

April 27, 2014 - 11:00 a.m. Pastor Jonathan Falwell

Lost in Translation – Words Matter!

Scripture: Philippians 2:2

Summary: In part 1 of the series *Lost in Translation*, Pastor Jonathan Falwell talks about developing healthy, biblical communication in our relationships, especially including encouragement and affirmation.

Today we begin a news series entitled *Lost in Translation*, and it's based loosely on a book that I know many of you are familiar with, *The Five Love Languages*, by Gary Chapman. Now we've all driven around town, maybe sitting at a stoplight, and we pull up behind a vehicle, and let's be honest, it's usually minivans, and we find stickers on the backs of these cars, and sometimes there's one or two if a couple's just been married, and sometimes there's three or four children along with it.

I saw one recently that I pulled up behind that car at the stoplight there was a mom and dad and nine children and five dogs. It took up the entire window. I don't know how they could see behind them because of all the stickers. Now we do that to kind of symbolize the family that God's given us, the relationships that He's placed in our lives. We do that to tell people these are the people that we love; these are the people that we care about.

But you know what's not usually there is what we've added to this graphic today, and that is those little call-outs, the little bubbles that you find over the heads of those stick figures, those individuals there, and we've got a question mark there. We've done that deliberately, because we know that without a doubt there are so many families that God has brought together, so many relationships that God has put into our lives, that while we care about them, while we love them, while we talk about how special they are to us, oftentimes we are disconnected because we have no clue how to communicate with the people who are in our lives. Communication is such a huge problem in relationships in the church as well as outside of the church.

We've all heard statistics about the divorce rate in our country, and usually that number hovers around 50 percent. Oftentimes people will use that same statistic and apply it to people within the Church, but that's not actually accurate. In fact, the recent study that was done by the University of Connecticut finds that only 42 percent of marriages within the Church end up in divorce. In a sub-section of that, in evangelical churches, churches like ours, only 46 percent of our marriages end in divorce.

That is not something to celebrate. That is not something to say, "Hey, we're better than everybody else. They're 50 percent; we're only 46!" No, it's not. It's a tragic thing. It's a tragic situation, because we see that, as the Scriptures talk about in the book of Genesis where it says

that a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and the two shall become one, for some reason those are being ripped apart.

Oftentimes I will perform weddings. I do scores of them. In fact, in a couple of weeks we will begin a period of time where I'll be doing a lot of weddings. It's like wedding season. I guess we have football season, we have basketball season, we have baseball season, and then we have wedding season, and I'll be doing a lot.

There are some weeks coming up where I'll have two or three weddings every Saturday, and I know that in every one of those situations is a phrase that I, along with pretty much every pastor that I've ever been around, use in the midst of the wedding that says, "What God has joined together, let not man separate." And yet we have 46 percent of our marriages that are separated. Why is that?

I believe firmly, and studies have borne this out, that the reason so many marriages end in divorce is because of two things: one is finances and the other is communication. Today and in the weeks to follow we're going to be talking about communication, about how to make sure that we are basing our communication—not only in marriage but our communication within our family, within relationships, within the church—on the right things; that we are figuring out how to communicate according to the Word of God.

And we are going to use the book *The Five Love Languages*, which I know many of you have seen and read. I don't know how many millions of copies this book has sold. We've got a version of that, *The Heart of the Five Love Languages*, the basic ideas behind this book, available for you today, but I also encourage you—if you have a chance and you've got this book at home, or maybe if you see it at a yard sale or maybe you can pick it up online, they are out there everywhere—to read this book. You'll find some incredible truths that will help you and strengthen your relationships as we walk through what we're talking about.

But I want to make sure that I get across that the sermon today and the sermons in the weeks to come are not based on this book; they are really based on this book, The Bible. While God certainly gives books like this to men to help us to put into practice in a practical way some of the things that are found in Scripture, I know that the only hope that any marriage has, that any family has, that any relationship has, that any church has, that any individual has, the only hope that we have is found in the Word of God.

So we are going to base this and the following sermons on the Word of God, and then put some practical things in place that we can use to impact our relationships and hopefully and prayerfully begin heal, begin to restore, and begin to strengthen what God has joined together.

Turn with me to the book of Philippians. In Philippians 2 we're going to read a very important, powerful verse that is going to serve as kind of the underlying theme of what we're going to talk about today and in the weeks to come, and it's a very simple verse, but incredible meaning, incredible power that's found in this verse.

Philippians 2:2 says, “Fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”

Now I want to read this in the New Living Translation to help bring this statement to life, to help us to really get the importance, the emphasis that is found in this verse. It says it this way, Paul writing, under the inspiration of the God, “Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.”

The idea behind this verse is that the relationships that God has given to us, the people that God has placed into our lives, that we should bring honor to God by being of one mind, working together, standing together, and realizing that God put us together for a purpose, that God brought us together for a reason.

In fact, there are a couple of statements that I want to share with you in this verse that we could do a little deeper study on to help us see exactly what this verse is trying to tell us. The first one is being like-minded. It’s the Greek word *phroneō*, which is the idea of thinking the same way about matters, or—and this one to me is kind of more important—that you are seeking one’s interest.

Let me put that into perspective for you. Being like-minded, the idea of seeking one’s interest, means that my desire, my passion, my heart with my wife, Shari, ought to be that I am seeking her interest in everything that we do. I ought to be trying to work to make her happy. I ought to be trying to work to meet her needs. I ought to be trying to bring joy to her heart. And Shari, it ought to be your job, too, to do the same thing for me. That’s what that passage is talking about, being like-minded. It’s up to both of us to make sure that we are on the same page.

That not only plays itself out in marital relationships. It plays itself out in family relationships, children to parents, brothers to sisters, to family members, to friends. It plays itself out in every situation, because that is what God’s desire is for us. Paul told us: Be like-minded.

But he doesn’t stop there. He goes on to say, “Having the same love.” Now we know this word here is *agapē*, and I think you all know what that means. It’s the idea of being fully committed to one, but it’s the idea of being unconditionally committed. Unconditionally committed. Now I think, and certainly in today’s culture—and I’ll be honest with you, in today’s Church—we need to be reminded of what *unconditionally* really means, don’t we? You see, we live in a culture today where we have conditional commitments.

At every one of those weddings that I perform, that man and that woman will be standing there and they will recite vows to each other, maybe vows that they’ve written, maybe vows that are traditional in form, but they are making commitments to each other, and they are doing that in the presence of me as a pastor, in the presence of their family members, in front of all their friends, and most importantly they are making those commitments in front of God.

And they are saying, “I commit to you to love you,” and you know the statement, “for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, ‘til death us do part,” those commitments are made. And those

commitments are lived by until the first sign of trouble comes, when a challenge arises, when disagreements begin to creep into the relationship, when things begin to go wrong. At that point, that commitment that they made in a church, that commitment that they made in front of God himself, may begin to be tossed aside, and that's why we have 46 percent divorce rate within the Church. There is not an unconditional commitment.

This verse goes on to say, "Of one accord." This is the Greek word *sympsychos*, which is only used one time in the entire New Testament, and it's two phrases meaning *together* or *with*, and *soul* or *inner being*. The way we would translate that is *soul mate*. Anybody ever heard the term *soul mate*? You've maybe used that term. We love that. It's a romantic term. This person is my soul mate. That's what God tells us, to be of one accord, that our souls are knit together, we're standing together.

The late phrase he uses is "one mind," and of course that's the word *heis*, which is the idea of one, and *phroneō*, the mind. It's the idea of a singular purpose, being one in purpose. In other words, it means that certainly in a marital relationship it's not all about what I want; it's about what we want. It's not all about what the husband needs or wants; it's not only about the wife's needs or wants. But together, because God has made them one according to the book of Genesis, that together we are now one. It's about what God has joined together, what we need, what we want, what we desire, what our heart is. Our minds are knit together and we are in one singular purpose.

And you look at that statement and think that sounds great, but why is it so often that the marriages that take places in churches all over the country fall by the wayside? It's because often people walk to that altar and say, "Oh yes, I commit. Yes, I love. Yes, I do." And they say all things that they're supposed to say. They stay on script all throughout that ceremony. But when they walk out there, it's really all about me. It's about what I want. It's about my desires. And marriages fall apart.

So we understand those commitments that we make, those words that we say to each other truly matter. Words make a difference. Words are important. Words matter. Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Death and life. It's a contrast there. It's two different things that are still in the power of the tongue. Death/destruction, life/joy. We want joy, don't we? We want life. We want our relationships to be alive. We want them to grow. We want them to mature. We want them to bring joy to our lives and to the lives of others.

That's what we desire. That's what we want. That's why get married. That's why we have children. That's why we have friends. We want lives that are full. But then we realize that by our own tongue, by our own words, rather than life we can also bring death and destruction. We realize how truly important words are.

Proverbs 12:25 says, "Worry weighs a person down; an encouraging word cheers a person up." In other words, one word, one statement of encouragement, one word of affirmation can truly change direction; it can change relationships; it can change a life.

In a more specific statement, in more graphic terms, I want to read to you what it says in James chapter 3. Beginning with verse 3 it says,

We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches.

But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. People can tame all kinds of animals, birds, reptiles, and fish, but no one can tame the tongue. It is restless and evil, full of deadly poison. Sometimes it praises our God and Father, and sometimes it curses those who have been made in the image of God. And so blessing and cursing come pouring out of the same mouth. Surely, my brothers and sisters, this is not right!

That, in very graphic terms, the book of James tells us how very important our words are; that with the same mouth that we praise God on a Sunday morning, we can curse the very image of God on Monday night. We, with the words that we use and the way that we talk and the way that we talk down about others, the way that we talk behind other people's backs, the way that we use the gifts that God has given to us, we can bring death and destruction to relationships.

So today I want to just briefly, out of Ephesians 4, one verse, I want to give you some practical things that we've got to remember that we have to do if we are going to begin to use the tongue in the right way, to make sure that we're bringing life and not death. In Ephesians 4:29 it says, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers."

The first statement in this passage that we want to point out and emphasize today is that we must always, every time we open our mouths, speak with a pure heart. Make sure that the words that come out of your mouth, when you say them, when you think them, when you share them, when you talk to somebody, whether it's your spouse or whether it's a child or whether it's a family member, a friend, a person you work with, make sure that everything that you say is with a pure heart.

Ephesians 4:29, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth." So often the words that we speak, we speak them out of a self-centered heart. We speak them with the idea that this is good for me, that I want to say this because it's important to me. This often takes place in the midst of arguments, in the midst of arguments that take place especially in a marriage.

Now I know everybody who has been married, every single one of you would admit that there are times in a marriage when an argument arises. Am I right about that? Anybody not have an argument in your marriage ever? Just raise your hand, because I need to see you after the service. We all have.

Every single one of us has those times where arguments happen, and what happens in the midst of those arguments, in the midst of those disagreements, in the midst of those conflicts is that we allow words to come out of our mouth that are not good words. They are not words that build up. They are not words to encourage. They are not words to empower. They are not words that bring reconciliation. Rather, they are to attack. They are words that go out of our mouths and we use them in defense mechanism to try to shut the other person down. We actually put ourselves on opposite sides of an issue, and I've got to win, no matter what.

Guys, I want to pick on you for a minute. Have you ever been in a disagreement with your wife over some issue that might or might not have been a big deal, but the moment that you said something you were like, "Man, I wish I hadn't said that"? I've done it. We've all done it. The man is in attack mode, we're going after it, we've got it all figured out because we are right and we just know that we're right, so we say something, and the minute we say it we realize that wasn't really a smart idea, and then we pay for it the rest of the week. Am I right about that?

Guys, we've all been there, we've all done that. This passage says, "Don't let any corrupt word proceed out of your mouth." Why? Because as Proverbs tells us, death and life are found in the power of the tongue. You're in the midst of a disagreement with somebody you love? Get over it.

Understand this: You can stop it by the words that you speak, by coming about it with a different perspective, not being in attack mode but rather being in restoration and reconciliation mode, figuring out we can change things here.

Second thing in this passage. Be sure to honor God with every word you say. With everything that you say, every statement, you honor God. That's not to say that everything that comes out of your mouth ought to be "Praise God, hallelujah." I'm not saying that. What I'm saying is that even the things that we say that have nothing to do with church or with praise, nothing to do with the Word of God, those very words can actually be words that are God-honoring rather than dishonoring God.

I'm telling you, when you attack someone that is in your life by going after them, by trying to attack them with words, trying to say mean things about them, when you gossip about someone else—whether it's in the church or not—you are not honoring God with those words. Those are not words that bring honor to God.

This passage says in the second part of verse 29, "Only say what is good for necessary edification." Guys, again, you ever said anything in the midst of an argument with your wife that wasn't necessary, that didn't edify the situation? Oh, I'm telling you, there've been some slammed doors in our lives, haven't there? Let's be honest. We've got to make sure that we always recognize we need to honor God with every word. It is too easy in today's culture to allow the words that we use to honor self rather than honor God.

The last part of this verse, we've got to recognize that God can even use your words to do a great work. The things that you say, God can use them to actually change situations, to bring restoration to marriages that are falling apart, to bring healing to relationships that are in

shambles. The Scripture is very clear that indeed it can. Look what it says in the last part of verse 29, “That it may impart grace to the hearers.”

What does the word *grace* mean? We talked about it a lot over the last few weeks. The word *grace*, unmerited favor, undeserved favor. Favor that you’re showing to someone, that you’re reaching out to someone, that you’re helping someone, and they don’t deserve it. This passage is telling us if you want to do what is right, then you better make sure that the words that you use impart grace—undeserved favor—to the people you are talking about. Undeserved favor to the person that you’re arguing with. Undeserved favor to the person that is sitting there in a situation where the anger, the temperature is rising.

Words really do matter. Words truly do make a difference, and I promise you this: Unfortunately, I’ve seen it, I’ve dealt with it, I’ve dealt with it in the last few days, marriages that have fallen apart because of words, because of language that wasn’t used right. And in that statement “death and life are found in the power of the tongue,” death has been found because words weren’t used correctly.

So let me give you some practical things that you can put into practice today, that you can begin to use in your life, in your relationships right now, to begin trying to change things around. The first one is to make sure that your words inspire courage in other people. Listen, there is nothing quite like telling somebody, “I really appreciate you. I think you’re awesome. I think you’re great. You’re doing a great job. I’m really proud of you. I think what you’re doing is really neat. It’s needed, and I really appreciate you doing that.”

You know what that does? It makes that other person not only feel good, which is important; it also drives that person to figure out how they can do more of those types of things to do a better job. It gives them courage to step out of where they thought they only could go and begin to do what they didn’t think they would ever be able to accomplish.

The converse of that is this: When you attack someone and tell them, “What you’re doing is stupid; it’s a waste of time. You’re not doing a good job,” you know what it’s going to do? It’s not going to inspire courage; it’s going to make them stop doing what they’re doing and actually stop doing less. And I want to tell you, there are some marriages in this room right now that are in trouble because of attacks rather than words of affirmation that inspire courage in that family.

Second thing we’ve got to do is make sure that if we feel like affirming someone, as Nike eloquently says, “Just Do It.” We miss so many incredible opportunities to encourage someone and to affirm someone, open doors that are right there where we can say, “Man, that’s a great job. You did a great job. I’m so proud of you!”

We miss those opportunities when they’re right in front of us, and they make a huge difference. We walk right by them and let those things fall, and what happens is oftentimes you don’t get a second chance. If you’ve got an opportunity, if you think, “Should I say something?” Just do it.

Next thing, make sure that when you are in the midst of a situation, a conflict, and you bring restoration, you’re working to heal that thing, don’t only forgive somebody, make sure that you

also affirm them. You forgive, which is important, but also let them know, “I appreciate you. You’re awesome. I love you. I respect you. I’m honored to be able to be your friend. I’m honored to be able to be your spouse. I’m honored to be able to be your dad. I’m honored to be able to be your child.” Affirm them, and I’m telling you, if you do more affirming there will be a lot less need for forgiving, because the relationship will be so much stronger.

Next thing, think of somebody you can actually encourage today. When you walk out of this room today, you’re going to be around a lot of people that you know. There’s nothing quite like walking up to somebody, wrapping your arm around them and letting them know how much you appreciate them. It makes a difference. It actually can encourage, it can restore relationships, even when we don’t feel like doing it.

And oftentimes, when we don’t encourage someone, we don’t affirm someone, it’s because of a conflict, it’s because of an issue, it’s because of some problem that has arisen between us, and we say, “I can’t encourage them because we’ve got that issue from the past.”

Gary Chapman wrote in his book that so often we ruin today because we let yesterday into it. We bring the failures of the past, we bring the issues of yesterday and the days beyond, we bring those challenges, those problems into today, and whenever you bring them into today, I promise you, today is not going to be a good day. So make sure not to miss those opportunities. Find someone you can encourage today.

Next one, don’t let the day end without just simply saying, “How was your day?” This is important, certainly in family relationships, in homes. “How did your day go?” Every day that I pick them up from school and the kids get in the car, I’ll ask, “How was your day today?” Of course, if I can get their noses out of the phone or iPad and they actually answer me, we have a conversation about what the day was like.

We’ve all had those digital divides, those meals where you sit down and look around the table and everybody is at the same table, but they’re involved in things around the world because they’re on their phones or whatever. It happens all the time. “How was your day?” Just simply show them that you care about what is going on in their lives.

Next thing, brag on them. Make sure you’re bragging on them. I’m telling you, all the time I talk about how awesome my kids are. I say it wide and far. I tell everybody how incredible my kids are, that my kids are the greatest kids in the entire world, and you ought to do the exact same thing. Well, not say that my kids are the greatest. You ought to say your kids are the greatest kids in the world—even though my kids are the greatest kids in the world. Brag on them.

When you do that, it’s going to change self-esteem, it’s going to inspire them, it’s going to encourage them, it’s going to raise them to greatness because they are going to believe “somebody believes in me,” and I’m going to tell you something: We live in a world today where way too many people and way too many children don’t believe that anybody else believes in them.

You want to know why we have a drug problem like we have? You want to know why we have a runaway problem? You want to know why we have a suicide problem? You want to know why we have these school shootings and all those kinds of things? Because kids out there today don't think that anybody believes in them. The kids out there don't think that anybody cares about them. The kids out there think that "Nobody out there really gives a flip about me."

I'm telling you, if you brag on those kids and let them know how awesome they are, how incredible they are, it will change their lives. Make sure that you brag on them often. And here's the deal: Once you're doing it, the last thing, don't ever, ever, ever stop. Never quit. Don't take an opportunity today to say, "Hey, you're incredible. You're awesome. I'm so proud of you. You're amazing," and then don't talk to them again for a couple of weeks. Or the next time you see them you tear them down. You can, in one word, undo years of affirmation with one conversation. Just make sure you never stop.

There is no greater example, no greater opportunity for us to learn how to do this, than what we find in the kind of affirmation, the kind of encouragement, and the kind of love that God has shown to us. You've heard me share that verse so many times, Romans 5:8, that God demonstrated His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

While you were a loser, Christ died for you. When you were saying things that dishonored God, Christ died for you. When you were so far away from anything that was of any redeeming value whatsoever, God loved you enough to send His Son Jesus to pay a price that you could never have paid, to get a gift that you could never have deserved.

First Corinthians 13 talks about that kind of love that God has for us. It's a love that never fails. No matter what I do, no matter how bad I get, no matter how far away I step, my God loves me, and He loves you, too.

Now the first step in doing any of the things that we've talked about today, in changing any relationships, is realizing that it has to be based on that kind of love. It has to be based on the love of God. And I know there are some people who are saying, "That sounds great. I'd love to have that in my marriage. I'd love to have that in my home. I'd love to have that in my friendships and relationships, but I don't know how to get there."

You don't know how to get there because maybe you've never come to that realization, as Romans 3 says, that we've all blown it. We're all sinners and we all desperately need something to change. And while we deserve everything that we get, all the pain and sorrow and suffering, we deserve it because of who we are, Romans 6:23 says, "But the gift of God," the unmerited favor, the grace of God is this: God loves you and He gave His Son Jesus for you, and today if you will believe that Jesus is the son of God, that He died and that He rose again, you can experience that unmerited favor, that unconditional commitment that God loves you and He will love you forever.

There are some here today that your marriage is in trouble. There are some here today that maybe your relationship with your children is suffering and it's challenging and you don't know what to do. You can read every book that you can find in every bookstore out there, but until you

base your relationship with your spouse, until you base your relationship with your children, until you base every relationship on what the Word of God says and what God's desire is, what His heart is, there is no hope. And today we're not here to tell you there is no hope. We're here today to tell you that there is hope and that hope is found in Christ and Christ alone.

[Praying] Lord, I pray for every person gathered in this room. I pray that as the service comes to an end that you'd speak to the hearts of the men and women found in this room. There are people here today that need transformation, that need to have that unconditional commitment to you and to your Word in order to strengthen the relationships around them. I pray that you would speak to them right now and draw them to you.

If there are people that need to know you as Lord and Savior, that have never experienced that gift of salvation, I pray that today would be that day. And I pray that you would do that work right now.

(Singing: "Lord, I Give You My Heart")

Lord, today we thank you for your unconditional love. We thank you for your unconditional commitment to us. God, we don't deserve it; we know that; but we thank you that no matter what we do, no matter how far we get away from you, that you are welcoming us back always with open arms.

So Lord now as we prepare to leave this place and go out into a world that we know is tough, into a culture that we know is resistant to the things of God, resistant to the Word of God, Lord, I pray that you would help each and every one of us to walk out of here with courage, with strength, that we would walk out of here empowered because we know that you are with us, that no matter what we face in this world, that greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. Lord, help us to live in victory and live in power and live in courage and live in strength; not because of who we are, but because of who Christ is. And God, we'll give you the praise, we'll give you the glory.

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