



Conversations: Listen More, Talk Less

Part 1 – Understanding Your Spouse

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We start a brand-new series today called *Conversations*. We're going to spend four weeks in the school of active listening, where we learn to *Listen More, Talk Less*. You're like, "Just that right there sounds awful harsh." We're going to learn how to be great listeners and have great conversations and not be so quick with the mouth. So, we're going to practice this word called, "Shuttie." It will save a lot of marriages in here if we just shuttie. We shut the mouth and we open the ears and we listen.

Today, we are going to talk about how to understand your spouse and in this series, we're going to address how to understand your child, children how to understand, students how to understand your parents. We're going to talk to Christians about how to listen and understand those who are not believers. We're even going to tackle racial reconciliation. We just feel it's a time in our nation, a time in our community where we all need to get better at listening and not being so quick in shutting down conversations.

I'm going to put this up here and ask you to be really honest this morning. On a scale of 1 to 10, one being "I haven't even shown up yet to the school of listening, I'm a terrible listener" and 10 being "I've got nothing to more to learn on the subject; I'm one of the best listeners and one of the humblest individuals you'll ever meet in your life," where are you. Don't answer this for the person you're with. Don't answer this for your spouse; answer this for you. How many of you are rating yourself as less than five? Thank you for your honesty.

How many of you would say a six, seven, or eight? (Single loud laugh from congregation) He can have his own answer, Ma'am, alright? I said he answers for himself. He's saying, "Thank you." Your welcome.

Does anybody here say they are a ten? Okay, good. Really? Oh, you're pointing to your wife. Good move. Pro move right there! Did you see that. Stand up and take a bow. That was fantastic! That's good. I didn't say a turn and a wave; I said stand up and take a bow.

So, studying this week, I met Amy and Carson for lunch. I was ready to ask this question and I was ready for the answer. I said, "Amy, scale of one to ten, how good of a listener am I?" and she quickly responded, "Five." I said, "Why don't you just take the lunch time to think about your answer. I don't need the answer right now. You can think about it. You can think about it this afternoon and when I get home we can discuss it."

She goes, “No, you’re a solid five.”

I’m like, “Wow! Carson, where to rank me?”

He said, ‘Dad, you’re a five.’”

I asked Carson, “What can I do?” because we are also going to be talking about parenting. We’re going to be talking about the parent/child relationship. I asked “What can I do, Carson, to be a better listener?”

As serious as can be, he goes, “The next time I ask for money, listen.”

I said, “That ain’t the point of the series.”

When I was growing up, when my parents handed me a twenty-dollar bill, do you know what that was called? It was called a birthday. We weren’t just handed money. Raise your hand if you weren’t just handed money as a kid. That’s a whole other series. Right now, we are talking about listening. I told Amy I was going to become a better listener, that my goal in this series was to move from a five to a six. I’m taking baby steps. I want to become a better listener.

An elder called me this week to discuss an issue. Remember, we believe issues are rarely ever the issue. I had this whole message open on my computer and I found myself violating everything I was talking about because this elder and I have a different opinion on the issue that we were discussing. I said... His initials are Doug Goodwin. So, I’m trying to have this conversation and I have a different opinion... I go, “I’m going to just shut up right now; I want to listen, so just tell me what you think,” and he would share.

You’ve been there and you’re there a lot in marriage especially, but something is being said and you just tense up. You’ve got something to say that is just the opposite and you’re thinking *I don’t think that way at all. Where are you coming from?*

If we would calm down and understand a few of the keys of listening before we get into application today... First of all, **Listening is a key to wisdom**. Listening is a moral issue. A lot of times, we don’t think about it that way, but, according to proverbs, it is the difference between wisdom and foolish behavior. It’s the difference between being a wise person and being called a fool. The scripture says, **To answer before listening – that is folly and shame**. – Proverbs 18:13 In the newer translations, it reads “to post without listening – that is folly and shame.” The person that speaks... It doesn’t say, “answer before thinking,” it says, “answer before listening.”

A wise person is not threatened by listening. A wise person who has solid convictions from the word of God and how it applies to us, can listen to anybody talk about anything and be okay; they’re secure. Let me ask you; are you a fool? Are you a wise person when it comes to listening? Is someone sharing their opinion a threat to you? It’s a key to wisdom and it’s a key to learning. You want to learn something about your spouse? You want to learn something about your child? You want to learn something about

a co-worker? You want to learn about someone who is from a different race or nationality than you? Do you know what that takes? Listening.

We support a ministry, and have for 15 years, called International Students, Inc. It's a ministry based out of Colorado, but missionaries are stationed on college campuses all across this country and their sole purpose is to make disciples of international students who travel from their home country to the United States for education. It starts with them picking up the students at the airport and just having great conversation with them on the way back to school. Their big first start of the semester activity is a barbeque or a meal. All they want to do is get to know the international students. Do you know what it takes to get to know somebody? Listening.

Let the wise listen and add to their learning... Do you want to get to know your spouse better? It starts with listening. Mouth shut, ears open, and listening to what they are saying. ***...and let the discerning get guidance.*** – Proverbs 1:5

Listening is a key to resolving anger. In James 1: 19, we read about rejoicing when trials hit us. We should not be threatened by trials, but we should persevere through trials. ***My dear brothers and sisters...*** He's talking here to believers. He's saying, ***...take note of this...*** Take note of this in the midst of trials and your faith being accused and maybe even being tempted. In the middle of all that ***...Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry...*** Listen; don't say anything right off the bat. The word today that seems to be the most powerful is "spout off." It's like I'm just going to throw it out there quickly.

Verse 20 says, ***...because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.*** When you spout off before listening, it's not showing Christ in you. It's shining a light on insecurity. It's shining a light on fear. It's shining a light on frustration, hurt. Have you ever heard someone say, "I am totally offended"? Do you want to know one of the cures for that? Listening. Just listen because offending has kind of become a socially acceptable way to say, "I am ticked off. I am angry at you." Be slow to speak – hold your tongue. A wise person holds their tongue. And be quick to listen. Lean into listening. That's why, in this series, we're going to work on the parent/child relationship. We're going to work on parent/teen.

I want you to know that **with a conversation, it goes both ways.** One of the best pieces of advice I ever received from a friend who has already raised all of his kids... He said, "Ted, when you need to have a serious conversation with your kids, especially your teenagers, make sure you're sitting down." That one piece of advice has helped me so much as a dad because when I'm standing up, speaking over my child; it's just that non-verbal position. I get a lot farther down the road when I sit down and try to meet them eye to eye. But, young people, students, children, it's not a one-way street, that you would have a great relationship speaking back to your parents.

Proverbs is full of the exhortation, "Listen, my sons..." "What I'm about to share with you, I need you to hear, I need you to listen, I need you to understand, I need you to take what I'm sharing with you deep into your soul."

So, being seated is a great position, but it's not always the best position for a couple in the car, because sometimes we need to get out of the car and stand. If I can just share with the ladies quickly because sometimes ladies get very frustrated. I've asked the question this week because I'm a five listener and I've discovered most husbands are. It's like the baseline for husbands. I've been asking ladies randomly around the church, and as I've seen you in public, and some of you are like, "Where did that question come from and why ask it?"

I've asked ladies here in the office and several ladies that volunteered throughout the week. I just went up to them and said, "Scale of one to ten, how good of a listener is your husband?" It's like every woman has a quick response of five. It's like just right there. It's like it's hard wired into you. One lady said... And I won't say her husband's name, but she said, "Jim, can go either way." I think I know what that is. Remember, ladies, with your husband, he can only think about one thing at a time. You can think about a million things all at once and have a conversation about it.

Last night, a friend came over. When he left the house, he then came back up to our house and knocked on the door. He said, "Your water meter out front is a new water feature; you might want to come look at it."

I went down to look at it and it was bubbling up out of the deal and the whole thing, and there was a major leak. I'd had a great day. I had just gotten back from a trip and we were resting; I got a nap in. I got a nap on Saturday. But, now, there's only one thing on my mind. It's fixing this water leak. I started calling plumbers, I start calling Taney County Water District 2. They came out within an hour; it was amazing. I said, "Here's the thing..." Amy sees me... Head of household issues, right? I get stressed over this stuff. It's funny that my kids don't lose a moment's sleep, they don't give it a second thought on these issues, but I think just standing there looking at it is going to fix the problem eventually. I'll stand out there for hours, just looking down at it. There's just nothing in life worth living if this whole... Are there any men that know what I'm talking about? It's like that stress that weighs on us.

The Taney County Water guy called me back and I said, "Listen, if it's on the side of the meter that I don't get charged, you can take your time; I don't care how long it takes. I fear it's on our side at about four hundred bucks a day, so can we get someone out here?"

Then I go inside and my family starts to have random conversations with me and I can't focus. Do you know why? It's because I have a water problem. By the way, they are going to fix it tomorrow, so I still have a water problem. I thought about it through the entire first service, I'm thinking about it right now. I'm very distracted to get this water pipe fixed.

Just so you know, ladies, if you're like, "He just doesn't have great quality conversations with me in the car." It's because he's driving! It's because he's racing! It's because he's passing! It's because he's teaching other drivers how to drive! You have no idea the amount of responsibility that is weighing on your husband behind that wheel. He needs to stay focused and when you... Look I'm getting thumbs up and head nods and hands up. A car ride is a very difficult time to talk about the marriage. "Is now a good time to talk about ways to make our marriage better?" "Noooo! That guy up there has to learn something and he's going to learn it in the next twenty seconds. When I get done with this..." You get

right on his bumper, then cut him off even when the warning light on your rearview says not yet. Too bad, you get over. We're teaching that guy.

Ladies, I just want you to know he's so intensely focused. You're like, "I know, that's why it's such a pain to have a conversation..." Whoa, whoa, wait a second. What if he's 100% focused on you? You want that. And we have that ability, guys. We do.

I think if we learn to listen and start with listening, the quality of our relationships are going to go way up. I'm so committed to this series and what the teaching team is going to bring in this series. I believe these two people can become friends. I believe that.

I grew up watching the *5:30 news with Peter Jennings* with my dad. It was 5:30 to 6:00. How many of you were Peter Jennings people at 5:30 central time? I don't ever remember Peter Jennings spending the entire time telling me how NBC is getting it wrong, but that's all the news seems to be today. Let's stop yapping so much and let's get better at listening. I believe world peace hangs in the balance of this idea of listening. I think we can solve this problem with listening: (shows a picture of President Trump and Kim Jong-Un) I don't think Tweeting is helping this problem. I think when we run our mouths and air our opinions before listening, it creates strife and conflict and people are at odds with each other. I don't think it's any different with relationships at work. Listening is a skill that makes us wise. It's actually part of living out our faith.

Listening is a key to living out our faith. We read this in Colossians. Paul is being very clear. Just so you know the context of this passage: Christians, at the time he writes this, are being accused of being atheist because they would not worship the gods of Rome, the gods of Greece. They were accused of being unpatriotic because they wouldn't burn incense to the emperor. They were accused of being sexually immoral with orgies and all of that because when they got together and shared love with one another... All of these accusations were coming at Christians. By the way, I just want to remind the church, I want to remind followers of Jesus that accusations are still coming your way. You will still be accused in the faith. It's still going to happen. People are going to misunderstand you, they're going to judge you, they're going to throw it at you.

Now watch what Paul's words are. He is saying that in the midst of all these accusation you are dealing with in the church, ***Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders...*** Don't do that human reaction of retaliation, no, be wise and ***...make the most of every opportunity.*** When it comes at you, you handle it well. You don't handle it in like manor. You don't return it to them.

The passage goes on to say in Verse 6, ***Let your conversation be always full of grace...*** If Christ is in you, your conversation has a gracious tone, with gracious words, but, and I like this, ***...seasoned with salt...*** It can have an edge. It can be lively. You can address truth. You don't have to hold back on truth, but if you're speaking grace and your tone is gracious, ***...so that you may know how to answer everyone.*** When they bring an accusation like, "I hear you believe this, but I disagree with you! You shouldn't believe that!"

If there is anything more controversial today in our culture, it's the whole issue over LGBT. Churches today are needing to set up their stance on this. There's a new website called churchclarity.com. It's put together so that people visiting a church can know where a church stands on the issue. There are four categories that a church is measured on. There is *clear and affirming*, which means they accept the LGBT lifestyle and they're very clear in communicating that. Then there's *unclear and affirming*, which means you don't really know what they believe, but they lean to affirming of the relationship. There's *unclear and non-affirming*. A lot of churches have fallen into this because they don't want to discuss it, they don't want to have the conversation. Then there is *clear and non-affirming*. You can go to this website, type in a church name... Our church isn't registered on there yet. But, you can type in the church name and see what category they fall into.

I just want to be really clear because the goal of communication is clarity. You should take difficult to understand ideas and issues and make them clear. I just want you to know our church is clear on this and non-affirming. We believe marriage is between a husband and a wife, a man and a woman for a lifetime. We just don't want to be unclear, but there are many in here who disagree with what I just said. I want to remind you. We can still talk. We can still have a conversation that's full of grace, seasoned with salt. You don't have to storm off, but that's the world we live in today. If I disagree with you, I'm done, I'm walking away. Forget you; I'm writing you off.

I personally believe that **Christians should be known for great conversations, not boycotts**. I've never been a fan of boycotts because in marriage ministry, in marriage counseling, do you know what we call a boycott? We call it withdrawal. "I no longer agree with you, so I'm going in the other room."

You're looking at a classic withdrawer. I get out of there. When Amy and I start to disagree, I go into the other room. I actually stir it up a little bit, and then I go into the other room. I take it right to the level I think I can handle and then I go in the other room.

That's not my wife. My wife is "We're going to handle this and we're going to settle this now!"

I go in the other room and what I'm saying by going in the other room is "You can join me when you agree with me." How many of you know what I'm talking about? Be very honest. That's what we're saying. "And when you come in, I'm not going to keep the same conversation we had going on in the kitchen; this is going to be a new conversation, one from my point of view." That's all a boycott is.

I don't like to get too controversial when I speak... But here we go. (picture of a Veteran and a kneeling football player) This is a conversation we need to have, follower of Jesus. When I saw the sign, even in Branson, that said, *Boycott the NFL*, I thought, *Oh, poppycock. I'm still going to watch it...* Well, I don't watch football, but I'm not going to let this issue keep me from watching; I'll still watch the last two minutes of every game I come across. But, that's the problem. Christians are being taught...

I didn't like it when the Southern Baptists, in 1998, said to boycott Disney World. Is this what we do? Show me in scripture where we're called to boycott someone that doesn't follow Christian principles. We're supposed to withdraw from conversation with them? And now it's boycott the NFL.

I want you to know, in this series, we are going to address racial reconciliation and I want this veteran to listen and try to understand what the football player is doing. I want this football player to listen to this veteran and try to really understand what is in his heart. I'm asking you to begin listening and understanding someone in a conversation.

It's Veteran's Weekend here in Branson. I'm going to ask all those who have served and sacrificed in our military to stand so we can honor you this morning at Woodland Hills Family Church. We sincerely thank you for your service.

Last weekend, I was in Maryland doing a marriage retreat. In this retreat, we had African American congregations, Charismatic congregations, and we had Pennsylvania Dutch Mennonite, Amish white folk all together. I loved it. It was such a diverse group. I always look out at that... I long for more diversity for our church. I long for more diversity for our community. When I look out there, it's like a little picture of heaven to me. Every nation, tribe, and tongue... You haven't worshiped until you've stood beside a charismatic who gets you involved in the process. They're bumping into you while you're worshipping and they're stroking you and they're bugging you... And you're like, "Oh, alright. We kind of keep in our space in the white church. I just need you to know that. It's a safe zone. You can stay there, and I'll stay here."

I did a message and I had two more messages left. Right before the last message, I was speaking on the six levels of communication, speaking to husbands and wives and I just felt led to say this. I said, "You know this issue with the NFL taking the knee? I believe we need to have a good, healthy conversation. Let's try to understand both sides." That's all I said. I mean three to five laughs a minute in this session were just sucked out of the room. There was no laughter for a few. I got a couple of amens, but even those amens were under the fear of judgment.

After the session, a Korean War Veteran came up to me. He said, "Pastor, I've loved everything about this weekend, but I couldn't disagree with you more on the NFL take the knee." He shares with me. He said, "I can't do anything about the 1800s," and he was just going on and on.

When he was done... because I was trying to practice listening. I said, "Sir, I want to say two things. First of all, thank you for your service. I come from Branson, Missouri, which I believe is the most honoring city in the country of veterans and I'm right there with you. My grandparents and Amy's grandparents served in World War II. We are grateful for your service." I said, "I'm one pastor who has been teaching my son and daughter, from a very small age, that when the National Anthem plays, you stand up, take off your hat, and you place your hand over your heart until it is done. So, I've been teaching that to my kids, sir. I don't think you're going to meet a more patriotic guy than me. But, the second thing I would like to share is that you are validating the very point I was trying to make."

He said, "What's that?"

I said, "You are telling me that you disagree with me and yet I never shared with you my opinion. That was the point I was trying to make. That's where we are at in our families and in our marriages and in our nation today. We are telling our spouse, we are telling our children, we are telling someone of a

different skin color that we don't agree with them and we don't even really know what they believe. What's the harm in listening?" I said, "Do you mind if I share this story to start the next session?" I took his silence as consent.

I stood up and I said the exact same thing I just said to you. I asked how many remembered what I said in the last session and how many disagreed with me? Hands just popped up everywhere. Again, you're saying you disagree with me and you don't even know what I believe; how can you disagree with me? For the record, since I've never been one to shy away from my opinion, I still believe when the National Anthem is played, you should stand up to respect those who have fought for that flag to show honor and respect, but it doesn't mean we can't have a conversation.

I don't know, but if you disagree with the take the knee, maybe you're more powerful if you listen and understand than if you boycott. I just thought about it this week. Maybe you'll actually get your desired outcome if, instead of spouting off about your opinion, you would listen, you would understand. Maybe listening and understanding ends the take the knee campaign. I don't know.

We lost three people in the first service over this illustration. This is exactly our problem. We make decisions on whether or not we're going to listen and understand someone based on what they believe, yet we don't even wait to find out what they believe; we just walk away from the conversation. We're boycotting relationships, which is what we call withdrawal.

So, here's kind of our fix to that. We're going to give you a little sticker when you leave today. It's a little bee. You can tell we are way low on budget for props for our church services. I think we got ten for a penny, so it was a really reasonable prop. The bee is going to teach us some things today. I want you to take this bee, when you get your sticker on the way out, and I want you to put it on the back of your phone, put it on your computer, wherever you post, put it on there. Put it on the rearview mirror of your car. Put it on your forehead if you need to. Whatever needs to happen because here's the first thing the bee is going to tell us.

Bee quiet – *Even fools are thought wise if they silent, and discerning if they hold their tongue.* –

Proverbs 17:28 This is where listening starts. Wise people know "I don't have to give my opinion right now, I can just listen to yours. And I'm not threatened by it. It probably won't change what I believe. It may. I may hear something I've never heard before, but I don't know until I'm quiet, until I listen." We call this non-verbals. Ninety-three percent of your communication is non-verbal. It's in your posture, it's in the distance you stand to the person. It's your eyes staying engaged. It's the tone of your voice.

I can say the exact same words two different ways and each of them have completely different meanings. Watch: "Let's eat, Grandpa!" "Let's eat Grandpa." The first is a meal with Grandfather and the second is a meal of Grandfather. But, tone is all that is. It's a non-verbal. You're non-verbals, more than your words... Your words are only 7% of the conversation. Your non-verbals are communicating to your spouse, communicating to your child, communicating to a co-worker that you are listening and engaged.

If I can take you to one of the greatest theologians who is not with us anymore, Keith Whitley... He's in country music and he wrote one of the best country songs about non-verbals. I would like you to sing it with me.

*The smile on your face lets me know that you need me
There's a truth in your eyes saying you'll never leave me
A touch of your hand says you'll catch me if ever I fall
Now you say it best when you say nothing at all*

"The smile on your face." That's a non-verbal. Your face is communicating that you're listening. Your face also communicates, "I know what you're saying right now, and I don't agree with it one bit." Your face communicates, "Oh, you're so wrong and in a minute, I'm going to have my turn!" That's all in your face. You don't even have to say anything.

"There's a truth in your eyes." **Bright eyes gladden the heart**, Proverbs tells us, so when you're sitting there with your spouse, guys, give her bright eyes that, when she's talking, let's her know you're engaged. If she makes a point that you don't agree with, give her bright eyes.

Watch this. "A touch of your hand." That's what we call a non-sexual touch, guys. It's the hand on the small of the back, a hand on the thigh, a kiss on the cheek, a kiss on the forehead, hand-holding. All of this... It's the best. He says, "When you say nothing at all, this is screaming to me."

Be quiet, engage with your body. Put your phone across the room. Put the technology away. Engage. Let your spouse be the speaker and you just be the listener and don't respond other than to let your eyes say, "I'm getting every word you're saying." Just sit on the edge of your seat. When she's done talking, guys, these are the only words you need to know: "Tell me more." That's all you need to say. Be quiet.

Bee understanding. I called Travis Brawner and said, "Do you want to be a part of this series because you're one of the most gentle, kindest, men I know and you're a lot easier to get along with than Doug Goodwin." No, I'm just kidding. Good to see you, Doug. He's over at the Chapel. No, I think he's hunting. But, I said, "When you come into a room, just your presence... You're a great listener." I think great doctors are great listeners.

He said, "Boy, Ted, it's interesting that you say that. Proverbs 18: 2 has been on my mind a lot." It says, **Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions.** If you're resisting this message right now, if you are resisting the word of God thus far, take my side comments out for a moment, and what the scripture has spoken to your heart today, if you're resisting that, as Mr. T would say, don't be a fool. Don't leave here a fool, but be a wise person who desires understanding.

Some of you have made the mistake this week of going onto a review of your business or your show or your book or your ministry or whatever. Somebody put a bad review and you made the mistake of responding in a nasty way. I just want to encourage you. You're going to have fools. If you are doing anything that is somewhat successful, fools are going to come out of the woodwork. Don't allow a fool

to make you a fool. You don't have to throw your opinion out there. Retaliation is not your goal. Let the Lord settle accounts for you. You be wise.

There are a couple of things to think about with this whole "airing their own opinions." **Statements create resistance.** Whether you're talking to your kid or your spouse... This is where Amy and I struggle a little bit because she'll make a statement and it's always better to go back at a statement with a question.

Questions lead to understanding rather than "You shared something now I'm going to share something." I'll give you an example. Amy will say, "Do you want to go look at rugs?" This is my non-verbal... and again, I'm a five. I've already told you I'm a five and I'm trying to be a six and this is where I'm going to start with it.

She'll say, "Do you want to go look at rugs?" She wants a new rug under the dining room table for Christmas. I can't even talk about it too much because this is automatically what I'm doing on the inside and it sometimes comes out on the outside. I'm tensing up. I can't control it. It's really bizarre for me. I don't hear, "Let's look at rugs." What do I hear, guys? I hear "Let's go buy a rug." Think about that for a second. "Let's go buy a rug" is a statement. "Do you want to go look at rugs?" is a question. The same thing just happened with dogs. "Do you want to go look at dogs?" I tense up. What's that mean? We're going to go get a dog.

Amy has learned this... Again, she's a seven or an eight. Her own words. A seven or an eight. That didn't come out right. I need to learn from you. What are you doing for coffee? I will say she's a better listener than I am, so that puts her above a five. And she learned this, so now she knows I get all worked up because when I hear, "Do you want to go shopping?" I hear, "Do you want to go buying?" "Do you want to spend money?" This, I think, is just the power of becoming a good listener. Now she says, "Hey, I just want you to know that I thought we could swing by today and look at rugs, but I want you to know I don't want to buy anything."

That complete and totally changes the mood of the conversation. I said, "Say that again. I want to make sure I heard you."

She says, "I want to look at rugs, but I don't want to buy one."

"Okay, place your hand upon that Bible right there and before God and gathered witnesses say, "I, Amy Cunningham, want to look at rugs, but do not want to buy." I can't explain it, but I've watched this work in 21 years of my marriage and I've watched it work in countless other marriage in this congregation. By Amy making the statement, "I don't want to buy," it sparks something in me to say, "Let's go buy you a rug." I can't explain it. It just does something because that question leads to understanding.

Understanding grows relationships. So, the question for us today is do you want to shut down your relationships or do you want to keep them going? Do you want them to be fuel for your marriage? Peter puts it this way, speaking to a wife of an unbelieving husband and then speaking to the husband.

Watch how all this plays out in the marriage. **...the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.** – 1 Peter 3: 4

He says, "Don't let your beauty come from outward adornment." And, again, sometimes people misuse that verse. He's not speaking there that you shouldn't dress nice or wear jewelry, ladies. That's not at all the point of that text. The point of that text is to make sure you understand that the priority for your beauty and what makes you look gorgeous is a gentle and quiet spirit because it's saying, "I trust in the Lord. I don't have to fix you. I don't have to change you. The best thing I can do is influence you."

If you have a husband right now that is behind you in the faith, maybe he hasn't even come to faith yet and you're like, "I've been telling him..." You've been creating statements. You've been throwing statements at him? What about questions. What about a gentle and quiet spirit in your approach to him.

Now watch what it says to the husband. **Husbands, live with wives in an understanding way.** – 1 Peter 3: 7 Your translation may read "a considerate way." Be considerate as you live with your spouse, who is a co-heir with you in Christ. The idea there is, guys, we should consider, in all of our conversations, the health of our wife, physically, emotionally, relationally, and yes, even financially. Be considerate, be understanding, ladies, letting it be a gentle and quiet spirit.

Here's a very practical... where we get some major resistance, but hear this if you're into airing your opinions in the marriage. **Listen to your spouse's opinion without seeing it as an attack on yours.** Someone who is wise is able to listen to another person's opinion without seeing it as threatening.

I have to just say to my gray-haired friends in the room. You lose a little bit of what I call the unnecessary fight as you get older. Look, they're waving at me like, "Yeah, I ain't got the energy for it anymore." But things that really fired you up don't fire you up as much anymore. And you can listen to someone else, knowing what you believe. You can learn what they believe and not be threatened by that. Again, we don't boycott the marriage. We don't walk away from the marriage because of irreconcilable differences. We become great listeners and great understanders. Then you can understand. This is key.

Understanding your spouse's feelings doesn't mean you must agree with your spouse's opinions. You can listen, understand, and validate, and then walk away, going, *That was good; I felt understood.* When I feel completely and totally understood by Amy, honestly, I can't explain it, but I don't care what we decide. Some of you are like, "Nope we've got a decision to make." My black and white, wrong and right folks in here right now are like, "We've got a decision to make and all this fluffy stuff is really nice, but when it comes to decision time, you've got to make the decision. How do we do that?"

I just want to encourage you that if that is where your heart is right now, put extra time into listening and understanding. Take the time to listen and understand, so that when decision time comes, I promise you that you may get to a place where you're no longer fighting for your opinion and you find yourself fighting for your spouse's opinion. Wouldn't that be a great marriage, helping your mate win every argument?

How about this because I think we come at it too much when we're discussing an issue with "I'm right, you're wrong." By the way, if one spouse walks away from the conversation feeling like a loser, you both lost. Why? It's because you're teammates. You're not wearing opposite jerseys, coming at the issue or the ball in the middle of the field on opposite teams. You are advancing the ball or the issue to the end zone. So, you're running the ball down the field together. You're teammates. You win together as a team and you lose together as a team. There is no such thing, in a good, healthy, growing, quality marriage, as one spouse winning and one spouse losing. The team lost.

Can I just tell you...? Put the issue aside for a second because the issue is rarely ever the issue. We hear couples say it all the time. "We're having problems over money, we're having problems over sex, we're having problems over in-laws, we're having problems over jobs, we're having problems over where we should live, we're having problems over..." And they always share the issue. You want your spouse... Guys, you want your wife, Ladies, you want your husband walking away from every conversation feeling that you are saying, "**You are more important than my opinions.**" "I value you more than whatever decision needs to be made. So, I want to hear. Tell me what's in your heart. Tell me why you think this way. Tell me why you think we need a rug for every season." I want to know that because some of you are like, "That is right!"

We have two categories when discussing issues in marriage: inconsequential decisions, which are where do you want to eat tonight? Where do you want to go on vacation? Then you have consequential issues, bigger issues that you have to deal with. Sometimes when a couple gets stuck in marital rift, they can't determine the difference between the two and they fight just as hard over inconsequential issues as they do over consequential issues, and that right there proves the point that the issue is rarely the issue. It's a heart issue going on. There's something much deeper.

I want Amy walking away from every conversation saying, "He listened, he understood, he validated what I said. It felt like he was agreeing with my feelings. He completely understood them."

When you validate someone all you're doing is like when you park a car in a garage and you take that ticket into a restaurant or into a mall and they stamp it. All that stamp says is that you were there. You want your spouse walking away from the conversation going, "Boy, he was fully present. He was quiet. He was understanding. And when he did have to speak..." This is the last bee.

Bee kind. And you see where we get the bee right here. **Kind words are like honey...** Gracious words are like honey. When it is your turn to speak... which you'll get your turn. Don't spend the whole conversation formulating your opinion. Don't spend the whole conversation getting ready to pounce and spout. When it is your time to talk, use kind words. What does the proverb say? **Reckless words pierce like a sword.** They kill, they destroy.

There's power... Life and death is in the tongue. Choose kind words. Maybe that will be the primary purpose of the bee for me this week, looking at this bee and reminding myself that after I listen, after I understand, after I've been quiet, and after I've engaged, I just want my words to be full of life.

You probably picked up from my preaching tone and style over the years that it can be a challenge for this Chicago native. We're not as mean as New York, but we're Chicago. This is something I know the Lord is working on in me. Again, my goal this week and over the next couple of months is just to move from a five to a six – baby steps.

I want you to take one step this week. Just take one step in listening. On the way home, your wife starts talking. Stop racing down Shepherd of the Hills. Just get in that right lane with all the other senior adults and just take your time getting down that road. Just take your time. You're not competing with anybody, you're just listening. When she starts asking questions and wants the conversation to go, you just keep the conversation going, don't shut it down. Use ***kind words that are like honey, sweet to the soul and healthy to the body.*** – Proverbs 16:24

There are physical effects to this kindness. It'll change you, it'll change your marriage, it'll change your family. We're going to dig into how to have these great conversations with the lost, how to have these great conversations with those as we talk about racial reconciliation, how to have great conversations with our kids, and how to have great conversations with our parents.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus that we are grateful for what you're doing at Woodland Hills. As we open up this altar for prayer time, I pray that many who need help in the marriage, need encouragement, need to be challenged as a spouse, as a husband or as a wife, that they would leave with just the simple goal of being a listener and being quiet in the conversation and being understanding. And then that they would just be kind in their words one to another, that they would choose honeycomb type words this week, communicating throughout the home.

I just ask for your guidance through this whole series. As we go through it, it will change the way we do life with our spouse, with our children, in our business. I pray for business leaders and entertainers and theater owners to take this to heart and maybe make it part of training for our community that Branson would be known, as we were this weekend, for being those that can honor veterans, that we would honor all of our guests, even those who show up who don't choose the path of wisdom, but choose the path of the fool, that we would be wise in the way we respond to them. May that be part of our heart and part of our strategy here as a community in Stone and Taney Counties and Southwest Missouri.

Just continue to use our church to live out faith. We're grateful for all the stories we hear each and every week of people who are serving and loving in big ways and being generous to their community and to their neighbors in big ways. Use us, as we go out today, to be the hands and feet of Jesus.

It's in the name of Jesus, through the authority of that name and the power of his love that we pray it. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.