
Speaking Redemptively

by Paul David Tripp

I was in high school working my first job and dealing with a big problem outside the home for the first time. Coworkers were stealing and damaging property. I knew who was guilty, but the boss did not. I did not want to be part of what was going on, nor did I want to be blamed for something I did not do. I knew I needed to talk to my boss and possibly my coworkers, but I was afraid. I got up the courage to talk to my dad about what was going on. He agreed that I needed to talk to those involved and then he said to me, "Be careful, son, to choose your words carefully." It was a nice way to summarize all that it means to communicate with purpose and control.

Speaking redemptively is all about choosing our words carefully. It is not just about the words we say but also about the words we have chosen not to say. Speaking redemptively is about being prepared to say the right thing at the right moment and exercising self-control. Speaking redemptively is refusing to let our talk be driven by passion and personal desire but communicating instead with God's purposes in view. It is exercising the faith needed to be part of what God is doing at that moment.

When Words Destroy

Sam and Belinda were people with lots of insight, yet they had never been able to solve the problems in their own relation-

ship. By the time we began to meet together, the struggles in their marriage were severe. Sam had moved out for two weeks to a month three separate times in the previous two years. Belinda had gone once for an extended "vacation" to her parents' home. Here was a Christian couple, married for twenty years, with a solid understanding of Scripture and lots of insight into one another, yet they could not solve their own problems.

The first time we got together, you couldn't have cut the tension with a knife. It would have taken a chainsaw! Sam was so angry that immediately after I prayed, he stood up and said, "I don't know why I am here! I know exactly what is wrong with our relationship. I've told Belinda a hundred times. She refuses to listen and plays the victim. I have no interest in sitting here and rehashing every horrible thing that has happened between us over the last twenty years! I just can't do this!" And with those words he left. I excused myself to Belinda and followed Sam to his car, eventually convincing him to return.

There was much truth in what Sam had said. He *did* have a lot of insight into the problems in his marriage. He *had* told Belinda many times things that she simply did not hear. Belinda *did* take on the role of a victim in those moments of confrontation. Sam *had* been forced again and again to rehash awful scenes that had taken place between them. Yet with all of the analysis and all of the talk, Sam had been anything but an instrument of change in Belinda's life. In fact, the fruit of Sam's talk was a wife who was more the embittered victim than ever.

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With all of his insight, Sam was never part of what the Lord was seeking to do in Belinda's life. Rather, he stood in the way of the Lord's work, and he consistently gave the devil huge opportunities.

Both Belinda and Sam had brought things into the marriage that contributed to their problems. Belinda's father was a brutally legalistic and critical man. Belinda watched her mother get verbally beaten night after night at the supper table as her father would criticize her housework, her cooking, her vocabulary, her looks, and even her voice ("that whiny screech of yours"). There had been many nights when Belinda would either cry herself to sleep or think of ways to repay her father for what he had done to her mom.

When they began courting, Sam realized that Belinda tended to be overly sensitive, and this would sometimes irritate him. But since there were so many other

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things that he liked about Belinda, he tried to overlook it. He had little idea that he was marrying a woman who was bitter, self-protective, fearful, and determined to do whatever was necessary to keep herself from going through the "hell" her mom had experienced.

Sam's parents, by contrast, had a wonderful relationship. His mom and dad regularly expressed their appreciation for one another. When they did quarrel, they would not only seek one another's forgiveness but also the forgiveness of any children who had witnessed the quarrel. In Sam's family, failure wasn't considered the end of the world; rather, you would be encouraged to get up and try again. Sam had always hoped that he could have a marriage like his parents'. He dreamed of those great times around the Christmas tree, this time with him as the dad. He married Belinda with this dream in view.

It was not a mistake of God's sovereignty that Sam and Belinda got together. It was God's wise redemptive purpose to use their relationship as a workroom for his ongoing work of sanctification. In this relationship, hearts would be exposed and changed. This was God's purpose. But Sam didn't marry with the gospel in view; his eyes were on his dream. Belinda didn't marry with the gospel in view either; her eyes were on her fears. So neither of them thought or spoke redemptively to the other when Sam began to see his dream crumble and

Belinda began to see her fears realized.

Yes, Sam knew that Belinda always seemed able to hear criticism even when it wasn't there. And Belinda knew that Sam always seemed disappointed because his real family didn't match up to the family of his dreams. But despite all the insight, things between them got progressively worse over the years. The talk that surrounded their difficulties only added layers of hurt and complication. Instead of demanding change in one another, Sam and Belinda needed to learn what it means to speak redemptively in the face of disappointment, hurt, failure, and sin—all common experiences in a fallen world.

Why Words Destroy

How do we understand Belinda and Sam's inability to solve the problems in their relationship? What is the pathway to change for them? What does it mean for them, and us, to *choose our words*, to speak redemptively?

A pointed passage in Galatians exegetes Sam and Belinda's relationship. It is followed by another passage that points the way to change. Both passages define what it means to choose our words so that we may be part of what the Redeemer is doing in our lives and in others.

Let's begin by looking at what has gone wrong with Belinda and Sam. Our diagnostic passage is Galatians 5:13-15.

You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

The three parts of this passage can help us understand what is wrong with Sam and Belinda's relationship, particularly in the area of their communication.

1. "Do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

If you had asked Belinda and Sam if their relationship was based on an indulgence of the sinful nature, they would have emphatically said "no"—but they would have been emphatically wrong. Their relationship and their communication were not shaped by the rule of love. They sorely lacked the servant posture that is urged in this passage.

They did not ask God how they could be used to encourage their spouse and support what God was doing in the other's life. They did not think about how they could "spur one another on to love and good

deeds" (Heb. 10:24). They did not look for ways to comfort, encourage, warn, or teach the other person. They did not view difficulty as an opportunity to minister God's grace. They did not look for ways to help the other person carry his or her load. They did not choose words that would encourage unity, love, and mutual ministry. Sam and Belinda looked to be served. He wanted to enjoy his dream. She wanted insulation from her fears. Thus they did not look for ways to serve.

It is here that this passage is particularly helpful because it tells us that the opposite of serving in love is not a *lack* of love and a *lack* of service, but an active *indulging* of the sinful nature! Either I am living as a ser-

Our most significant human relationship (marriage) takes place in the middle of life's most significant process (sanctification).

vant of the Lord and accepting His call to serve those around me or I am living to gratify the cravings of the sinful nature and expecting others to satisfy those cravings as well. Although Belinda and Sam would have initially disagreed, they came to understand that they had entered their relationship with selfish desires at the core.

Sam was pursuing his goal of the perfect wife and family. Because of this he immediately became disappointed and angry when he saw Belinda as an obstacle to his goal. Belinda came into the marriage with the personal goal of self-protection. Her relationship and communication with Sam were dominated by a constant focus on self. (How is the world treating me?) Because of this self-protection goal, she picked apart everything Sam said or did, and she was always able to find something that was insensitive, critical, neglectful, or "abusive." Then, in her disappointment, she lashed out in anger against Sam.

James 4:1,2 explains how Belinda and Sam's desires affected the dynamics of their relationship. "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but you don't get it." Theirs was a relationship of constant conflict because their two hearts were ruled by the desires of the sinful nature. James talks about desires that battle within, desires that wage war to establish control over people, resources, "territory." The battle between the desire for the perfect family and

the desire for self-protection had taken over Sam and Belinda's marriage. The result was, as James describes, constant conflict.

2. "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

This also offers a significant insight into the relationship. The problems in Sam and Belinda's relationship were not fundamentally horizontal (person to person), but fundamentally vertical (person to God). If I am living for God's glory, if I hold this as a more fundamental personal goal than my own happiness, if my love for Him stands above my love for anyone or anything else, including myself, then my practical goal in life will be to please God in everything I do and say wherever He puts me. One sure fruit of such a heart commitment to God is that I will love my neighbor as myself. The First Great Command always precedes and determines the keeping of the Second. I will never love my neighbor as myself if I am not first loving God above all else.

James 4 is again helpful here. In verse 4, in the midst of his discussion of the causes and cures of human conflict, James introduces the concept of spiritual adultery. Adultery occurs when the love that was promised to one is given to another. Spiritual adultery occurs when the love that belongs to God is given over to some aspect of the created world (see Romans 1:25). James says something extremely helpful as we seek to understand the relationship between Sam and Belinda: human conflict is rooted in spiritual adultery! When a desire for a certain thing replaces love for God as the controlling force in my heart, the result will be conflict in my relationships. Conflict has vertical roots that produce the horizontal fruit of fighting and quarreling. Love for God that makes me want to keep His law will always result in practical love toward my neighbor.

3. "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by one another."

This last part of Galatians 5 is an apt description of the daily conversation between Belinda and Sam. They bit and devoured one another with words. Their communication never built up, strengthened, or encouraged. Rather, they were skilled in taking chunks out of one another. Sam knew the places where Belinda was tender and vulnerable, and he would go after those places whenever he saw her in the way of his dream. Belinda knew where she could hurt Sam, and she could devour his joy or hope with a few well-placed words.

Their words were critical, condemning, manipulative, threatening, judgmental, selfish, malicious, demanding, ruthless, and vengeful. Their words

revealed that Sam and Belinda did not need a radical change in their vocabulary as much as they needed a radical change at the level of the heart. This would fundamentally alter the way they spoke to each another.

The issue was not that they came into their marriage with problems. This is true of all of us; moreover, God *designed* marriage that way. This most significant of human relationships exists not primarily for our pleasure but as a means of His continuing work of sanctification, that we might be for the praise of His glory. It is no accident that our most significant human relationship (marriage) takes place in the middle of life's most significant process (sanctification). God has designed it this way for His glory and the good of His children!

It would be wrong for Sam and Belinda to say that their marriage came to this awful state because they were cursed with unusual difficulty. The problem was not that they had problems. The core issue was the way the desires of their hearts dictated their response to each other in the midst of those problems. Because they were living for themselves and not for God, they bit and devoured one another, almost to the point of destruction. Sam had been verbalizing doubt about God's faithfulness and love, and Belinda had quit going to church altogether. Their faith lay wounded under the wreckage of their conflict.

Hebrews says that the Bible is able to expose the "thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb. 4:22f). Galatians 5 does exactly that for Sam and Belinda. Their relationship was not ruled by the law of love but by the desires of the sinful nature. Because God was not in control of the system, they entered every situation looking to have their own dreams, desires, and demands fulfilled. In their anger and disappointment with one another, they beat one another with words. Their words tore at the fabric of their relationship because the fabric of their faith had already been torn in their hearts.

Speaking Words of Redemption into a World of Sin

Sam and Belinda show us that speaking redemptively is not a superficial matter of choosing the right vocabulary, but a fundamental heart commitment to choose words that promote God's work in a particular situation. Belinda and Sam had lost sight of the real war that lies beneath human quarrels. They had begun to think that their battle *was* with flesh and blood, and so they fought each other to win the dreams that had gripped their hearts. Their chief weapons were their words. What would it have meant for Sam and Belinda to speak redemptively into this situation?

Galatians 5 continues to provide helpful answers.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful

nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us

Speaking redemptively begins with self-examination.

keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 5:16-6:2).

This passage provides a step-by-step guide for what it means to speak redemptively. Remember, speaking redemptively does not mean that we ignore the practical concerns of life. We cannot, because we will encounter them every day. Rather, speaking redemptively speaks to these concerns in a way that promotes the interests of the King in the following ways:

1. Speaking redemptively begins by recognizing the war within. (See verses 16,17.) As long as indwelling sin remains, there will be a war within our hearts (Rom. 7:7-15, Eph. 6:10-20, James 4:1-10). We must always live aware of this conflict because to forget the presence and power of indwelling sin will immediately lead to problems in our talk. This is *the* conflict, the basis of every other war we battle. We should never give in to thinking that our primary battle is with flesh and blood (see Eph. 6:10-12).

We must never allow ourselves to look at our husband, wife, parent, child, brother, sister, or friend as the enemy. When we do, our goal soon becomes horizontal

winning, and redemptive speaking goes out the window. There is only one enemy who is scheming, manipulating, tempting, deceiving, and masquerading to get us to forget the real battle and to tempt us to give in to the desires of the sinful nature. We defeat the work of this enemy when we speak to one another out of an active awareness of the real spiritual war within.

2. *Speaking redemptively means never giving in to the desires of the sinful nature as we talk.* (See verse 16.) All of us wrestle with a conflicting catalog of desires. When something has gone wrong, we may desire that an appropriate, godly solution be found, but other desires are operating as well. We may desire to assess blame or to separate ourselves from responsibility. We may desire to rehearse all the other times this person failed us or to have that person hurt as we hurt. We may desire to share the failure of this person with another. We may be jealous that someone else is getting the attention we think we deserve. We may feel bitter and filled with hatred toward someone who has consistently failed us. We may be filled with rage.

Speaking redemptively means saying no to any communication that would flow from these desires. Speaking redemptively does not start with examining the situation, the needs of the person(s) with whom we need to talk, or the Scripture passages that would give insight into what we should say. No, speaking redemptively begins with *self-examination*.

3. *Speaking redemptively means refusing to speak in any way that is contrary to what the Spirit is seeking to produce in me and others.* (See verses 16-18.) As a Christian, the most important thing in my life is the completion of God's work in me and others, to the praise of His glory. I never want to obstruct what He is doing as Redeemer in the little moments of life. I recognize that ultimately those moments do not belong to me but to Him. They are the workroom in which He does His work of sanctification. My job is to be a usable instrument in His redeeming hands. Any time I speak out of my own sinful desires, I am communicating in a way that is contrary to what the Spirit is seeking to produce in me.

4. *Speaking redemptively involves a willingness to examine how the fruit of the sin nature is present in my talk.* (See verses 19-21.) If I am seeking to live consistently with the Spirit's work in me and not give room for the enemy, I must be willing to examine my talk with the mirror of the Word of God. I want the "words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart" to be pleasing in the Lord's sight (Ps. 19:14). So I look for words of envy, jealousy, and pride. I look for words of faction, dissension, and division. I look for words of anger, rage, malice, and hatred. I look for words of self-

ishness, self-righteousness, self-protection and defensiveness. I look for words that evidence impatience, irritation, a lack of forgiveness, unkindness, and a lack of gentleness. I look for talk that is coarse or materialistic.

I do not examine myself with a morbid, discouraged attitude of self-criticism. I do it with joy, realizing that because of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, I do not have to live under the control of the sinful nature (Rom. 8:5-11). With joy I seek to please Him in every way in every situation! I want to speak in a way that is worthy of the calling I have received (Eph. 4:1).

5. *Speaking redemptively means saying "no" to any rationalization, blame-shifting, or self-serving arguments that would excuse talk that is contrary to the work of the Spirit, or that would make this talk look appropriate or acceptable for a kingdom citizen.* (See verses 19-21.)

I was a young pastor of a struggling little congregation with huge counseling needs. It seemed as if I never had a quiet moment at home without someone calling me with the latest, greatest crisis. I dreaded hearing the phone ring at night and dreaded even more the words, "Paul, it's for you." Although I did not realize it, increasingly I viewed certain people in the congregation as obstacles to what I wanted rather than objects of the calling I had gladly accepted from the Lord. I can remember getting calls and saying to my wife, "Who is it *now*?!" but then answering with a friendly, pastoral "Hel-lo."

One Saturday afternoon I was relaxing at home with my wife and children when I got a call from a desperate young man. He had been desperate for a long time and seemed to have the gift for calling me at all the wrong moments. He was always discouraged, always asking for help, yet always resistant to the help that was offered. Nothing seemed to work for him. He professed to have tried everything without benefit. He was at one of the seedy local motels, saying that he was going to end his life once and for all. He said that unless he had a reason to live, he would kill himself before the day was over. I found out where he was, asked my wife to pray, and got in my car to go and talk to him.

I prayed on the way, and I knew that my wife was praying, but there was a war going on within me. I *was* that catalog of conflicting desires! I really disliked this man. I disliked his humped-shouldered posture. I disliked his whiny voice. I disliked his need to always be the center of someone's attention. I hated the way he had spit back at me every insight I had offered. I resented the time he had taken away from my family and other aspects of my ministry. And I was angry that I

had to go once more to put him back together. As I drove, my thoughts were pulled back and forth in the war between pastoral concern and personal resentment.

I arrived at the motel, and we sat in a dingy room that smelled of smoke and sweat. He gave me his normal litany of complaints. I began to respond with truths from the gospel when he interrupted me and said, "You're not going to trot out that stuff again, are you? Don't you have anything new to say?" I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Here I had willingly left my family out of concern for him, and he mocked my efforts to help without any appreciation! I lost it, giving in to the rage that had been building for weeks. I verbally tore him limb from limb. I told him exactly what I and the congregation thought of him. I laid as much guilt on him as I could, told him to get up off his duff and do something right for a change, prayed for him(!) and left. I was seething as I drove away.

It didn't take long for conviction to set in as I drove home. It also didn't take long for rationalization and self-excusing arguments to set in right behind them. By the time I arrived home, I was convinced that I had spoken like one of the prophets of old, proclaiming a "thus says the Lord" in a sinful and rebellious place. I had convinced myself that God would use this dramatic moment of truth to create lasting change in this man's life. I arrived home, and my wife, who had been praying, asked me how the time had gone. I told her that I had spoken to him more strongly than I had ever spoken to anyone in my ministry. I made sure I used the prophet analogy with her. She immediately said, "It sounds to me like you got angry and blew it." The moment she said those words, I saw my self-serving rationalizations for what they really were, and I was filled with remorse. As it turned out, God used my subsequent confession of my own sin and struggle with this man to begin to turn him around.

God wants us to not only listen for talk that is contrary to the work of the Spirit but also for ways we rationalize sinful talk to make it acceptable to our consciences.

6. Speaking redemptively means speaking "in step with the Spirit." (See verse 25.) Keeping in step with the Spirit means a commitment to speak in a way that is consistent with His work in me and that encourages His work in another. In this passage the Spirit's work is made quite clear. He is working to produce in us a harvest consistent with the character of Christ: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Speaking in step with the Spirit means that as an act of faith and submission, I hold my speaking up to the standard of this spiritual fruit.

And I look at the difficult situations of life as sovereignly-given opportunities to see this fruit mature in me by His grace. Difficulties are not obstacles to the development of this fruit, but opportunities to see it grow.

Years ago there was a man in our congregation who was particularly critical of my ministry. I struggled inside whenever I saw this man or even thought of him. I can remember being relieved when I would arrive at a church event and discover that he was not there. I was

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also aware that he was not keeping his opinions to himself. He had begun to gather a group of like-minded folk around himself. Our congregation was not large, and thus the discontent was becoming more and more obvious. I decided that it was time to ask this man if we could talk. I told my wife that I was planning to talk with Pete (not his real name). She immediately asked me what I was planning to say. As I shared my thoughts with her, I could sense that she was responding negatively, so I asked her what was wrong. She said, "Before you can deal with him, Paul, you have to deal with yourself. It sounds to me like you hate this man. I don't think any good can come out of confronting him with his wrong until you deal with your own attitudes."

I wanted to think that Luella was just another person who was misunderstanding and misjudging me, but she wasn't. Truer words have never been spoken. I hated this man. I hated the controlling effect he had on me. I hated the fact that he had turned others against me. I hated the way his criticism had caused me to second-guess everything I did as a pastor! I hated the way he had destroyed my dream for my ministry and our congregation. I hated the arrogant smirk on his face. I didn't really want to deal with him. I just wanted him out of my life!

Luella was right. I was in no condition to be an instrument of the Spirit in Pete's life. I was in no position to speak redemptively. I *was* totally out of step with the Spirit in regards to this relationship. I *did* need to deal with me first. I *did* need to examine my heart and confess the sin that was there, and I *did* need to determine to speak in a way that was consistent with the fruit the Spirit was working in me.

As I examined my heart, there was more there that

needed to change than I had ever thought. My problem was not just hatred and anger, but sins at an even deeper level. Much of what had been motivating me in ministry was not the work of the Lord, but my personal dream. I had dreamed of going into a tough area to minister and being successful in a way no one else had been. I had dreamed of being highly respected by an ever-growing congregation and, before long, the entire Christian community. I had dreamed of great numerical growth, of building a large, modern facility, and of leading the “mover-and-shaker church” in the region. Most of all, I had dreamed that I would be looked on as the one at the center of it all.

I hated this man because he was right! He was not right in the way he had dealt with his concerns about my ministry, but he was right in his insight into my

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of righteousness!*

pride. I *did* enjoy being at the center of every gathering. I *did* have the final opinion on every topic. I *was* frustrated when people would get in the way of my novel programs. I hated how slowly things moved and how negative people were. And I struggled with God for putting me in this hard place.

The very man I hated began to be an instrument of rescue in the hands of the Lord. Through Pete my selfish, arrogant dream was exposed and began to die. Under the heat of this trial, God showed me the sin in my heart in a new way. As I took several days to examine myself and this situation, I began to be thankful for the very man I had hated. I was not thankful for his sin, but I was thankful for the way God had used him in my life. As I became thankful, I began to listen to what Pete had said about me and the way he had said it. I realized that there were things God wanted me to learn even from this harsh messenger. Finally, as I listened to the way he communicated his thoughts, I discovered that he and I were a lot alike. Pete was proud, opinionated, vocal, and impatient. I had hated all those things but learned that they were present in me as well.

In those days God gave me a genuine, pastoral love for Pete; and when we talked, I was able to communicate to him in a way that was patient, kind, gentle, peaceful, and self-controlled. I was even able to go into this difficult talk with joy as I reflected on the good that the Spirit had done in me through him.

Speaking in step with the Spirit not only means

speaking in a way that is consistent with what the Spirit is doing in *me*; it also means speaking in a way that encourages the growth of this fruit in *you*. Frankly, before Luella spoke to me, I didn't care if God used me in Pete's life. There were only two things I cared about: I wanted to prove Pete wrong, and then I wanted him to leave our church and leave me alone! I had fallen into thinking that my struggle *was* with “flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:10-12). I saw Pete as the enemy to be defeated, and I had lost sight of the spiritual warfare going on beneath the surface. I did not want to serve Pete; I wanted him to support my dream. Even as his pastor, the last thing I wanted was to be a tool of redemption in his life. I had never even considered being a tool that the Spirit could use to produce good fruit in his life until my talk with Luella.

When I finally did talk with Pete, I had a radically different agenda from the one I had first discussed with my wife. I no longer wanted to “win.” I no longer wanted him to shut up and be a compliant part of my dream. I really did want to be used of God to produce the fruit of the Spirit in Pete. He came to our talk ready for battle. It was clear that he had prepared his weapons and rehearsed his defenses. But there was no battle. I told him that I was thankful for his insights; that through him the Spirit had really exposed my heart, and I asked for his forgiveness. Before I even had a chance to talk about him, he said, “Paul, I've been wrong too. I guess if I were honest I would have to say that I have hated you and I have looked for every opportunity to criticize you to others. I have been angry at you and angry at God for putting us in this congregation. I need your forgiveness.”

That night, for the first time in a long time, Pete and I spoke in step with the Spirit, and the Spirit produced new growth in each of us. But don't miss the point: it started with someone confronting me and encouraging me to examine my own heart before I confronted Pete. Speaking in step with the Spirit means taking time to listen, examine, reflect, and prepare. It means communicating out of a commitment to participate in the Spirit's continuing work of grace in our lives and others.

7. Speaking redemptively means giving no place to the passions and desires of the sinful nature. (See verses 24,16.) Pay careful attention to the words of verse 24: “Those who belong to Christ have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.” Notice that this is not a passive passage. It says that when we come to Christ, *we* crucify the passions and desires of the sinful nature. This passage directs us to consider an aspect of the gospel that is often omitted. The gospel is a glorious message of *comfort*, of sins forgiven, condemnation lifted, relationship with God reconciled, Spirit given, and

eternity guaranteed. But the gospel is also a *call* to forsake living according to the cravings of the sinful nature so that we might live for Christ. True salvation is not only about receiving comfort; it is also about answering the call. This once-and-for-all commitment to godly living, crucifying the passions and desires of the sinful nature, must then be lived out by the indwelling power of Christ in all of our relationships and situations.

There is no place where this commitment is more needed than in the area of our communication. If we were humbly honest, we would admit that much of what we say is driven by the passions and desires of the sinful nature, not by a commitment to the will and work of Christ. Husbands who let angry criticism fly at their wives, wives who give in to grumbling and complaining, children who lash out in anger against their parents, parents who in frustration beat their children with words, disappointed members of the body of Christ who slander their leaders are all giving way to the passions and desires of the sinful nature. The result is a harvest of bad fruit in broken relationships and unresolved, increasingly complicated problems.

To speak words that are shaped by the emotions and desires of the sinful nature is to deny both Christ's promise of freedom from sin's dominion and our commitment to live as those who *belong* to Him. Speaking redemptively means speaking out of the powerful self-control that Christ has given us, the One who broke the bonds of our slavery to sin and who gave us the gift of His indwelling Spirit. Our mouths can be instruments of righteousness! We *can* say "no" to the emotions and desires of the sinful nature.

8. Speaking redemptively means having a restorative view of relationships. (See chapter 6, verses 1 and 2.) Paul says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently."

Paul is talking about a condition that includes all of us this side of glory. We get "caught" in anger, pride, self-pity, envy, vengeance, self-righteousness, bitterness, lust, selfishness, fear and disbelief. And either we don't even know that we are caught or we don't know how to extricate ourselves. There are areas of sin to which we are blind or that are our particular theme of struggle. There will be a day when the final snare falls off and we will be *with* Christ forever! But until that time, we need to recognize that as sinners, we are easily caught in sin. Because of this, we need one another.

Paul then says, "You who are spiritual should restore him gently." When we are "keeping in step with the Spirit" (verse 25), we position ourselves to be one of His restorers.

Speaking redemptively means letting this restoration agenda direct our relationships. We are all tempted

to think that our relationships belong to us. We tend to view other people as our possessions. Parents fall into this with their children; then, in the teenage years, when the child fails, the parents are unable to see beyond their own anger and hurt to be agents of restoration for their own offspring! Husbands and wives believe that it is their mate's responsibility to make them happy. Life becomes a series of final exams. We judge people according to the way they respond to us, the way they affect us. We look for proper respect,

We are easily caught in sin. Because of this, we need one another.

love, appreciation, acceptance, and honor; and we find it very hard to continue in relationships where those things do not exist.

Paul is calling us to something radically different here. This new agenda has its roots in the fundamental recognition that our relationships do not belong to us but to God. Once we begin to think of our relationships this way, we begin to see the need for restoration all around us. When you're on a vacation and the children are quarreling in the back seat, there is more going on than your expensive vacation being ruined! The need for restoration is revealing itself. You can respond to this situation as an irritated parent whose children are robbing him of his vacation dream, or you can respond as a restorer who wants to be a tool in the hands of the great Restorer.

When husbands and wives disagree over the same old stuff once again, they need to do more than curse the fact that their marriage doesn't work or that the other person never has a clue. They need to discover where they are "caught" and they need to respond to one another, not with a demand agenda, but with a restoration agenda. The greatest work of human relationships is not the pursuit of human happiness but reconciliation to God and restoration to the image of His Son.

9. Speaking redemptively means speaking with humility and gentleness. (See chapter 6, verse 1.) Harsh talk ("Why don't you just get your act together?" "If you think I'm going to keep cleaning up your messes, you've got another think coming!") and prideful talk ("In my day," or "I just can't relate to people who do that!") in the face of another's weakness, temptation, and sin simply contradicts the message of the gospel.

Gentleness should be our natural response when we

see a brother or sister ensnared in sin. We must recognize that except for God's grace, we would be where they are. Thus we should respond to them with the same grace we have received. God loved us when we were unlovely. He has forgiven us in the face of repeated sin. In fact, it is His love that draws us out of the darkness toward His marvelous light. In our communication with one another, as we all struggle with the reality of remaining sin, it is vital that we mirror the compelling love of Christ. He is our only argument, our

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only hope. He alone is able to change our hearts. We want to talk in such a way that draws people to hope in Him.

We are also free to be gentle because we have given up any hope that human pressure, power, or logic can change the heart. It is never the loudness of our voice, the power of our words, the drama of the moment, the creativity of our illustrations, the strength of our vocabulary, the specter of our threats, or the grandeur of our gestures that causes a turning within people. Gentleness flows from knowing where our power lies. God can use whispered words to produce thunderous conviction in a heart. Yes, we want to think and speak well, but only because we want to be useful instruments in the hands of the One who *does* bring change, not because we trust our skills to produce it.

Gentle talk does not come from a person who is angry and looking to settle the score. It comes from the person who is speaking not because of what he wants *from* you but what he wants *for* you. I am able to speak gently only when I am not speaking out of personal hurt, anger, and bitterness but out of self-sacrificing, redemptive love. I speak to you, not because your sin has affected me, but because it has ensnared you. I long to see you freed from its snare. I am not on a mission of selfish confrontation but loving rescue. And I know that in some way we all need this rescue daily.

10. Speaking redemptively means other-centered living and other-centered communication. (See Gal. 6:2.) The picture here is of people on a journey. They are not just focused on what they have to carry but are looking around for those who need assistance. With these words, "Carry each other's burdens," Paul broadens his call to us. He calls us to look beyond personal comfort, success, and good to see the person struggling to carry his load, and to share the weight. This is the way of Christ.

We are also called to speak to one another out of this "burden-bearing" mentality. When we see someone struggling with weakness, we point him to the strength he has in Christ. When someone is ignorant, we speak to her with wisdom-giving words of truth. When someone is fearful, we talk of the God who is an ever-present help in trouble. When someone grieves, we seek to bring words of comfort. When another is discouraged, we seek to bring words of hope. When feeling alone, we greet them with expressions of our love and Christ's presence. When angry, we point to a God of righteousness, vengeance, and justice. When engaged in conflict, we seek to speak as peacemakers and reconcilers. When anxious, we point to the Sabbath of rest that Christ had given His children.

Speaking redemptively means choosing our words carefully. We do not want to indulge the passions and desires of the sinful nature. We do not want to provoke another to sin through our own conceit and envy. We do not want to bite and devour one another with words. Rather, we are committed to serve one another in love with our words. We want to speak in step with what the Spirit is seeking to produce in us and in others. We want to speak in a way that is consistent with His fruit and that encourages the growth of that fruit in others. Finally, we want to speak as gentle, humble agents of restoration, as burden-bearers who are committed to live by Christ's rule of love.

What radical revival, reconciliation, and restoration would result in our churches, homes, and friendships if we carried this call into every relationship and every situation! How different things would be if we were consistently committed to speaking redemptively! How completely different Belinda and Sam's relationship would have been if they had answered God's call to speak to one another with words of redemption! How important it is for us to choose our words well!