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“WE NEED TO TALK”

by Josh King

We *need* to talk. Many churches are not plagued by communication frustration as much as by communication evasion. The failure to communicate is for lack of trying. Words are not misunderstood, they are not spoken. Christians often seek to avoid offending someone by avoiding “the talk.” Sometimes you can avoid “the talk” by talking. You talk about everything except what you *need* to talk about. So again, I doubly emphasize, we *need* to be a people who realize we *need* to talk.

I hope we elders are as big on ear as we are on mouth. I hope we are not just leader-talkers, but leader-listeners. We will only talk *rightly* if we listen big to God and His word. We will only talk *wisely* if listen big to you. The more we listen, the better we can talk. But if you don’t talk, we can’t listen. We want our words to be “fitly spoken,” so that they are “like apples of gold in a setting of silver (Proverbs 25:11; cf. Proverbs 15:23).” For this to happen we primarily need God’s Word, but your words help us know which of His words might best help.

As shepherds we have been charged to “pay careful attention... to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made [us] overseers (Acts 20:28 ESV).” A shepherd must feed, lead, and protect the sheep and to do so he must *know* the sheep. We “watch over your souls,” and when you talk to us, it opens up your soul and it makes our oversight a delight.

Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you. (Hebrews 13:17 ESV)

Talk helps us to know, and knowing helps us to do all other shepherding tasks well. So what should we talk about?

SUFFERING

When you are sick, when a loved one has died, when you are struggling with doubts, fears, worries, and anxieties, *please* talk to us. Certainly we don’t need to know about a cold, but we should know about cancer. James exhorts you,

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be



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forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (James 5:13-16 ESV)

I don't want to deal with the parts of this text that are harder to understand in this article; I want you to see the part that is clear. When you are sick, call for the elders. Doctors and counselors are often good gifts to us from God, but they are inadequate for the whole man. Man does not live by bread alone. Suffering sheep need the Word of God and they need prayer. This task is given to elders.

PLEASURE

We not only *want* to weep with you, we *want* to rejoice with you too. Let us celebrate God's goodness *to you with you*. Additionally the Word of God and prayer are needed to respond in a godly way to a job promotion as much as a job loss.

When you see signs of God's grace in your life, such as a joy in deeper understanding of a precious doctrine, a fruitful conversation about Christ with a co-worker, your children's interest in Jesus, repentance regarding a sin recently revealed to you, or spiritual growth, *please* tell us. We say with John, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth (3 John 4 ESV)."

DOCTRINE

When you are confused about a doctrine, say election, let us know so we can help. When you are concerned that a doctrine we are teaching may not be true, say election, let us know. Untruth, mind you, is different from heresy. I am an amillennialist. That is to say, I do not believe in the dispensational premillennial pre-tribulation teaching concerning the second coming of Christ. You might find this position to be untrue, but it is not heretical, just as I find the premillennial position to be untrue, but not heretical. If I were to say Jesus was not returning, or that there was no resurrection of the dead, this would be heresy and you would need to follow the instructions given in 1 Timothy 5:19-20.

As elders we are charged to teach. We can teach better when you ask questions and express your thoughts.

UPSET OR LEAVING

If you are thinking about leaving, let us know, you might have *good* reasons, and we might need to repent. If you are thinking about leaving, let us know, you might have *bad* reasons and *you* may need to repent. Please, don't just leave. Remember we are called to



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look after your soul. When you disappear, this causes a pastor to worry and it makes things messy.

Even if you are moving, let the elders, responsible to God for your spiritual care, help find a new solid church. As shepherds we want to make sure that when you move there is good green grass, and good faithful shepherds. This is true for children relocating or going to school as well.

If you are upset with the leadership, please don't bottle it up. Bottled frustration ferments into bitterness. And bitterness cannot be corked or bottled. The pressure builds and soon a mess is made. There is a place for forbearance and patience, but when there is frustration or anger the best thing to do is talk. Bitterness, like all sin, grows best in the dark; so don't wait until dark, talk before the sun sets.

Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. (Ephesians 4:25-27 ESV)

MISCELLANEOUS

We want to build a culture of discipleship—one on one, small group, and preaching. We want every member to be seeking to make disciples. The more organized and formal any discipleship relationship is, the more likely it is that you should let the elders know. For instance, if you are inviting a neighbor over who does not know Christ for dinner once a week to go through the book of Mark, we would *love* to know and pray with you for your neighbor. If you are gathering a group from the church to go through a book study, then the elders really *should* know as we are responsible for the oversight and teaching of the flock. We can help point you to resources and helps as well.

If you are planning on being out of town, or miss a Sunday because of sickness or an emergency, it is so kind when you call or send an email to let us know. We care for your souls. We worry when you miss communion, fellowship, and sitting under the Word of God. Like so many other things we've said in this article, this is not a have to, but it is an opportunity to make our shepherding more joyful, and when you do, we deeply thank you.

CONCLUSION

What we want here is simple—talking. Not ranting, not venting, not lying, not deceiving, not manipulating, not sugarcoating. Honest, loving, open conversation to the edification of one another and the glory of God—that is our hope. Simply put, by talking to us we



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learn better how to pray for you and minister the Word to you wisely; and thus your pursuing our joy transfers into your joy.