

Keys to Effective Conversation

by William MacDonald

Effective conversation involves taking the initiative in asking meaningful questions, listening carefully, commenting on what has been said, and seeking to edify others.

Duration: 33:09

Scripture: John 4:7, Ephesians 4:29-30, Colossians 4:6

Topics: "Effective Communication", "Christian Witness"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the idea of having bigger eyes in heaven. He emphasizes the importance of planting seeds in people's minds and provoking their will. The speaker shares a story about forming judgments without all the facts and highlights the wisdom of listening before making conclusions. The sermon then transitions to discussing effective conversation skills, including learning from the perfection of Jesus and involving strangers or quiet individuals in conversations. The speaker encourages listeners to appreciate the interesting stories of aged Christians and to be willing to listen to them.

Transcript

And beginning with the 29th verse, Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 29, our subject tonight is keys to effective conversation. We might call it building communication skills, keys to effective conversation. Ephesians chapter 4, verse 29.

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth but that which is good to the use of edifying, and then if you have a modern version of the Bible, it probably says in there, as the need may be, because those words really should be in there, that which is good to the use of edifying as the need may be that it may minister grace unto the hearers, and grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption, that all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice, and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ hath forgiven you. Oftentimes, our conversation simply rambles. Even as Christians, we become engaged in conversation, and pretty soon we're talking like jackrabbits.

We move quickly from one thing to another without really building anything constructive. Maybe somebody sees a rabbit dash across the path, and then you start talking about a rabbit. That makes somebody think of some Welsh rabbit they had on the plane from Bangor, Maine, to Waco, Texas.

Texas, they start talking about Texas where everything is bigger and better, and that reminds someone of the Texan who admitted they didn't have anything like Niagara Falls in Texas, but they thought he thought they had a plumber who could fix the job. Niagara Falls, that made somebody think of a wedding in the conversation, so they started talking about a wedding and described all about the wedding in great detail, ending with the color of the mints that were served at the reception. Reception, that made somebody think of reception policy in the local assembly.

That was the most lofty hype that was reached so far. And so, it's possible, really, to travel all the way from Dan to Beersheba in a conversation and never get anywhere, isn't it? And the Word of God teaches us that our conversation should be directive, that when we speak it should be purposeful, and some of the subjects of conversation, really, some of the purposes of conversation are listed in this verse. It says, let no corrupt communication.

Somewhere I came across the idea that that word corrupt could mean let no worthless speech communication proceed out of your mouth. Let no worthless. Well, that's really quite a challenge to us, isn't it? It's so easy in life just to be occupied with trivia.

You know, if you examine your conversation, excuse me, you realize that a lot of it, really, is nothing but trivia. Let's just listen in to a phone conversation. Usually, these tape recorders are demon-possessed, and I hope it'll work for you.

Okay, just let's listen. Mary, did you have a good vacation? It was such a shame that you weren't here for Sally's wedding. Did you hear about it? It was really something.

You would have loved the men's outfits. They wore that latest style for weddings. Purple tuxedos.

Isn't that fantastic? And you should have seen the shirts they wore. They were avocado green with ochre-colored ruffles down the front. Ochre? Well, you and I might call it muddy orange, but you know Sally.

She always says things just right. The ochre was to please the groom's mother, because that was the color of her dress. Oh, and their shoes? Mary, have you ever seen avocado-colored lizard-skin shoes? They redded them for the occasion, you know.

Sally's mother told me that, and I guess we better not say too much about it. You know how critical people can be. The bridesmaids were outstanding in their orange dresses with lavender polka-dotted ruffles.

And the bride was pretty, too. It's the first time I've ever seen a bride carrying hydrangeas. But Sally certainly has a style all of her own.

Oh, do you really have to leave, Mary? I wanted to tell you about the recession. Even the candy mints carried out the color scheme. They were purple and green.

Maybe you and I can pay Sally a visit someday. I'm just dying to see her apartment, because with tastes like hers, I can imagine what it will be like. Well, bye, Mary.

Well, that gives you an example of a conversation that really hasn't accomplished very much, has it? Let no worthless communication proceed out of your mouth, but rather that which is good to the use of edifying, to the use of edifying that as the occasion may need, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

Okay, now, what do we learn from the Word of God as to how to carry on a conversation? I'd like to suggest the first key. Take the initiative in asking meaningful questions.

Take the initiative in asking meaningful questions. In this way, you draw out people. The Lord Jesus did that when he was here on earth, didn't he? He was always asking perceptive questions.

He never asked a question because he needed the answer. His questions were always asked to teach others. Can you think of some of those questions he asked? He asked, whom do men say that I am? Well, it was very important for the disciples, for Peter at Caesarea Philippi, and for all of them to realize who he really was.

If he were just another man, if he'd just won in a series, if he'd just won among equals, then they certainly wouldn't go out and live and die for him. But if he was the unique son of God, then they were on the winning side, and nothing that could happen could turn back the tide of victory. So, he asked them that question.

He drew them out. Peter came forward with that wonderful answer, I know who you are. You're the Christ, the son of the living God.

And at that point, I believe the Lord Jesus had reached the high-water mark of his teaching ministry with the disciples. From then on, he went on to the cross. What other questions did he ask? He asked, what think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? That's a great question, wasn't it? On another occasion, he said, why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say? And so, the Lord Jesus used questions to draw people out and to teach them as well, and we should do the same.

I can remember having the privilege of being in the company of Dr. Ironside years ago. In fact, I was driving him across the Bay Bridge in California. I think I could take you to the spot on the bridge.

And he said, Bill, what do you think 1 Corinthians 6:4 means? He said, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church. Imagine asking me. I didn't even know there was a problem there.

And he wants to know what I think it means. But you know, it's that portion of the word of God dealing with Christians going to law against other Christians. And it says in the King James Version, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.

He said, what do you think that means? Well, I didn't even flounder around. I just confessed I didn't know what it meant, you know. It does seem strange, doesn't it, that Paul should tell the Christians to judge these matters as they arise among Christians, to set those to judge who are least esteemed in the church.

And then after I had confessed my ignorance, he said, well, do you think it might mean this? Do you think it might be a question instead of a statement? Do you set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church? In other words, do you take your law cases to ungodly judges who have no standing in the church as such? We as Christians, we're going to judge angels someday, and here you are running off with your quarrels and disputes to men of the world. Do you set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church? Well, you know, I never forgot that. As I say, I could take you to the place and the bridge where that conversation took place.

What was he doing? He was teaching me. He was teaching me. In a very gracious way, he was sharing the word of God with me.

What a wonderful thing that is, isn't it? That's what we should be doing. That's what older Christians should be doing with younger Christians all the time. Our speech should be meaningful.

It should be worthwhile. It should be edifying. It should be appropriate that it may minister grace to the hearers.

Say, well, how do I do that practically? Well, I think we have to be before the Lord about it, to tell you the honest truth, but there are ways. Supposing you meet a Christian for the first time, what do you say? Well, you can say, you know, I'd be interested to hear about your conversion. That's always worth talking about, isn't it? I think that's what heaven's going to be a lot about.

I really think in heaven that, among other things, we're going to be tracing the marvelous dealings of God in grace in the lives of his people. Everybody here who's a believer has an interesting story to tell. Everybody.

And you can draw it out of a person by asking questions. I don't think I've ever heard of your conversion. Could you tell me about your conversion? Another question you could ask is, have you had any thrilling answers to prayer lately? That's a good question, isn't it? You say, well, supposing they don't.

Well, at least you've created the idea in their minds that we should be having answers to prayer all the time. Another question I like to ask people is, have you read any good books lately? You know, Mr. Wilson, just up here with those books, made my mouth water. I almost thought I'd intercept him before he got back to the bookstore with some of those books.

But really, the books that have been the greatest blessing in my life have been books that other people have read and recommended to me. So, that's a good subject for conversation. You say, well, supposing you meet an unsaved person.

How do you start a conversation with them? Well, remember Paul Little sometimes asked people the question, would you say that you're a Christian or on your way to becoming one? You've got an in for the gospel, don't you? It's easy from then on to start a witness for the Lord Jesus. And I believe that if we're really exercised before the Lord about this, he'll give us good questions to ask people so that the conversation won't ramble, so that it won't drift, so that it won't be taken up with trivia, but to really count for time and for eternity. Okay, second key.

Be a good listener. Showing a sincere interest in what the other person is saying. This is very important.

Be a good listener. You've asked them a question. You've asked a question.

Listen carefully. Listen the person out. Dale Carnegie, in a recent article I read, told of how he asked a question of a man, and the man started and he never came up for air, you know.

Dale just sat there listening to him, and the man went away and said to a friend, that Dale Carnegie is sure a good conversationalist. That's good, isn't it? He was a good listener. He was a good listener.

Philippians 2, 3, In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. I have a friend in the Midwest, and when you meet him and talk with him, he hangs on your words sincerely, and he gives you the impression that meeting you and listening to you is the greatest thing that has happened to him all day, and everybody loves him. Everybody loves him.

He's a good listener. Sometimes somebody starts to talk, and we interrupt them, you know, before they really had a chance to tell the story. I've been guilty of that.

Somebody starts talking, and I think I know what they're getting to, and I interrupt them before I hear the full story, and you can make some very bad judgments. Perhaps this will serve as an illustration of that. Don't jump to conclusions before you hear all the facts.

A lady invited several friends to a mushroom steak dinner. When her maid opened the can of mushrooms, she discovered a slight scum on the top. Since the guests were expected at any moment, the lady suggested, Give the dog a little, and if he eats it, it's probably all right.

The dog licked it and begged for more so the dinner was completed. After the main course, the maid came in to serve the dessert, but her face was ashen white. She whispered in her employer's ear, Ma'am, the dog's dead.

There was only one thing to do, and the lady did it. She called the doctor to come with the stomach pump. Some time later, the guests were reclining after the doctor had left, in various stages from the use of the stomach pump.

The lady called the maid and asked, Where's the dog now? The answer came, Out on the front steps, ma'am, where he fell after the car hit him. He that answereth the matter before he heareth it, the shame and folly to him. But we oftentimes do it.

A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he gets to know something. There's not a Christian alive that I can't learn something from. Do you believe that? Every believer is a member of the body of Christ.

Every believer contributes something to the body of Christ. And some Christians in other fellowships that might be looked down on, I can learn from them fervency in prayer. I can learn from them simplicity of life.

I can learn many, many other things. I've never met a Christian yet that I couldn't learn something from. And so, hear the person out.

A good listener looks at the person who's speaking instead of letting his gaze wander all around the room. He doesn't interrupt with every random thought that comes to his mind. And this is a terrible temptation for some of us.

He doesn't sigh or yawn, and he responds with smiles and notes of approbation. So, that's the second key. Listen carefully.

Now, I think the third key is this comment on what has been said. See, you get your opportunity now. You've asked your questions, you've listened carefully, now you have the opportunity to comment.

And in commenting, you can edify. Maybe what has been said is not well balanced. This is especially true when we're young.

We latch on to an interpretation, for instance, of Scripture. We latch on to a conclusion, and we can't see anything else. But as you get older, you realize there are other viewpoints, too.

And in commenting on what has been said, oftentimes you can balance the subject out. When you're young, you know all the rules. When you're older, you know a few of the exceptions.

And in commenting, you can bring these out. Be a good commenter. The next key, I think, is this.

Always seek to edify. Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if we could walk away from all our conversations and feel that we had edified somebody in the process? A lot of illustrations come to my mind in this regard. First of all, the Lord Jesus himself, always seeking to edify, taking things from nature around him and drawing spiritual lessons.

I believe that everything that we look at, everything in nature, has a spiritual lesson connected with it. The Lord Jesus spoke of winds and sea and sky and waves and birds and grain and weather and made it his delight to bring heaven and earth together. He really did.

And there are a lot of Christians who do that, and I believe it's a skill that you and I can develop. I remember one day standing outside the assembly in LaGrange, Illinois, and dear Fred Elliott was there. He was standing talking to me.

Fred Elliott from Portland, Oregon. And we were talking there, and suddenly our conversation was drowned out by the California Zephyr going by on the tracks nearby. Two huge diesel engines just zooming past us, you know.

And Fred Elliott tapped my shoulder and he said, Power, brother, but nothing like the power that raised him from the dead. Well, you know, that was a wonderful experience for me. I thought it was the California Zephyr, but to him it was an object lesson of power and made him think of the greatest display of power that the universe has ever known, the power that raised the Lord Jesus from the dead.

Isn't that a great thing? To be able to see these illustrations about you in nature and in all of life about us and draw lessons from it. It's good to find out the person's own interests and draw spiritual applications from that. You need a carpenter, a fellow who does carpentry.

What makes me think of my Savior, doesn't it, since how he came into the world and served as a carpenter in Nazareth for those silent years. My, what a wonderful thing. I've often told the story that I was asked to speak at a hospital in Nazareth some years ago, a Christian hospital.

They have a little chapel, and when I got up to speak, instead of standing behind a pulpit like this, I was standing behind a carpenter's bench. And it was a lovely reminder that our Savior served as a carpenter, that a carpenter's bench was his pulpit in Nazareth so many years ago. And someone has beautifully said that if there had been a sign over his carpenter's shop, it probably would have said, My yokes fit well.

Well, he could bring some of those things out if you need a carpenter, couldn't you? And this is true. If we exercise ourselves along this line, we can draw out spiritual lessons, find out the person's interest, and make spiritual applications. And in all of these things, we should strive to be a thermostat, as someone has said, and not a thermometer.

A thermometer reflects the temperature about us, but a thermostat determines the temperature, and in conversation we can be either. Maybe the conversation becomes very light and very shallow, or we can go on with it, or we can seek to raise the temperature at that particular time. Next key, praise whenever you can.

Praise whenever you can do so sincerely. A lot of us are afraid of praising one another. We forget that there's a difference between praise and flattery.

Flattery is when it's not true, and you know it's not true and you say it anyway. That's flattery. But praise is sincere, and you find the Apostle Paul doing this in all of his epistles, I think, but the epistles of the Galatians.

He starts off, if he can find something commendatory in the lives of the Christians, he doesn't hesitate to say it. Well, we shouldn't either. In fact, it isn't a bad thing to set as a goal in life, every day of life, to seek to raise someone's spirit.

A lot of people really go through life and receive very little approbation for what they do so faithfully behind the scenes. Try to speak a word of praise here at the conference to some who have served so faithfully and so devotedly and so sacrificially. Next key, be positive, not negative.

Thankful, not complaining. It says that in Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 4, neither filthiness, nor foolish jesting, nor foolish talking, nor jesting which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks. Next key, speak the truth in love.

A man can speak the truth and it can be a very one-sided testimony if it's spoken in bitterness or harshness. If we wash the brethren's feet with scalding water or ice-cold water. But the balance of Scripture is to speak the truth in love.

Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 15. And then I think another very helpful key with regard to our conversation is this, Colossians 4, 6. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt. The balance of Scripture is absolutely lovely.

Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt. And you see this in the conversation of the Lord Jesus. He's speaking to the woman of Samaria.

He says, give me to drink. I'll tell you, that was unspeakable grace for a Jew to say that to a Samaritan woman. It just wasn't done.

That's all. There was this terrible racial barrier between the two peoples. And the Lord Jesus comes and he just sweeps them aside and he says to the Samaritan woman, give me to drink.

Let your speech be always with grace. And then he said to her a little later, go call thy husband, seasoned with salt. The perfect balance was there.

And she felt the salt, too. And it was for her eternal welfare she came to the Lord and went back into the city and said, come see a man that told me all things that ever I did. You find it, too, when the Lord Jesus was dealing with a woman who was taken in the act of adultery.

He said, neither do I condemn thee. That's the grace. Go and sin no more.

That's the salt. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt. And we can truly sit at the feet of the Lord Jesus and just study his conversation.

It was morally perfect, every word of it. He never came to the end of the day and wished he hadn't said something that he had said or wished he had said something that he hadn't said. The absolute perfection

of the Lord Jesus.

We can learn so much from him. And then a final key to effective conversation is this, try to involve strangers or quiet persons in the conversation. There are some who are willing to sit back and let others do all the talking, and yet they're interesting, too.

I sometimes take some of the interns. Every year, in fact, we take them out to a convalescent home. And before we go in, I say, look, now every one of these persons, every one of these aged Christians is an interesting story if you're just willing to sit and listen to it.

And so I go in and I ask a few questions of some of these dear old saints, and the young people are absolutely enthralled to hear. They're the marvelous dealings of grace, the leadings of God in their lives. Well, this is true of quiet persons, people who are more or less wallflowers, people who hold in the background, just try to draw them out, involve them.

And another good thing to do is involve children in the conversation. You can really learn a lot from the little ones. And sometimes they come up with some things that you never forget just because you're drawing them out.

I was talking to a little fellow once about when we get to heaven, you know, and he was asking, well, will we see God when we get to heaven? And I said, well, God is spirit, and with these natural eyes of ours, we can't see spirit. And he wasn't satisfied at all. I mean, he just let me know that that didn't satisfy him.

He said, I know, but will we see God when we get to heaven? And I went through this abstruse theological explanation once again, you know, that with natural eyes you can't see a spirit being. God is a spirit being. He took a deep sigh, and he said, maybe when we get to heaven we'll have bigger eyes.

That's something that day. I really do. And so these are some keys that should help us.

Now, I know when you go out from this meeting, you're all going to be afraid to talk to anybody else. Well, I don't think it's going to come overnight with any one of us, but I think it's good to plant these seeds in people's minds, don't you? And what a wonderful thing it is that if we all went forth from the meeting, my first message here at the conference, I said that the thing that I like to do is to provoke your will. Well, here I'd like to provoke your will with regard to your conversation, that we might be before the Lord, that we might be exercised to become proficient in edifying conversation, in conversation that will help other people onward in their journey to heaven, and to avoid the trivia, and to avoid taking up time with things that really won't matter a hundred years from today.

Now, Brother Frank's going to lead us in that lovely hymn, Take My Life, with special attention to the words, Take My Lips, and then we'll close in prayer afterwards. Number is 548. 548.

We'll sing verses one and three, please. Lord Jesus, thoughts of his sojourn in this veil of tears, the tale of love, unfolded in those years of sinless suffering and patient grace, we love again and yet again to trace. We think especially tonight of his conversation, how meaningful, how productive, how fruitful, how edifying it was, and how his words come weaning on to us, down through the centuries in the sacred scriptures.

Father, we pray that you will set a watch before our lips. We pray, Lord, that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts might be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Help us to use this faculty to dedicate it and consecrate it in a special way to your glory and to the good of

others.

Teach us, Lord, to be directive in our conversation, to be purposeful, that it might be appropriate and edifying and good and not worthless. Help us, Lord. We need your help.

We ask it in the Savior's precious name. Amen.

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