

Scripture: Numbers 22:21-35

Memory Verse: Ephesians 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

If God could speak to Balaam through a jackass perhaps you could learn how to communicate with your husband (or wife)!

The reason that God had to use the mule to speak to Balaam is because he wouldn't listen when God told him what to do. That mule had probably been with Balaam for a long time. She must have known Balaam intimately after having him ride her back everywhere he went. I would even imagine that this might not be the first time Balaam had yelled at her or even been abusive. How many other times had the mule tried to communicate with Balaam and Balaam couldn't or wouldn't understand?

What strikes me in this story is how calm the mule was and how angry Balaam was. The mule was just telling Balaam the truth he didn't want to hear. How many times has our spouse been trying to show us a problem in our life and we became mad at them? Maybe they didn't communicate very well. Perhaps they didn't even tell us what the problem was. It could be that they even hurt us in the process, but the truth is still the truth.

Often God uses our spouse to show us "truth" in our life. They will see something we don't see and react to it in some way. The problem is that they either don't tell you what the problem is or they are speaking in a language you don't understand, like lion. We then get mad at them and react instead of trying to understand.

Balaam's problem was with God, not the mule. Sometimes God uses our spouse to show us things in our life that are not right. No one knows us better than our spouse. They see things that we are blind to. Instead of getting mad at your spouse, take time to listen and try to understand. Try to see the problem from their prospective. Realize that God may be using them to speak to us and to keep us from being hurt or hurting others.

Another lesson from this story comes from the mule's response to Balaam in verse 30; "And the ass said unto Balaam, *Am* not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since *I was* thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay." Balaam was treating the mule like he was an enemy instead of his faithful companion for so many years. Your spouse is not your enemy! Don't treat them like they are. They are your partner in life and want what is best for you.

Meditation: How many times has God spoken to you and you haven't listened? How does God want to use your spouse to speak to you?

Assignment: Talk about ways that you can communicate better when you see a problem in the way your spouse is behaving.

Just for Fun: Play a game of "Pin the tail on the Donkey". Winner gets to choose the prize!

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Pastor Wayne

Memory Verse: Proverbs 31:11 The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

Communication is the main problem in most marriages and is the number one reason for divorce. Either there is no communication or bad communication. Both will destroy a relationship. So how do you learn to communicate with your spouse?

You start by communicating truth with your neighbor (verse 25). Your spouse is your closest neighbor. They live next to you. Eat next to you. Even sleep next to you. You are “members one of another!”

The problem is that many couples are living a lie. Even after marriage we hide our true self from our spouse. Our fear is, “If my spouse really knew me, they wouldn’t love or respect me.” We are afraid to be transparent, especially about our problems because we don’t trust our spouse with that information. We are scared that they will reject us, think less of us, or use it against us. Unfortunately, there is a lot of truth to these fears.

If you want to learn how to communicate with your spouse, the first step is to build a relationship of trust and unconditional love. Your spouse needs to know that you will not judge him, condemn her, or use whatever they say against them in the future. Allow him or her the freedom to tell you what they did or are feeling, knowing that although you may be shocked, surprised, hurt, or even angry that you will not allow this information to change your underlining feeling towards them or to cause you to act differently with them. They have to believe that you will accept them and lovingly help them to overcome whatever the problem is.

There are seven important steps to building trust as a couple:

1. Communicate your unconditional love and acceptance for your spouse at all times, speaking to them in their love language.
2. Emphasize the good qualities of your spouse. Make sure they know what you appreciate about them.
3. Pray for your spouse daily. Pray for them in their presence. Thank God for them and ask God to help you to love them.
4. Always speak the truth in love to your spouse. (Ephesians 4:15). Truth must be cultivated in order to grow. Create a habit of being honest, even in the little things.
5. Be willing to forgive your spouse and to accept the pain that comes with honesty – “The truth hurts!”
6. Focus on the many good qualities when confronting them with something negative.
7. Try not to react to what they say to you, but to act on the information in a positive and helpful way.

Meditation: Think about how God loves us unconditionally even though he knows the truth about us. He is always willing to forgive and help us to change for the better.

Assignment: Talk about why you are afraid to be transparent and honest with each. Tell your spouse what they can do to help you.

Just for Fun: Play a game of Truth or Dare. Each of you write 20 questions and 20 dares. The questions should be a mix of funny, personal, and intimate. The dares should be provocative and challenging, but not hurtful. Each spouse can use a skip for any reason. Look on the internet for ideas.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Pastor Wayne

Memory Verse: Proverbs 16:32 *He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.*

This is the second in our series of devotions from Ephesians chapter 4. In this devotion we are going to talk about how to use anger as a tool to help you to build your relationship. You may be thinking that you should never get angry with your spouse. That's not true! The Bible says "Be ye angry", the key is to "sin not" in your anger.

It's not whether we get angry, but what we do with it that matters. It's how we handle the angry emotions we feel toward our spouse when it occurs. Are we going to allow our anger to spew out and hurt our spouse emotionally? Or are we going to learn to find ways to express ourselves appropriately – ways to express our anger that enables our spouse to feel safe amidst the upsets that inevitably happen in every marriage?

In order to do so, it helps if we understand that anger in and of itself is not wrong. Anger is a God-given emotion, common to each of us, something that happens naturally, in response to one's perception of a threat to our security and well-being. Emotions are simply a part of our human makeup, and yet they are subject to our management and control if we choose to do so. Everyone experiences anger, some more intensely and frequently than others. It's not whether we are going to get angry, but what we do with it that matters.

Though anger is an emotion common to all of us, few people are naturally skilled at being able to control this unruly emotion in healthy ways so that it does not become an emotional threat to others around us. Most of us rely on a few specific ways of dealing with our anger that we learned as children and took with us into adulthood. These "inherited" ways of dealing with anger in marriage often have a destructive impact upon ourselves and upon those closest to us.

Recognizing what makes us angry can help us find better ways to cope with this emotion. We will discuss some of these in our next devotion.

Researchers tell us that anger in marital relationship is more prevalent than in any other relationships and that inability to express one's anger appropriately is the principal cause of harmful interactions within marriage. The success or failure of a marriage may depend on the way spouses manage and express their angry feelings. Ask God to help you to change how you respond to your spouse when you are angry. Determine to learn how to use anger as a tool for growth rather than a weapon of destruction.

Meditation: Meditate on how God, even in His righteous anger has chosen to show grace and mercy instead of wrath.

Assignment: Talk about how anger becomes destructive. Don't focus on what your spouse does wrong. Confess your own weakness in this area and ask them to forgive you. Determine to do better the next time you get angry.

Just for Fun: Have a fight when you are not angry at each other. Yell nice, encouraging and helpful things at each other like, "You are beautiful." Or "I would never divorce you, no matter how mad I am because I couldn't live without you!" then kiss and touch each other affectionately.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Pastor Wayne

Memory Verse: Proverbs 19:11 The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and *it is* his glory to pass over a transgression.

What are the root causes of anger? I'm not asking what caused the fight. We often fight over trivial and insignificant things. There are underlining issues that cause us to get angry and especially to lose our temper. It is important to identify those reasons both in our self and in our partner. Here are some of the underlying causes for us to become angry:

- Insecurity
- Low self-esteem
- Feeling disrespected
- Fear of being hurt
- Anticipating our the other persons response
- Guilt
- Unresolved issues
- Pride or envy
- Feeling out of control

We often feed these underlining insecurities through the way we react to the problem. Our tone of voice, body language, and words add fuel to the fire. Proverbs 15:1 tells us that "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." Use words that are reassuring. Take time to listen and understand what is feeding the anger. Don't just react to the situation, choose your actions carefully before responding to the perceived threat; "*He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding: but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly.*" Proverbs 14:29

The next time you feel yourself getting anger, try to identify the underlining cause. This will help you to deal with the issue you are struggling with differently. Talk to your spouse about why you get mad and how they can help you to control it. For example if your spouse understands that you are feeling disrespected, she can reassure you that this situation does not cause her to lose respect for you or if you are feeling insecure he should reassure you that he will not stop loving you because there is a problem.

The inappropriate expression of anger in marriage can be a major source of marital distress and unhappiness. Recognizing and managing this unruly emotion can greatly enhance the degree of security and happiness that you and your spouse achieve in your marriage. If you are willing to take an honest look at yourself, come to grips with the reality that anger is an issue in your marriage and you are willing to work at it, you can overcome this martially destructive emotion and discover the joy of peace and harmony in your marriage and family.

Meditation: Think about the way you respond to your spouse when there is a problem. Why? What is the underlining reason for the way your spouse responds to you. What can you do to address the underling cause?

Assignment: Talk about the list above. Which ones are true of you? Why do you feel that way? What can your spouse do to help you overcome that?

Just for Fun: Play a game of "The Eyes Have It". Cover your mouth with your hand. Have your spouse try to guess the emotion just by the look in your eyes. Learn how important body language is when you argue.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Pastor Wayne

Memory Verse: James 1:19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.

We may not like to talk about it, but if you're married, you've been there. How do we deal with our anger in marriage? How do we argue? How do we reconcile? We all have different ways of handling our differences with our spouse, but here are a few tips to help make it better:

1. Stop talking – wait till you can be reasonable and sincere

Before you say something you don't mean, stop. You can't take your words back. You can ask forgiveness later, you can say you were out of line, but the memory of your voice saying something hateful or unkind will last forever. Stop before you say something you don't mean.

2. Don't storm off, or walk away

Walking away either says you don't care or you don't respect your spouse enough to listen. If you need a break to keep yourself from violating rule number 1, then tell your spouse, in a reasonable tone of voice, that you might need a break to think. You don't want to overreact, and you want to make sure that you say what you mean. That's fine. Your spouse should understand. Just make sure that you DO come back to continue the conversation.

2.5 But, don't let the sun go down on your anger

Make it a habit to resolve things as quickly as you can. There's nothing more miserable for each of you, and for your children, than to have you two walking around for days grumbling, rolling eyes and being snippy. What torture! In the end, you will only make things worse by hurting each other more. Try to resolve the issue as quickly as possible.

3. Don't be a Princess (or Prince)

We are ourselves. We all have a hard time remembering that we are just one side of the story. Because we live in OUR head, and we hear all OUR arguments, we reason out the injustices done to us and feel OUR pain. We don't live, hear, reason or feel what our spouses do. We just see their faces and hear their voices, and when they're mad, that might not engender much sympathy. Taking the time to try to understand their point of view can go a long way to resolving the problem. Sometimes we really do just need to stop thinking we're so perfect and righteous in order to be able to understand how our spouse feels.

To be continued...

Meditation: Think about God's longsuffering towards us. How can you be more longsuffering towards your spouse?

Assignment: Discuss these four steps for dealing with problems. How will you implement these? How can you help each other in these areas?

Just for Fun: Talk about something you can do when you are arguing. Take a walk together. Wash the dishes together. Argue naked. Pass a ball back and forth. The one with the ball gets to talk.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Pastor Wayne

Memory Verse: James 1:20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

4. Take a break – clear your mind, but don't mull or blab

Sometimes mulling only brews more anger. Maybe you need a break. Go for a walk. Go to the store, play a game of Go Fish with the kids. Get your mind off the topic for a bit. Many times, I have found that after stepping away, and removing the emotion from the topic, I can come back and look at the issue that caused our disagreement and realize that it really wasn't that big of a deal after all! Be respectful. Even if you're angry or upset, there is rarely a time when it is necessary for you to blab to a friend or even a family member. Once everything is resolved, you will usually regret revealing that intimate part of marriage to someone else.

5. Dig Deeper – what is the real reason you're angry?

Sometimes you're really not angry about what you think you're angry about! And that's just not fair. What can your spouse do if you're throwing old emotions or misdirecting anger at him? He has no CHANCE! If you feel some burst of anger pop out of nowhere, there might be something more there. Think about things for a while. Try to find the root cause, so that you can really deal with the issue and move on.

6. Pray

Seriously, pray. Don't pray that God will show your spouse how right you are. Don't pray that God will comfort you in your agony. Don't pray selfishly! But, rather, pray for God to grant you the virtue of humility. Pray for the fruit of the Holy Spirit to be manifested in both of you. Pray that God will help YOU to love more, act with kindness, and be a better servant. God will take care of the rest.

7. It's okay to apologize first

Because sometimes, it just doesn't really matter. I don't know how many times my husband has come up to me, given me a hug, and said, "I'm sorry!" He wasn't stating who was right and who was wrong. He wasn't saying, "I'm sorry... that you messed up!" In his mind, and in his voice, he conveyed that he was sorry that we fought. "I love you. I don't want to fight. You're my best friend. I'm sorry." *"You are more important than my feelings."*

It takes great humility to apologize sincerely. It's SO hard. But it feels good to let that resentment and anger go. And sometimes, when one person is willing to start, the other follows. That first step of love and humility can soften hearts and bring the rest of the issue out in the open with an attitude of love and a true desire for resolution.

To be continued...

Same meditation, assignment & Just for Fun as yesterday

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Pastor Wayne

Memory Verse: James 1:21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

8. “I’m sorry, but...” Is NEVER okay

We have a “No ‘I’m sorry, but...’ Rule” in our home, with our children, with each other. If you’re ready to apologize, then you’re either in, or you’re out. If you say something like, “I’m sorry, but that was a really stupid thing to do!” ... guess what? No dice. You’re back at square one, or worse. Make sure your apology can hold water and be taken seriously. Make sure that you are able to be sincere, or wait. And remember, your body language speaks volumes. Make sure that your face, your eyes and your voice echo what you feel.

9. Don’t be afraid to ask for help when necessary

You may think everyone else’s marriage is perfect and you’re the only couple who has struggled. That’s NOT true. I bet you’d be surprised how many couples you know have gone to a wise Pastor for advice, been on a marriage retreat or gone to some sort of marriage counseling. Sometimes loving enough to admit you need a bit of help is the greatest gift you can give your spouse. It doesn’t mean you’re weak, or that you have failed. You’re just looking for some outside, detached, well-informed perspectives. It might just be the best thing you’ve ever done for your marriage. So, don’t be afraid or embarrassed to ask for help.

10. Be thankful, and love.

Practice love. Remember the good things, and bring them to mind often. Make a habit of speaking well of your spouse. Say something nice on Facebook, praise her in front of her friends. Tell him you’re proud of what he does. Tell him you love the way he mows the grass like clockwork or the taste of her sweet rolls on Saturday mornings. Remember those things that made you fall in love with this person in the first place. And bring them to mind often.

Change the way you fight. All couples argue, but you don’t have to fight. Attack the problem, not each other. Learn to control yourself instead of trying to control each other. Use these steps to help you to be angry and sin not. Find what works for you!

Meditation: Meditate on why you fell in love to begin with. Think about all of the good qualities your spouse has. Thank God for them.

Assignment: Review the whole list for the last three days. Talk about how you will implement them and what you can do to help each other when anger starts to take control.

Just for Fun: Post something very positive about your spouse on Facebook. Call someone and tell him or her what a blessing your spouse has been to you. Make it your goal to say five positive things about them to others in their presence.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Pastor Wayne

Memory Verse: Ephesians 4:28 Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

Are you a thief? Are you guilty of grand larceny in your marriage? I'm not talking about pilfering a few dollars out of your wife's purse or your husband's wallet. This is about major marriage crimes! Are you guilty of stealing the joy out of your relationship? Have you stolen the happiness out of your marriage? Would Judge Judy convict you of a crime of dis-passion?

In Ephesians 4:28 God admonishes us to "steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." Our spouse needs us to give, not take! Instead of working for a better marriage we are often the ones who are robbing our spouse of what should be theirs.

Case #1 – Time thieves. Instead of "redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16) we are culpable of wasting the time that could otherwise be spent on and with our spouse. Otherwise innocent pastimes, such as watching sports or surfing the internet or playing video games, etc. take the time we could be interacting together and working to build a better marriage. Don't be a time thief!

Case #2 – Relationship robbers. This is one of the so-called victimless crimes, but the real victim is your relationship. We steal by not paying what we owe. You owe your spouse intimacy. Intimacy is one of those intangible assets like bearer bonds: You bear the responsibility for bonding with your spouse. Listen to them, talk about what you are feeling, show affection, and be transparent.

Case #3 – Sexual abuse. I Corinthians 7:4 admonishes us that "The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife." It is abusive not to meet your spouse's sexual needs! You are guilty of fraud by not giving your spouse what belongs to them through the marriage covenant. Stop robbing your spouse of the pleasure only you can give them!

Case #4 – Death of the romance. Charges can range from premeditated killing of the romance to manslaughter. The weapon can be sharp words, a killer look, an emotional beating, or a direct shot right to the heart. Sometimes we can be guilty of manslaughter through neglect. You didn't intend to kill the romance, it just happened because you weren't being careful or paying attention to your relationship.

Whatever the case; confess your guilt, throw yourself on the mercy of the court, and pay your debt to your relationship. The only way you can pay your debt to society is by bringing the joy back to your marriage. Start serving your sentence today!

Meditation: Meditate on the ways that you have stolen the joy from your relationship with God and your spouse. How can you restore the joy of the Lord?

Assignment: List some of the joy-thieves in your marriage. Talk about how you can prevent these crimes from happening.

Just for Fun: Your spouse has been charged with the crime of stealing the joy in your marriage. Your job is to arrest and convict them. Frisk them, checking carefully for concealed weapons. Follow up with a hot and heavy interrogation. Don't be afraid to get personal. After they confess their love, sentence them to do time with you!

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Pastor Wayne

Memory Verse: I Thessalonians 4:11 And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you.

The word labour in Ephesians 4:28 means “to grow weary, tired, exhausted (with toil or burdens or grief)”. Marriage takes a lot of labour! You have to work at being a good husband or wife. You have to work through your problems and work at having a better relationship. It is easy to grow “weary in well doing” (Galatians 6:9). We get tired of dealing with the same problems over and over again. It is exhausting to constantly worry about whether your spouse is happy and if you are doing the right thing.

We forget that we are not the customer of Marriage, INC. we are the ones providing the service to our spouse. There is an old business saying; “The customer must come first.” Our customers are our spouse and our family. We need to work hard at giving them what they need and providing quality service to them every day. If your marriage were a business would your spouse recommend you on Yelp? Would you get a five-star rating? Would your family be repeat customers?

Being married is hard work! There is always something else that needs to be done. We can never just sit back and relax thinking we have done enough. In Luke 17:7-10 Jesus illustrates this truth: “But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.” It is nice to be served once in awhile, but like the waitress at the restaurant you are there to serve, not be served. You have to keep going no matter how weary you get.

The root word for labour means “to beat yourself”. I think the hardest part of our relationship as married couples is that so often we feel like we are beating our head against the wall. That is what I get the most “weary” of; feeling like no matter what I do, it is not enough. Trying my best and it doesn’t seem like it makes a difference. Feeling like nothing I do will satisfy my wife. You begin to wonder, “Why bother?” You get tired of dealing with the same problems and complaints day in and day out, but that is your job and you need to work at it. At the end of the day, there is a satisfaction in knowing that you have provided quality service and done your job well.

Meditation: Meditate on Colossians 3:23 “And whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men.” This verse was written to servants. Are you serving God to the best of your ability as you serve your family?

Assignment: Many businesses have Customer Service Rules. Make your own list of how you should serve each other (Serve with a smile, Customer is always right, etc.) and post them in a prominent place as a reminder to each of you.

Just for Fun: Put on an apron and spend the day “waiting” on your spouse, providing whatever they ask for. If you do a good job, maybe they will give you a nice tip!

Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

Pastor Wayne

Memory Verse: Colossians 4:6 Let your speech *be* always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Did your mom ever wash your mouth out with soap? I can tell you from personal experience that it is not a pleasant experience. Usually, that happens to a child because he or she said a curse word. Perhaps we should have our mouth washed out because of the corrupt words we use with our spouse.

First, no husband or wife should ever curse at his or her spouse. There are no excuses and no exceptions. A Christian should not use swear words. These types of words are vulgar, offensive, and of no value. Using a swear word shows a lack of ability to express ourselves appropriately and violates a whole list of Scriptural principles. If you are any kind of man, you would not allow another man to swear at your wife so don't allow yourself to do it either. If you are a lady then prove it through the language you use.

Corrupt communication is not just about using curse words. The word corrupt means bad, rotten, or putrefied. We need to keep our language clean and our words pure. Choose words that are not hurtful, that don't tear the other person down, or don't leave a bad taste after you say them. Instead of washing your mouth out with soap after you say something corrupt, use SOAP to make sure the words you say are good.

Soft
Odious
Affirm
Pure

Soft - "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger." (Proverbs 15:1) Keep your words and tone soft, not harsh. Do not use language that are abrasive and will cause irritation.

Odious - Give your words the smell test. If I am not sure if the shirt I am going to wear is clean, I smell it. If it doesn't pass the smell test I don't use it. That is a good way to check your words. If the words "smell" bad to you, I can guarantee that your spouse isn't going to like them either!

Affirm - Does what I am going to say affirm my spouse and our relationship? I need to affirm my love, acceptance and commitment for my spouse and our relationship.

Pure - "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things *are* honest, whatsoever things *are* just, whatsoever things *are* pure, whatsoever things *are* lovely, whatsoever things *are* of good report; if *there be* any virtue, and if *there be* any praise, think on these things." (Philippians 4:8) Pure thoughts lead to pure words.

Meditation: Meditate on Psalm 19:14 especially in how you speak to your spouse; "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."

Assignment: Come up with a list of corrupt words together and make a commitment not to use them anymore, especially with each other. Post the words in a prominent place to remind you not to use them.

Just for Fun: Make a Corrupt Communication Jar. When you use one of the words on the list you have to put money in the jar. Give that money to some special project or charity.