

Communication



Scripture notes that the tongue is small, but can have a large impact.^[1] Solomon wrote that *we will be blessed if we say the right things*,^[2] and because God wants us to be blessed, He has provided guiding principles in Scripture to help us in the area of communication. Listed below are five spiritual precepts:

1. **Think before you speak:** The phrase comes from Scripture, not from Benjamin Franklin (as many suppose). Proverbs 16:23 and Proverbs 18:20 encourage people to engage the mind before engaging the tongue. Speaking too quickly, without properly considering the impact of your words, can lead to “all kinds of trouble.” However, those who say the right things, in the right way, at the right time, will have “the king for his friend.”^[2]

Here is a truism: It is always easier to get into trouble than to get out of trouble. It is easier to say yes than to say no. It is easier to over-commit than to maintain a balanced life and schedule. Scripture cautions, think before you speak.

2. **Be honest:** Scripture is clear on this point (see Colossians 3:9, Titus 1:2. and John 8:44). Speaking the truth can at first be difficult, especially if this has not been your custom. However, speaking the truth brings great dividends. Like any new skill you are trying to master, speaking only truth becomes easier with time and practice. Those known for speaking truth are respected and tend to be extended more grace when mistakes are made and quickly acknowledged.

Additionally, honesty is key to establishing and maintaining quality relationships. Without honesty, relationships remain superficial and vulnerable to one party thinking the worst rather than giving the benefit of the doubt. Do not use truth as a club, but be committed to being honest.

Scripture notes that “*An honest answer is the sign of true friendship.*”^[3] Be gentle, be tactful, but be honest. Other verses which speak to this principle include Proverbs 10:10, Luke 17:3, Proverbs 24:26, and Proverbs 28:23.

- 3. Practice listening more than speaking:** Scripture notes we should be “quick to listen and slow to anger.”^[4] Remember, the best communication is two-way communication. A dialogue is better than a monologue. Ask questions. Show interest. Be polite. Be sincere. Good communication begins with good listening. Someone said, “A wise man is not always silent, but knows when to be.”

Remember the principle: *less is more*. Especially when you are angry, remember, *less is more*. Know when to speak and when to walk away. Consider the big picture—your primary goals. Winning a fight or an argument is not the goal—your goals are to protect your future and witness. Don’t engage in pointless arguments, and avoid angry and argumentative people. Proverbs 11:22b says it well: “*The correction of fools is folly.*” Indeed, most of the time, discretion *is* the better part of valor.

- 4. Speak humbly:** Set aside pride. Do not boast. The Bible seems to go out of its way to present two particular people as being exceptionally humble and meek. The first is Moses, the second is Jesus. These two men were courageous and exceptionally strong leaders, yet the Bible categorizes them as humble and meek—*perhaps we need to rethink our definition of meekness*.

Meekness is *not* weakness, it is to be gentle, self-confident, and strong enough in character to lift others up without demanding the spotlight. God sees, God knows, and that should be good enough for us. Most of the time, others see and know our strengths and weaknesses—*we need not continually point them out*. We are watched more than we

know. Scripture promises that if we *“humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord then He will exalt us.”*^[5]

The humble know there is no need to talk themselves up and demand the spotlight continually. Some call that healthy pride—most call that arrogance. James 3:14 charges people to “not be self-seeking in your heart [and] do not boast.” Good advice.

God has a way of ensuring that the proper people see and know. We should not seek to elevate ourselves, especially at the expense of others. Pursue humbleness over pride. Scripture notes: *“A man’s pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.”*^[6]

5. **Hold a confidence:** Be able to keep a trust—to keep a secret. Proverbs 11:13 states, *“A tale bearer reveals secrets. But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.”* Another translation of that same verse reads: *“...he who is faithful keeps a secret covered.”* Yes, there are matters that are appropriate to share, but most of the time, sensitive and personal information is not. Gossip is not vital information.

Know that breaking a confidence often leads to a break in the relationship. We should not share everything we know (even if what we know is true), and not unnecessarily share the things told to us in confidence.

Holding a confidence is a sacred trust. The principle is valued in Scripture—Proverbs 20:19 notes that we should disassociate from those who cannot hold a trust. Being *in the know* can make a person feel important, and some enjoy being the bearer of information that others do not know. However, friendships are valuable, and we should guard them by guarding the sensitive information shared with us in confidence.

Three more suggestions:

1. **Consider your timing.** Ecclesiastes 3:7 (another book in the Bible written by Solomon) notes: *“There is a time to speak, and a time to be silent.”* Remember, the goal is not to find the easiest or most convenient time or express for *you* to express what you want to say—the goal is to find the best way for the person to hear what you have to say.

The formula for achieving a positive outcome in tough conversations is to say the right thing, the right way, at the right time. The Psalmist said it this way: *“Like apples of gold in settings of silver, so is the right word said at the right time.”*^[7]

When we speak impulsively, blurt, demand a conversation, or have an uncontrolled need to ‘vent,’ we generally lose the opportunity for a positive outcome. Remember, it is relatively easy to *make* someone listen—once—but though you may win a battle you will likely lose the war. Be wise about WHEN you approach sensitive subjects, and...

- 2. Be wise about HOW you approach sensitive subjects.** Watch your body language—watch your tone. Studies show that body language and tone communicate more than words. Amazing but true. Therefore, before you say anything, consider whether there will be love or encouragement in my voice or if there will be anger, condescension, or sarcasm.

Note: We typically get what we give. My dog doesn’t understand English—but she knows when she is in trouble, by the tone in my voice. And when I have a particular tone, she avoids me. Bettering communication skills is not about expanding your vocabulary and learning new words—it’s about putting more love and empathy in the words we already know.

Watch your tone. Proverbs 26:20 notes: *“Where there is no wood, the fire goes out.”* So, when you find yourself in an argument *move to remove the wood* that is fueling the fire. Often, the wood is our poorly chosen words, or our words that are spoken in a poor way. If you want to de-escalate an argument, lower the tone—lower the volume. Try speaking gently. Proverbs 15:1 notes, *“A pleasant answer turns away wrath but a harsh word arouses anger.”*

- 3. Check the condition of your heart.** Scripture notes that *“Our every word should be useful for edification.”*^[8] Edification means to make something better or to something that will build someone up. Keeping that goal in mind will help your conversations to stay on track.

Setting good goals begins with having a good heart. If there is anger and bitterness in our hearts, that will be expressed in our body language, words, and actions. But if we have forgiven (others and ourselves) and our goals are good, then our words are much more likely to be spoken in a way we will not later regret. It is much better to feel satisfaction

than regret. Pray for a new and “clean”^[9] heart, for Jesus said, “*The things that come out of the mouth, from the heart.*”^[10]

Before engaging in deep discussions on sensitive subjects, ask yourself: *What is my goal here? What am I trying to accomplish?* Let good goals guide your conversations. Keep in mind this warning from Scripture: “*Thoughtless words can wound as deeply as any sword, but wisely spoken words can bring healing.*”^[11]

[1] James 3:2b-10

[2] Proverbs 22:11

[3] Proverbs 24:26

[4] James 1:19

[5] James 4:10

[6] Proverbs 29:23

[7] Psalms 25:11 (Message)

[8] Ephesians 4:29

[9] Psalm 51:10

[10] Matthew 15:18

[11] Proverbs 12:18