how we live.

Which is why we read this in God's Word:

Romans 12:2 **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”** NIV

Romans 12:2 **“Do not conform yourselves to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind.”** TEV

So, in order to rebuild, restore or begin relationships we must allow God to transform us inwardly by completely changing our minds. So, we need to guard our thoughts – allow God to change our thoughts so that we can speak words that will help us build great relationships.

Discussion: God's Word says that we can be transformed by renewing or completely changing our mind? What does that mean for us today as it relates to building relationships?

Principle #3: Learn To Listen

Psalms 116:1 **“I love the LORD, because he listens to my prayers for help.”** NCV

God gives us a wonderful example to follow. He listens to us. He hears us when we pray. God teaches us by example through His Word that we are to be listeners as well.

Proverbs 18:13 **“Spouting off before listening to the facts is both shameful and foolish.”** NLT

What Solomon is telling us is that if we don't listen we are being stupid – which hurts us, and we are being insulting which hurts the person talking.

Proverbs 21:23 **“If you want to stay out of trouble, be careful what you say.”** TEV

Listening is a learned habit and skill, but it is also one that we never fully arrive at doing 100% of the time. What I mean is I will do really well listening during several conversations and then something happens, I get distracted, something is going on in another part of my life and I don't listen well. If you're honest you know exactly what I'm talking about because you've done the exact same thing.

Several years ago I came across an acrostic for the word LISTEN.

L = Look At People. We are to listen with our ears and our eyes.

I = Invest In People. Show people that they are important by listening to them.

S = Stop Whatever Else You Are Doing.

T = Think About What They Are Saying. Rather than what we are going to say next.

E = Empathize with People. Acknowledge their thoughts and feelings.

N = Notice Body Language. One study says that 55% of a speaker's impact is in our body language.

So, we need to learn how to listen.

Principle #4: Build Others Up

Ephesians 4:29 **“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.”** NIV

Ephesians 4:29 **“Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will do good to those who hear you.”** TEV

Friends, there are literally hundreds of people and ways that we can build people up.

So, in closing this morning I want to challenge us to write down one thing that we will do with each of these principles as our application step.

Application:

#1: I Will Build Trust By _____

#2: I Will Guard My Thoughts By _____

#3: I Will Learn To Listen By _____

#4: I Will Build Others Up By _____