

FAMILY GOD'S WAY
God's Plan for Communication

In 1991 comedian Steve Martin did a wonderful movie called "Father of the Bride." Maybe you've seen it, even though I was shocked to realize that it came out 30 years ago! (Where *does* the time go?) The movie is about all the fuss and troubles that a father goes through when his first-born, a daughter, is going to get married.

There is this one scene where the daughter, Annie, announces that the wedding's off. She can't marry her fiancé. Naturally, her dad tries to be comforting to his daughter who is in tears. He asks her, "What was it? Another girl?" She tells him, "No, nothing like that." It's their 8 month anniversary. So he bought her a gift for their first apartment. He gave her a ... *blender!* (Shock! Gasp!) She asked him, "Well, what's a gift like that supposed to mean?" He said he didn't understand. It's not supposed to mean anything. But she thinks he expects her to be little 1950's era housewife who stays home and is thrilled with getting kitchen appliances! She gets scared, and lashes out at him. He tells her she's over reacting. The argument escalates into a big fight. And before you know it, the wedding is off. All because he gave her a blender.

We laugh. But how many us have had fights at home over something not very big. Then the small issue gets turned into a big mountain. And before you know it, there's a knock-down drag out, open the drawers and dump out the contents, kind of fight!

If you've been part of a family for any length of time, I suspect we've all had some angry drawer-dumping episodes. Where the words got loud and ugly. The kids could hear it all from upstairs. Or maybe the kind of fights that are silent and icy. Whole family feels Antarctic express.

Maybe you called him that name that you know will just push his buttons so bad.

Or in the midst of some heated argument with your spouse, you all of a sudden play the D card. The D card trumps all. "Well, do you want a divorce?" You go from upset over tuna fish casserole to calling

it quits. The D card really puts the kibosh on communication, doesn't it?! Talk about not dealing with the real issues!

Sue and I both grew up in families where our parents' marriage lasted. Her parents argued loudly. They rattled the windows and rafters when they argued. Then they solved it and went on. In my family I once thought they didn't argue at all. In reality, they did, but I just didn't hear it. It was usually quiet and sometimes cold and icy.

A young couple were newly married. The bride grew up never hearing parents argue and fight. Soon after the wedding, she and her new husband had their first big argument. She called her parent's on the phone. Her father answered. She told him the story of what happened, of how they had a bad fight. She asked if she could come home. Her father responded to his daughter, "Sorry, you ARE home."

Every self-centered, sin-filled family has to handle conflict – or it will handle you. Everyone knows at least someone for whom conflict handled them, it got the best of the marriage. It started as a little annoyance. Then became a full-on conflict. Then came separate rooms, separate apartments, then lawyers determining visitation.

Other couples have the same conflict, the same fight, but they make it through and over the years grow closer. Why the difference?

Families who handle conflict, instead of letting conflict handle them, are families where everyone has decided that their long-term commitment is stronger than their short-term conflict. These are couples who **Decide that the Commitment made on the wedding day is stronger than any Conflict we face today.**

So when they fight – and every family is sinful and *does* fight – these families approach conflict differently. They use words not to BREAK the relationships, but to BUILD the relationships.

Now, let me say that if you are single, widowed, or divorced, even if you are living alone, you may be tempted to tune out from today's sermon. Yet, let me encourage you to tune in, because you will find that what we discover from God today you can use in any relationship. That will bring blessing and joy to you. And please listen so you are

prepared to share with others, especially the next generation, God's ways for family life.

Also, let me say again that if you are married or living together with family members, listen for yourself only. No elbows in the ribs. Apply God's Word to yourself. Period.

In families, when fights occur, what are the **Rules of Engagement ... so words do not ~~BREAK~~ the relationship.**

1. No Archaeology. No digging up old stuff, old arguments, and bringing it back up again. Once buried, leave the shovel in the garage. If you keep digging up each other's garbage and flinging it at each other, the only thing that happens is everyone ends up with rotten stinky garbage all over.

If you churn cream, you will produce butter.

If you twist a nose, you will produce blood.

And if you stir up anger, you will produce a fight." Proverbs 30:33

The writer is talking about direct results. Churn cream → get butter. Stir up anger (bring old arguments back up again) → you get a fight.

A subtle form of bringing up old arguments is when we say the words "you always" or "you never." Bringing up "always" or "never" quickly turns attention away from real issue. Instead of dealing with today's problem, suddenly you are arguing about when who did or didn't do what. Like this: "You always do that" "Oh Yeah?? Last July I didn't!" Stick with today's issue.

A second subtle form of archaeology is saying, "Oh yeah? Well you do it more than me!" Who cares who does what more often – point is have problem today that needs solving. **Forgive and Focus.**

I'm not saying that we don't discuss past years, problems you faced together, past victories won. Yes, share past. Yet share the past for healing purposes, not to hold it against other person.

Once forgiven, let it go. No archaeology. No digging up old junk.

A second "rule of engagement" for communication at home is **2. No triangles.**

Triangles happen when we try to get others in the family to take your side in an argument with another family member.

We've all seen when parents – usually unintentionally – involve the kids in a disagreement between the parents. Kids don't want to take sides between mom and dad. They want to be on BOTH your sides. They want you BOTH to win. They love you BOTH. They want the marriage to succeed.

When you put kids in the middle, they don't know what to do. Rips them apart. Exasperates them.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4 If you want to exasperate your kids, put them in the middle of your argument, involve them in your conflict.

Same goes for relatives, friends, co-workers. Don't involve them in your conflict. Don't talk about your conflict with others with the intent of proving you are right. First speak directly to one another. There is a time when we all need advice on what to do. And then clearly ask for advice, not agreement with your point of view. Don't put other people in the middle. Put your energy into fixing the problem, not involving others in it.

Third, **3. No time – bombs.**

When I was a kid I played with caps. I would hit them with baseball bats and rocks. I always got a thrill when they'd go "pop" As I got older, I got my hands on firecrackers, and some friends got bigger stuff – m-80's. Those m-80's can do serious damage. Do you know what the difference is between caps, firecrackers, m-80's. and a stick of dynamite? Just the amount. It's just the amount of gunpowder.

Some people shrug off problems at home. "It's no big deal," or "just forget about it" they say. Not talking about small conflicts each day, not solving them, is like saving up caps. They are just small issues, but when saved up over time, now there is a lot of gunpowder waiting to explode. So he's watching Dancing with the Stars and she comes in and changes channel to golf, and he goes ballistic. It ALL comes out! All of the feelings stuffed down inside come out at once. The anger is way out of proportion to what's an appropriate response for changing TV channel.

The Bible says: **Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Ephesians 4: 26-27**

In other words, it's better have small explosions every day. Face conflicts, talk about them, solve them – day after day. Instead of save it all up and have one big explosion.

The next “rule of engagement” is 4. **No name – calling.**

No “You (fill in the blank)” -- trying to keep this G rated. No F bombs. No using the B word. No cussing.

No “You’re just like your mother” or “You’re just like your father.”

Instead, use their given names. God guided Paul to write:

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. ... Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Ephesians 4:29,31

Paul seemed to know that name calling often turns vulgar, and so he later wrote: **Among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. Ephesians 5:3-4**

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but” words break spirits. When break one another’s spirit, you break the family, because a family starts with two spirits becoming one, and spreads to include everyone in the home. When the one-ness breaks, conflict wins.

The last “rule of engagement” so as not to break relationships at home is 5. **No hitting.** That should be obvious! God says in the Bible: **In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church Eph 5: 28-29**

Husbands, if you are in habit of hitting your wife. STOP. Not tomorrow, today. Wives, if being hit, get help.

Now, let’s turn to the positive. Let’s consider

Words filled with God’s grace BUILD the relationship.

1. **“Please” & “Thank you”**

Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:21

Submission is necessary in marriage and family life, because when you put sinful people under one roof, that’s one too many “I’s.” “I

want this. I need this. I have to have this.” Marriage is about putting my I under yours. And this spreads to the rest of the family.

Your relationship with Christ is the basis for your submission. It’s because I love the God who died for me, who gave His life for me, who gives me life that never ends, who makes me eternally victorious so that nothing can ultimately ever get to me, it’s because of that relationship He has given me, that I willingly submit to others at home.

We don’t submit to one another because she’s a great gal or he’s a great guy. That’s never totally true—unless you’re my wife, Sue.

I submit because that’s my natural place under Jesus.

And “Please” and “Thank you” are the most simple but profound submission words. They communicate I’m not over you. I can’t control you nor demand from you. As a response to Jesus’ serving me, I take that servant position with everyone. It definitely ought to be reflected in my marriage, and in our homes.

See how many times you can use please and thank you this next week.

A second phrase filled with God’s grace that builds relationships is **2. “I’m sorry I hurt you. Please forgive me.”** Jesus once said: **So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. Make peace with that person, then come back and offer your gift to God. Matthew 5:23-24**

Jesus doesn’t say, “If you have something against someone else....” Jesus says, “If you know someone has something against you.” If you know you have hurt him or her in some way, you need to take the initiative. “I’m sorry I hurt you. Please forgive me.”

See, so often when we hurt our spouses, we know they’re still going to hang around, so we blow off true apologies. We only give token words: “Sorry.” “Sorry.”

Not good enough. When our kids were little, they’d often say “Sorry!” We’d ask “You’re sorry for what?” It’s important that we say the what: I’m sorry that I hurt you. What I did hurt you. Please (there’s the submission word again) please forgive me.

True sorrow demonstrates true love.

A third phrase filled with God's grace that builds relationships is
 3. **"Please pray for me. How can I pray for you?"**

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience Colossians 1:9-11

I suspect few of us have asked our spouses how we could pray for them and even fewer have asked them to pray for us. Praying for one another is one of the best ways to love and care for each other in a Christ-centered home.

When you ask someone to pray for you, there's that submission thing again. You're admitting you don't have it all together. And when you ask how you can pray for your spouse or parent, or child, you're communicating servant love to them.

Paul prayed for the Colossians that they would live a life worthy of the Lord. A life worthy of what Jesus did for them. I'd like to live that kind of life, a legacy life, a life that leaves something significant behind. A life that leaves God's fingerprints on the lives of people, and His Spirit in their hearts.

I pray for Sue every day -- I don't ask her as often as I should what she'd like me to pray for. I pray for my family members everyday. Again, I should ask them what they wish for me to pray about for them.

It's a powerful thing when family members regularly pray for one another. And its very rewarding when you see how God answers your prayers.

Another phrase that builds relationships is: 4. **"You are a great ... (fill in the blank) kisser / lover / father / mother.**

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth – for your love is more delightful than wine. Song of Songs 1:2

The point is --- often we don't turn our intimate thoughts into spoken words. They just stay in here and don't get shared. It's the

sharing that communicates love. It's in sharing your heart that their heart can respond.

Compliment people. Like complimenting your co-workers in front of your boss, compliment your wife / your husband in front of your kids. Compliment your spouse each day – makes you – and your spouse – feel great – and focus on the good things God's given you in your relationship.

The most important grace-filled words that build the relationships in your home is: **5. "Let's go to church."**

You might say, "I'd rather take her out on a date." And I'm saying that by going to church weekly, you'll be reminded of this important message: **Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. Romans 15:7**

When you go to church as a couple, you see a whole bunch of other people who may look higher than you or lower than you. They may look richer than you or poorer than you. But I guarantee you they're wrestling with a lot of the same problems you're wrestling with.

If you are married, it's good to come to a place where all the married people are in the same boat -- they're *all* married to sinners. But it's even better to come to a place and hear how those sinners are accepted by God and called to accept each other. How God's love is not conditional upon change: *I'll love you if you I'll love you when you* How God's love to you not conditional upon revenge: *I'll love you after you pay.*

In Jesus, God accepts you as you are. When you bring the truth about your brokenness to God with a humble spirit, Jesus' death on the cross leads the Father to accept your brokenness and all. And His Spirit in you empowers you to do the same for others.

In your home, "Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you." When your spouse loses her figure or his money-making capacity, when she gets Alzheimer's and he gets disabled, "Accept one another, just as Christ accepted you."

Those are important words, friends. Those are life-giving words. You need to hear those words. All in your family need to hear them. Hear them regularly. You'll be reminded of God's grace to you, and it's

amazing how God's grace then has a way of sneaking into your spirit and mind, and filling up your words. And when your words / your communication is filled with God's grace, your words BUILD relationships // BUILD marriages – not break them.

Let me leave you with a challenge:

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

Write a letter using one or more of the five phrases filled with God's grace. Don't just say them. Put them on paper. Leave them on the pillow, the sink, the dashboard.

Proverbs 16:24 says: **Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.**

AMEN.