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Unity Busters
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Today we are talking about unity busters in the church.

In the book we are going through, we learn that there are two main unity busters that seem to breed like viruses in churches and these two unity busters are both mentioned in the text this morning. See if you can pick them out as I read to you the text.

(Scripture: Ephesians 4:22-5:1)

Did you pick them out? You may have if you read chapter 2. The first one is...

GOSSIP – or unwholesome talk/a real unity buster

You know, I remember when our kids were young we used to always have overnights. Their friends would come to the house, we would have pizza, watch a movie, and then in the morning Tim would make pancakes for everyone.

I remember one time when Chris had his friends over and they decided to have a pillow fight. I wasn't in the room, because I would have stopped it. But what of course happened?

One of the pillows burst open, and feathers flew everywhere. I mean everywhere. Even though he tried to clean up the bulk of the feathers, quite frankly it was a next to impossible job. For months afterward I would find a feather here, and feather there scattered all over the house because they would get blown around and land on the TV, or couch or end up stuck to my black dress in the closet.

It was impossible to contain those feathers. They just kept floating around everywhere.

Gossip is kind of like those feathers. Once it is out it floats everywhere. You cannot contain it. Rumors start. People come to the wrong conclusions. Usually they come to the wrong negative conclusions about someone, based on something they heard second or third hand or fourth or fifth hand.

(Play telephone in the congregation...maybe...whisper)

When Paul talks about unwholesome talk, I think he is referring to – what today we call gossip. Because then he says...use your words only to edify, not to tear down.

The writer of Proverbs is very aware of the power of words. There are probably more proverbs devoted to human speech than any other slice of human life. Let's read this one together out loud:

The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit. (Proverbs 18:21)

Sermonspice video...

Words are so powerful, aren't they?

With just our words we can do so much damage...

We can crush somebody's spirit.

We can step on somebody's dream.

We can fill somebody with resentment.

We can make other people, even our own children, afraid.

I have also learned that, **when you say the right word at the right time it can bring tremendous joy and hope to someone.**

You can say the right word at the right time and, somebody who thought they were alone realizes they are not alone; that they are loved.

You can say the right word at the right time and somebody who was confused receives guidance and direction.

Somebody who is ready to give up all of a sudden can carry on.

Words really do have the power of life or death.

Here's another related proverb...This one is from Proverbs, Chapter 29:

Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Proverbs 29:20)

Wise people recognize the challenge of communication

When the subject gets sensitive, wise people pause before they speak.

And, really wise people say a little prayer

If you get into a situation where the subject is really sensitive, and it will be sometimes; maybe it's a subject out there in the courtyard after church

Your standing there with your coffee, and someone is telling you their opinion about something that you don't agree with

Maybe that person is so opinionated and sure they are right...What do you do?

Well, if you pray first and speak second, your prayer will be:

God, help me know what to say.

If you speak first and then pray afterwards, your prayer will be:

Oh, God, why did I say what I just said?

But, either way, you're going to pray and you are going to speak so it is better to pray the prayer first.

Sometimes the wisdom of God will be:

Shhh....Don't say anything at all.

Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace. When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive. (Proverbs 17: 28)

There is an old movie entitled “Being There”

Its about a man who has a very low IQ.

But for some reason everyone thinks he is brilliant. Most of the time he just sits and watches TV.

He says a word here, and then the next day he might say two words. But most of the time he is silent.

And everyone around him is always interpreting what he does as brilliant, and giving complicated explanations for his verbal utterances that barely exceed a couple words a day? Why? Because he is silent...

Want people to think you are smart? Don't say too much.

There's another colloquial proverb that says....

Light travels faster than sound, that's why some people appear wise until they open their mouths.

David Hubbard was for years the President of Fuller Seminary and a great Old Testament scholar. He wrote a commentary on the book of Proverbs. And, in this section he writes about what would he look for when he's looking for leaders—to be part of the leadership team of that school... This is what he writes:

Do they wait their turn? Do they step on the lines of others? Do they have a need for the last word? Do they try to top everyone else's stories? Do they sound off in their areas of incompetence?

Can they say: I don't know...

Do they repeat themselves badly or wander aimlessly through their subject matter? People with these and other verbal liabilities do not usually make it to my team. They are not sensitive enough, they are not modest enough, they waste time, they hurt feelings, they shatter morale.

Sometimes verbal wisdom involves knowing when am I invited to speak in a situation and when my involvement likely to do more harm than good? Lets read Proverbs 26:17, together out loud:

Like someone who grabs a stray dog by the ears, is someone who rushes into a quarrel not their own. (Proverbs 26:17)

In those days, dogs were not usually cute little domesticated pets; They were more like wild dogs, jackals..

And to pick up a dog by the ears was asking for trouble

Proverbs says "Its dangerous to jump into a fight that's not your business".

The idea behind this proverb is I don't have to go around trying to fix everybody.

I don't always have to take sides. I don't have to go around passing judgment every time something is going on. I don't have to jump into it.

So often those who just have to get involved end up gossiping and distorting...

The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts. (Proverbs 18: 8)

Proverbs has a lot to say about gossip and how destructive it is, how it can

reek havoc in a community. This Proverb gets to why it is so hard to get rid of because it feeds something deep inside us. Something dark inside me feels

kind of good at passing judgment on another person, makes me feel superior:

Those who are mean-spirited, slander their neighbor but the wise practice discretion. (Proverbs 11:12)

And Jesus said,

Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks. (Matthew 12:24)

So, ultimately, if I've got a mouth problem, I've got a heart problem. That is the real issue. Because, whatever is going on in my heart over time, it's going to come out of my mouth.

I found out a couple weeks ago that at the big church in So Cal., Saddleback Church, if anyone is caught gossiping about someone else, they are instantly removed from their volunteer position or fired if they are paid staff.

I thought this was pretty harsh except that I get it too...gossip kills the church. It kills unity. It destroys the people of God.

And I can try to work by
Will power real hard on my mouth, but if my heart doesn't change,
inevitably,
my mouth is going to lead.

God's goal for the human race is not
just that we avoid sin. (Don't step on a crack or you'll break your
mother's back; so busy avoiding the cracks, that you don't enjoy the
journey...I went right by the store)

That was the problem with the Pharisees. That was the problem with
legalism. God's goal for his creation is not just avoidance –

God's goal is for there to be an explosion of goodness and joy and love.

And we are meant mostly to use our words for that to happen!
And, if you never talked there would never be any expression
of life, never any creative ideas, never any articulation of hope, never any
direction, never any wisdom, never any counsel. So, God's goal is way
more
than avoiding verbal sin. Proverbs 25:11 puts it like this:

A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. (Proverbs
25:11)

Gold and silver, two most precious things in that society.
That is how valuable words are.

The right word at the right time to the right person with the right spirit saves lives & brings hope.

This week you're going to run into some deflated tires.
You can get impatient if you want, judgmental if you want,

Or, you could pause and say, Help me God and breathe a little life into the person. Some of you have such gifts for doing this. Let's read this scripture together...

The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit. (Proverbs 15: 4)

SECOND UNITY BUSTER...

UNFORGIVENESS OR Resentment

I heard a mother tell this story recently. She said, "My son was 4 and in preschool. We were in the van when he decided to ask us about something at school. "Mom, what's the F word?" My wife started to panic. "How do you know the F word?" He replied, "I don't. Someone said it at school and the teacher said (in his best teacher voice), 'you are NOT allowed to say the F word or I will send you to the principal!' But I didn't hear the word, mom. So how do I know which F word I'm not suppose to say if I don't know what it is?"

Before we could stop him he started listing his vocabulary of F words, "is it fruit or fries or Friday," to which my two year old daughter who didn't know her alphabet yet chimed in, or maybe its cheese!"

The F word alarms people and raises eyebrows. It has power because it represents our most vulgar and crude thoughts and behaviors. It's aggressive, counterproductive and divisive.

But the F word has an important counterpart – another F word that's far better. It's the word **Forgiveness**.

It has power because it represents our most honoring thoughts and behaviors. It's humble, constructive and unifying.

If only we weren't as afraid to say *that* F word.

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

St. Augustine penned some very wise words many hundreds of years ago: **"In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity."**

Once over 2,000 years ago a carpenter from a tiny village in Nazareth was laying a foundation that would change the world.

Jesus said, **"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'" They all heard that. "But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons [children] of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."**

Anger, hurt, bitterness, resentment are huge forces in our world and nobody sitting in this room gets a freepass. But Jesus says, **"If you love only those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that?"**

He's just describing the way the world has always worked. And it's so interesting that He chooses something as simple as the process of greeting another human being.

Peter came to Jesus one time and says, "Somebody hurt me. If he asks me to forgive him seven times, should I do it?" And Jesus says, "Not just once..., you do it seventy times seven."

That meant in the ancient world we must forgive perpetually. Never ending...ongoing.

Now forgive does not mean forget, condone, excuse, tolerate, or overlook; it means to choose the way of love over the way of hate. The way of love might be painful. It might not always be doing what the other person wants me to do, but there will be a way of love.

And I know everybody here has hurts, and some are really big. But we have been given this power from God to forgive one another as God has forgiven us in Christ.

Sometimes it is hard to forgive others, if we ourselves don't feel forgiven. Do you know that you are forgiven this morning? Do you accept that forgiveness and recognize your freedom? Do you acknowledge that God in Christ has wiped the slate clean for you...that there is absolutely no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Do you realize that you can put down the guilt, the baggage, the heavy burden. That you don't have to carry around regret, or a sense of failure, or a the feeling that you don't measure up? In Jesus Christ you are forgiven.

Once we know that we are forgiven it is much easier to forgive others. But sometimes, have you ever noticed, its hardest to forgive our Christian brothers and sisters. With people in the world we have all the compassion and mercy. We think to ourselves, "Well they don't know God. Its okay. I'll forgive them."

But with people in the church or other believers, we get so mad! They should know better, we think! They are Christians!

I was thinking about the picture the kids made last week where they assembled all the parts of the body for Children's Message to represent the church which scripture calls the Body of Christ.

And when they put it up here on the easel the body looked kind of dismorphic and weird because the kids had put the legs where the arms should go and vice versa.

And Lorraine Mancebo said to me, "That is a great picture of the church. It isn't a perfect place! We are all doing the best we can, but we are all human with all of our warts and wrinkles and weaknesses."

And I got to thinking, you know, maybe God created the church not so much so that we would have a perfect place to go and worship him where everyone here acts better than the people out there, and where we get our needs met....

Rather, maybe God created this imperfect human institution called the church to teach us how to love each other....with all our imperfections and weaknesses...the way that Christ loves us...To forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us....We too, with Christ have the power to forgive...

Sermonspice video on forgiveness...