

Effective Prayer - Part 1

by William MacDonald

Effective conversation is a skill that requires discipline, sincerity, and a willingness to learn from others.

Duration: 28:36

Scripture: Psalm 30:5, Proverbs 15:1, Proverbs 18:21, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 4:15, Ephesians 4:29, James 1:19

Topics: "Effectual Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of commenting on the answers we receive after asking questions. He highlights the joy that comes from someone sharing a thought that adds depth to the conversation. The speaker also mentions the significance of speaking the truth in love, referencing Ephesians 4:15. Additionally, he discusses the key of expecting meaningful conversations and the need to consciously think about our words. The sermon encourages taking the initiative in asking meaningful questions, being a good listener, and being mindful of the impact of our communication.

Transcript

This morning I'd like to take another key, our key is still here, and this morning I'd like to think with you about keys to effective conversation. Perhaps that's something we don't think about too much. We get together and talk and say the very first thing that comes off the top of our heads.

Whereas really we should look before we look, shouldn't we? And the Bible has an awful lot to say about this. Conversation is really a science. And it's a skill that we should devote ourselves to, that we should consciously think about.

Let's read at the outset a single verse of scripture. It's Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 29. It says, let no corrupt communication.

I don't know where I ever got this, but somewhere I read that that word corrupt could really mean worthless. And I like that. It doesn't necessarily mean off-color, although that certainly could be included here.

But let's think of it this morning anyway. Let no worthless communication proceed out of your mouth. But that which is good to the use of edifying, and then if you have a modern translation of the Bible, it adds those words, as the need may be, which is just what really should be in there, to the use of edifying as the need may be that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

And really that verse is saying that you and I should really give ourselves to the building of communication skills, that we should discipline ourselves in the matter of our conversation, not just to talk, but to seek to be helping others when we do talk. I'm really preaching for myself this morning. I really am.

Let me give you an illustration of the way it usually goes. We get together in a group. Somebody sees a rabbit running through the grass.

That reminds another person of some Welsh rabbit they ate on the plane between Bangor, Maine and Waco, Texas. Bangor, Maine. People think of lobsters when they think of Bangor, Maine.

And so somebody starts to talk about lobsters. Invariably the conversation does get back recurrently to subjects of food. And before you know, you've wandered all the way from Dan to Beersheba, and really you haven't got anywhere.

Isn't that right? That's typical of conversation. Now this says, let no words of communication proceed out of your mouth, but rather that which is good to the use of at a time as the need may be that it may minister grace to the hearers. So that brings us to the first key in this whole subject of effective conversation.

Take the initiative when you're speaking to people in asking significant questions. Take the initiative in asking meaningful, significant questions. That is, seek to draw people out.

Now the Lord Jesus was a master at this. He was a master at everything good. Do you think of any questions the Lord Jesus asked? He knew the answers to them all, didn't he? The Lord never asked a question because he didn't know the answer.

He asked questions to draw people out. Anybody, think of a single question he ever asked. You know, it's a request, but I was thinking more of a question.

Ah, good. Whom do men say that I am? Very good. He was going to draw them out.

He was going to go on with the cross. It was important that his disciples really know who he was. They were going to go through terrible times of persecution.

Ten of them were going to die martyrs' deaths, and one of them was going to live a martyr's life. And it was tremendously important that they know who he is. If he is Christ, the Son of the Living God, then they're on the winning side.

They don't have to worry about the grave. You see? So he asked that significant question. Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am? Another question.

Let's think of Christ. Good question. Whose son is he? And one that pierces me every time he ever asks me is this.

Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say? The questions of the Lord Jesus really were communicating to the disciples, and they communicate to us today as well. This takes discipline. It's not easy for me to do this, and I have to be seeking to do it all the time.

I say, well, that really is hard. When you meet people, how do you ask them significant questions? I had the privilege as a younger man of traveling some, not very much, but a little, with dear Dr. Ironside. He was always doing this.

I can remember driving across the Oakland Bay Bridge with him, and he said to me, what do you think that verse 1 Corinthians 6.4 means? Set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. It has to do with a passage about going to law with one another. And he said, what do you think that means? Isn't that strange? Set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.

Well, imagine asking me. I didn't even know there was a problem there. And so after I expressed my complete ignorance on the subject, he said to me, so gracious, he said, do you think it might mean this? He said, some versions of the Bible put it as a question.

Do you set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church? And what it really means, he went on to explain to me what it probably means is that these Christians were going to law against one another. They were going to ungodly judges to settle problems that should be settled in the church. These ungodly judges were really of no standing in the church.

It didn't mean that the church didn't respect them, but they didn't have a standing among the children of God. And he's saying, you're going to people who are least esteemed in the church, and you're taking your troubles to them. Is that what you do? Do you set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church? I don't want to labor the point, but I just merely point that out.

Here we are, driving across the Bay Bridge. He asks me a question to draw me out. I don't know the answer.

He suggests the answer, and I still remember it today. You see, what I'm trying to say is it was a profitable conversation. We could have talked about Alcatraz.

We could have talked about Treasure Island. We were passing the bridge there because they were all in perfect view, but he didn't do that. He was always feeding your soul when he was talking to you.

Wonderful, isn't it? Really wonderful. But that still leaves me up in the air. What question would I ever ask anybody? Well, the first time you meet a person, you can say, I don't think I ever heard about your conversion.

Would you tell me how you were saved? I said, there isn't. If there haven't been, it's still better. Another question you can ask is a conversation like, have you read any good books lately? You know, I received a great blessing in life through having books recommended to me.

This morning after breakfast, two books were recommended to me. I wrote them down in my notebook. I intend to read them.

I find if people have received a blessing from a book and they pass it on, I'm going to receive a blessing from that book, too. Have you read any good books lately? It opens up a wonderful field of discussion on good Christian books. I was thinking about our meeting last night.

Have you had any thrilling answers to prayer lately? That should keep you going for a couple of hours, shouldn't it? So, that's the first key, and I think it's a good key. Try to take the initiative in asking meaningful, significant questions, seeking to draw out the other person. Key number two, be a good listener, showing a sincere interest in what the other person is saying.

I said, oh, Jesus was a good listener. That's marvelous, isn't it, when you think of God becoming man down here on this earth and wandering among such failing creatures, and yet he was so human, and I say it respectfully, rubbing shoulders with people like us, and yet so humble and listening to what people had to say. One of the verses that Brother McKenzie has been going over with us comes to mind Philippians 2. Philippians 2, verse 3 says, In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

I had a friend up in Chicago, and when you meet this fellow, he acts as he talks to you, he acts as if that's the greatest thing that's happened to him all day. He's so interested in everything that concerns him. Everybody loves him.

He's so fair, he really means this. He listens with such rapt attention and enters into it as if this were so important in his life. And people really love that dear brother.

He's a good listener. Darrell Carnegie was introduced to somebody, and Darrell asked a couple of significant questions of the person. The person took off and started to talk.

Later on that person said to a friend, You know, that Darrell Carnegie is a wonderful conversationalist. He hasn't said anything but the initial question yet. A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he knows something.

And you know, I try to remind myself of this. There isn't a Christian in the world that I can't learn something from. Do you believe that? There isn't a Christian in the world that I can't learn something.

That you can learn something from charismatic Christians. Yes, I sure can. I can learn more about praise, and I can learn more about servancy and prayer, and many other things.

There isn't a belief. That's what we believe. We believe that we're all members of the body.

We believe that every member of the body is important. Every member of the body is significant. I don't care what Christian I meet anywhere.

I can learn. I think of people that have been such a tremendous blessing in my life, and they don't even know it today. A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he knows something.

A good listener looks at the person he's talking to instead of letting his gaze wander all around the room. He tries to refrain from yawning or sighing. And he doesn't interrupt with every random thought that comes to his mind.

This is really one of the hindrances in effective conversation. You're talking along. What you're saying is good, and some random thought comes to my mind like a twaddle to the gable of a barn, and I just can't hold it in, and I interrupt the conversation that I would come, and the continuity of the conversation is blown.

And a good listener responds with smiles and with notes of agreement, showing that he's really entering into the conversation. Then the next key is, the third key is this. You've asked a question.

You've listened attentively to the answer. I think the next step is to comment on it. Now, that comment can be an elaboration of what has been said.

Those here who minister the Word of God publicly know what a joy it is when somebody comes up at the end of the meeting and shares some thought that really caps the climax, and you say, I wish I had said that. They've been right with you all along, and their minds have been working, and they have something good to add. Now, you can do that in conversation too.

You can comment. Maybe that brother lacks balance. I praise God today for the ministry of a man named Charles Van Ryn who was with us at Emmaus Bible School, and Charles probably grew old trying to teach me balance.

Because it's so easy to get on a subject, to go off on a tangent, to become extreme on it, to become an extremist, and he was forever trying to balance things out with us. It's a great ministry. Maybe your comment will do that.

It can reinforce what's been said. It can be balancing what's been said, or it can even correct something that has been said. The fourth key is always seek to edify.

Always seek to edify. I want to do this. I want to discipline myself in working with people, in being with people, to be contributing to their spiritual welfare.

That's what this verse says. This is good for the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. Always seek to edify.

Someone has said, be a thermostat instead of a thermometer. The thermometer reflects the temperature in the room, but the thermostat controls the temperature in the room, doesn't it? We should be a thermostat rather than a thermometer. When I'm with a crowd, maybe the conversation is going off and into the wild blue wonder.

It's getting nowhere. It's a good chance to step in and try to bring the conversation back onto a constructive level. And in that connection, you say, well, how can I... Find out the person's interest that you're talking to and try to make spiritual applications.

Try to make spiritual applications. Maybe you're talking about something that's very mundane, but I believe there are spiritual applications in everything of life about us. We finished our breakfast this morning and the young people are there and they're wiping off the table and they're sweeping up the floor almost before we get out of the dining room.

Surely no spiritual application. Sure there is. I look at those young people and I think, can you sweep floors to the glory of God? And of course the answer is yes, you can.

Yes, you can. Whatever you do. Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.

Hard to think, isn't it, that God takes note of those things and it's pleasing to him when it's done in his name and for his glory. One of the greatest men I ever knew for making spiritual applications was dear Fred Elliott from Portland, Arizona. And when you were with him, whatever was happening was always something spiritual about it.

I was standing outside the chapel in LaGrange one day. It was right near the railroad tracks and he and I were talking and as we were talking there, there was a tremendous roar and it was the California Zephyr, you know, coming by. And it went, vroom, you know, two big diesel engines or whatever they were.

There's one roaring by. He said, tapped me in the shoulder and he said, power, brother, but nothing like the power that raised him from the dead. I thought it was the California Zephyr.

He could see a spiritual truth connected with that train zooming back. I've never forgotten it. That was years ago.

He told me it happened now. I've never forgotten it. The power that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead was the greatest display of power the universe has ever known.

Isn't it nice to see that when a train goes by? I think so. And to share it with somebody else, the Burlington Zephyr. Okay, next key.

Praise whenever you can. Praise whenever you can do so sincerely. There's a difference between praise and flattery.

We know that flattery isn't right. Flattery is saying something that you know isn't true. If you say to Eddie Schwartz, you're a good sayer, that's praise.

If you say it to me, it's flattery. And there is a difference. We're so afraid that we forget.

And you know, it's a very nice thing in going through life, every once in a while, to sit down and write a letter to somebody and just express a little gratitude, a little appreciation. You'd be surprised what a letter like that does along the way to people. People are dying for a little bit of gratitude like that today.

And letters or phone calls or words like that can lift a fallen spirit and cheer a person along the way. Don't be stingy. Paul did that.

I think in all of his letters, but Galatians, he had some word of praise, didn't he? At least at the outset. He didn't have them Galatians because they were swallowing another gospel, but wherever he could find something to praise, he would do so at the very outset of his letters. And we should imitate him in this and in our conversations.

Next key, be positive, not negative. Thankful, not complaining. Be positive, not negative.

Thankful, not complaining. It's a wonderful gift to be positive, not negative. I'm telling some of the friends that in our discipleship training program, twice a year, those of us on the staff sit down and we take the file about one of the fellows that's working with us.

And we go over that file and we sit down, we spend an hour doing this actually, at least an hour, and we appraise that fellow spiritually, his spiritual life, his academic life, his personal life, and his practical Christian service. And we write down in a simple paper everything positive that we can say about him and everything that needs attention. And then we call him in on Monday afternoon after lunch and he sits there at the mouth of the lion, as it were, and he hears it all.

However, when we sit there, we might say, well, this fellow has this failing. But when it's presented to him, when it's presented to him, it comes out as a positive thing. You might think about the whole subject of and seek to improve in that area.

In other words, we don't come down with a sledgehammer on him. We come in with velvet gloves and present it in a positive way and tell him areas of his life that he can give greater attention to. You know,

most of us grow up and we don't have people that love us enough to do that with us.

There really is a kindness. The best friends I've ever had are the people who've been frank with me, told me things in my life that they didn't think were fitting for a follower of the Lord Jesus. I was really touched this year and one of the fellows said, we always, incidentally, at the end of this session, we ask them, you know, now, do you have anything to ask? Has this been fair? One of them said, I could have told you all that before I came in, he said.

Very good. But one fellow stood at the door this year and he said, as he was leaving, he said, I just want to thank you men, he said, for the way you pour your lives into mine. And they appreciated that people loved them enough to appraise them and to help them along the way in a positive way.

They know they're not trying to tear them down. They're trying to build them up. Be positive, not negative.

Next, speak the truth in love. Speak the truth in love. Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 15.

Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 15. But speaking the truth in love may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. You know, there's a right and wrong way of doing everything.

I think that's one of the things we learn as we mature in the Christian life. A right and wrong way of doing it. It's possible to speak the truth, even, and not speak it in love.

But I tell you, when it's closed in love, it really makes all the difference. And closely connected with that, another key is that Colossians 4, 6. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with love. Colossians 4, 6. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with love, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

In other words, our speech should be transparently honest, our conversation with people, and yet, once again, it should be loving. I see this so beautifully in the life of the Lord Jesus. Let your speech be always with grace.

He said to the woman, Give me to drink. Oh, what a gracious thing for a Jew to say to a Samaritan woman. You know, there are no diplomatic relations between those people.

That's an understatement. There is genuine hostility between them. And the Savior said, Give me to drink.

Let your speech be always with grace. But you drop down a few verses, and he says, Go call thy husband. Seasoned with salt.

Right? Now, that was the surging scalp of reaching in, conviction of sin. Unkind? No, it wasn't unkind. Best thing that ever happened to her.

Leather to the feet of the Savior. Same thing with a woman taken in the act of adultery. He said, Neither do I condemn thee.

Always with grace. Go and sin no more. Seasoned with salt.

And you can go through the conversation of the Lord Jesus, and you can see these things so clearly set forth. And then a final key. Try to involve strangers or quiet persons in the conversation.

You know, it's possible to get together with a group and for just two or three to really carry the ball and others to sit there and say not a word. It's really a nice thing to be able to involve others in the conversation, especially children. Don't you think when the Lord Jesus was in a home that he would always try to draw the children out? I think so.

I think so. I think he had a wonderful way. And incidentally, you can learn an awful lot by talking to children.

I tell you, those little minds are really working. And out of the mouths of those who suffer has thou ordained strength because of thy enemies. Well, I can look back and think of conversations, plethora of conversations that I've had with little ones and the gems of wisdom that they've come across with.

And so these are some keys. The basic thought I want to leave with you this morning is that we really shouldn't allow our conversations to meander, to wander, that we should discipline ourselves in our conversations to always seek to be accomplishing something for the Lord, to be building people up in their most holy faith, to be helping them along the way, to seek to edify them as the need may be. It really should be appropriate just the right words spoken by the Holy Spirit of God, really how wonderful it is.

Just to be able to be there in a home of sorrow and to quote the right verse of Scripture. Nothing else has been able to help the people. And you come along and you quote Psalm 30, verse 5, weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning and the cloud is lifted.

Wonderful thing. As the need may be that our speech might be appropriate. So, may each of us make this our prayer this morning.

Let the words of my mouth, the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in my sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.

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