

How to talk about controversial issues without losing your friends.



James 1:19

“Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger”

- **Ethics has to do with knowing when to speak and when to shut up.**



“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends”

Martin Luther King Jr.

James 1:19

“Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger”

- **When we do speak, there are rules of engagement.**

Colossians 4:6

“Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.”

- Like salt, our words are to be memorable (worth preserving) and savory (tasty).
- They should be sensitive to each person and moment.

If Christian ethics rests on respect for the dignity of those who bear the image of God then -
it should affect the way we think, listen, & speak to (and about) each other, especially when we disagree.

The bully talks at others.

The coward talks about others.

The peacemaker talks with others.

Ephesians 4

“28 He who steals must steal no longer, but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.”

Observations from Eph.4:29

- **The context** is the ministry of grace - intentional generosity.
- **Our tools** for ministry are the fruit of our hands and tongue.

(vs.28)

Ethical use of our
wealth

We steal when we take or withhold from those in need.

We are Godly when we work so that we can generously share.

(vs.29)

Ethical use of our
words

We corrupt others when our speech is insensitive and disrespectful.

We care for others when our words edify by giving grace.

How to talk about touchy issues so as to build relationships

1. **Put down your sword and shield** - Combat tools do not enhance communication.
2. **Find common ground** - Build on what you share in common.
3. **Listen empathetically** - Work just as hard at understanding as at being understood.
4. **Manage fears** - Address both your fears and the fears of those around you.

1. Put down your sword and shield -

Combat tools do not enhance communication.

“Smashing heads does not open minds. America has become an *Argument Culture* that urges us to approach the world—in an adversarial frame of mind. It rests on the assumption that opposition is the best way to get anything done, ...



Nearly everything is framed as a battle or game in which winning or losing is the main concern.”

Deborah Tannen
Georgetown Univ. linguistics professor

The language of war

- **makes it harder for us to love others** - When we demonize our “enemies” we cannot say we love them.

differ disagree disdain **demonize**



dialogue debate disengage **destroy**

Max Lucado



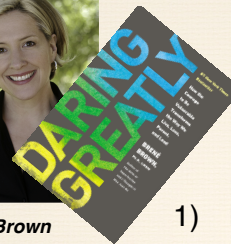
“conflict is inevitable, but combat is not.”

The language of war

- **makes it harder for us to love others** - When we demonize our “enemies” we cannot say we love them.
- **communicates an adversarial mindset** - an “us or them” mentality where there is no middle ground only winners and losers.
- **confuses culture conflict with civil war** - Standing against worldliness and sin does not mean that we curse humanity (especially the Body of Christ).



Brene Brown



Connecting with others calls for emotional disarmament -

- 1) laying down sword & shield,
- 2) avoiding warfare words,
- 3) **courageous vulnerability**

https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame

https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability



Greater Carolina
Association of Rabbis'
Kallah (retreat)



- **Presuppositions** - The conservative rabbi and I were on one side and the reformed rabbis and liberal protestants on the other.
- **Empathy** - A rabbi convinced me that he understood the strengths of my position and yet rejected it. This caused me to want to listen to him.

- **Stereo types** - We nearly always distort the positions of people we don't listen to, communicate with, or understand.
- **Depersonalize** - We have a better chance of finding the truth when we 1) focus on the issue and 2) team up with those who see it differently so as to work together to find the truth.

2. Finding common ground - Build on what you share in common.

Common goals,

We all seek life
- security, significance, serenity.

Common good,

We all share a sense of moral justice, fairness, community, beauty, & love.

Common grievance,

We all live with unmet longings
- imperfect people in an imperfect world.

Common grammar

We all share the same unspoken language
- reason, art, music, sport, laughter.

2. Finding common ground - Build on what you share in common.

"Disagreement is an achievement among those who share a common world view.

What we have so often in modern international, civic, and religious discourse are hostile communities of differing world-views speaking AT (PAST) each other without ever making meaningful contact.

We don't disagree, we just have verbal food fights where we talk over each other and where only our supporters are listening or understanding."



Richard John Neuhaus

2. Finding common ground - Build on what you share in common.

- **Presuppositions** - Our faith assumptions
- **Suppositions** - Our reasoned conclusions



Tom Morris

• Predispositions

- Our natural temperament

• Dispositions

- Our mood at any moment

Sensitivity to each of these areas is vital to effective communication.

2. Finding common ground - Build on what you share in common.

Illustration

Science

"If you can't measure it, it is not real."

Religion

"God said it, I believe it, that settles it."

Presuppositions:

"Metaphysical materialism."

"Exegetical inerrancy."

Albert Einstein

"Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind."

Pope John Paul II

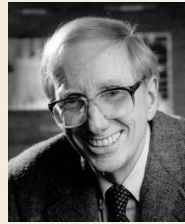
"Science can purify religion from error and superstition; religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes."

2. Finding common ground - Build on what you share in common.

Biblical illustrations

- **Jesus' sermon in Matthew 5-7** - builds on the common experience of the Law of Moses.
- **Peter's sermon in Acts 2** - builds on the common authority of the O.T. Prophets.
- **Paul's sermon in Acts 17** - builds on the common authority of Greek culture.
- **The N.T. epistles** - build on the common faith of Christian believers.

3. Empathetic listening - Working just as hard at understanding as at being understood.



Robert Bellah
(sociologist)

Expressive individualism

"We are moving to an ever greater validation of the sacredness of the individual person, but our capacity to imagine a social fabric that would hold individuals together is vanishing."

We have classes on how to speak and persuade but why are there not classes on how to listen?

3. Empathetic listening - Working just as hard at understanding as at being understood.

What happens when we don't listen well?

- **We don't grow** - We are designed to be a part of a larger body or community through whom God speaks to us.
- **We don't convince** - If I hope to influence someone, my first move should be to win their trust and respect by listening to & understanding **THEM**.
- **We invite hostility** - When people do not feel that they are heard, they turn up the volume, turn on the heat, call out the guard, shut off the hearing aids and spread the word.

4. Addressing fears - Addressing both our fears and the fears of those around us.

Dan Brown



"Men go to far greater lengths to avoid what they fear than to obtain what they desire."

We fear **rejection**,
want **attention**,
crave **affection**,
dream of **perfection**,
& end up in **isolation**.



4. Addressing fears - Addressing both our fears and the fears of those around us.

The two primal defensive impulses in life as a result of the Fall

Deception and Fear.

Genesis 3:10

"I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself.

Christian Ethics are the triumph of
truth over deception and love over fear.

Our fear of losing what we believe
we need to be whole
is challenged in the cross of Christ.

**When our words are out of line
we are guilty of a -**

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Ephesians 4:29