

The First Five Minutes

Study Guide

1. What is it that usually occurs during the first 5 minutes of contact that sets the mood for the way people will relate to each other?

2. Can you think of an example of something you said to someone this week, perhaps in all innocence, which put them in a bad mood? Can you think of something that someone said to you this week that adversely affected your time with them? What are some other destructive speech patterns (i.e. gossip, criticism)?

3*. Read John 8:6. Jesus used a technique to diffuse certain difficult situations, a technique that is sometimes used today. What is this technique and what did Jesus appear to be able to avoid by using it?

4*. Read Proverbs 11:12; 10:19 and 13:3. What does the Bible say about the general use of this technique, the one used by Jesus, explored in question 3?

5. Read Luke 6:45 in as many translations as possible. Now write this verse in your own words:

What does this verse reveal about our "speech problems"?

6. What did Jesus say was the most important commandment (Mark 12:29-30)? How would obedience to this commandment ultimately affect a person's speech?

7. What did Jesus say was the second most important commandment (Mark 12:31)? How would obedience to this commandment ultimately affect a person's speech?

8. What do you conclude should be the first step in correcting harmful speech patterns?

9*. Read Ecclesiastes 5:1,2; Proverbs 28:9; 25:12. Learning to say only the good things that help people requires discipline of our heart - our human spirit; for any godly character quality to become a part of our life involves practice and the work of the Holy Spirit. In these passages is another such spiritual discipline. What is this discipline?

Why do you think the work of the Holy Spirit would be necessary to make this discipline a part of our inner person, our heart?

10*. There are many principles and disciplines that help prepare us for following the command we have in the Bible that says:

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Ephesians 4:29

In the following passages try to identify those principles and disciplines:

- Proverbs 23:22
- Proverbs 15:28
- Proverbs 15:23
- Psalm 64:2
- Ecclesiastes 10:12, 13, 20
- James 4:11

11*. As we have seen in this lesson thus far, the Bible puts tremendous emphasis on saying things that build up people - whoever they are. Even when we are confronting people with their sin we are to use the following guidelines, ones Paul used whenever he shared the Gospel with others:

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:6

What does it mean to you for conversation to be always "full of grace"?

What does it mean to you for conversation to be "seasoned with salt"?

12. For further study, read James 3 and Colossians 3. What insights about speech do you gain from these chapters?

*These questions were taken from Series H, Lesson 17, "Saying Only the Things that Help," Tested Bible Studies For Small Groups by Rev. John Matson. [electronic edition] Ages Software, Albany, OR. Version 1.0. Copyright 1997.

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Lesson

James Dobson offered the following commentary in his April, 1999 issue of "Focus on the Family" magazine:

I heard about a brilliant but simple principle some years ago that I never forgot. Its thesis was based on the concept of "the first five minutes," describing the way people relate to each other.

For example, a speaker is given very few moments to convince his audience that he really does have something worthwhile to say. If he's boring or stilted in the beginning, his listeners will begin thinking about something else, and the orator will never understand why. If he hopes to use humor during his speech, he'd better say something funny very quickly, or his audience won't believe he can make them laugh. The opportunity of the moment is lost.

Closer to home, the first five minutes of a morning determine how a mother will interact with her children on that day. A snarl or a complaint as the kids gather for breakfast will sour their relationship for hours. And when a man arrives home from work at the end of the day, the way he greets his wife will influence their interaction throughout the evening. If he mutters, "not tuna casserole again!" the relationship will be put on edge from then to bedtime.

Fortunately, when we have been apart from those we love, we have an opportunity to reset the mood. A little sensitivity when coming back together can produce surprising benefits. It all depends on the first five minutes.

After I read Dr. Dobson's commentary I thought back over my week. A few nights before, my husband came home and walked into the kitchen as I was preparing dinner. He saw a bowl of cubed watermelon on the table and asked if he could put it back into the refrigerator so it would be icy cold when dinner was ready. For some reason, I interpreted this as an affront to my ability to prepare dinner properly. Our relationship was on edge for the remainder of the meal.

On that Friday night I'd come straight home from school and taken a nap -- my regular Friday night routine during the school year. When I woke up I found my husband digging around in the refrigerator for something to eat. He couldn't find a particular piece of grilled chicken he wanted. I suggested he just get a piece of roasted chicken out of the meat drawer (I always keep roasted chicken in the meat drawer for my 16-year-old son to "snack" on). For some reason, he interpreted this comment as an insult to his intelligence. Of course he knew there was roasted chicken in the meat drawer -- he wasn't stupid! Needless to say, our relationship was on edge for the second night in one week! Two nights

ruined because of conversation that took place in the first five minutes we were together.

We can all think of even more destructive speech patterns and habits that determine the way people relate to one another: gossip, criticism, lies, deception, humiliation, angry outbursts, vulgarity. While we may find ourselves on the receiving end of this type of speech, the scriptures warn that Christians should never be found guilty of using such injurious speech.

Jesus left us an example of silence to avoid fruitless confrontation (John 8:6). The book of Proverbs confirms that restrained speech reveals a person of understanding and wisdom. Guarding our words will result in benefit for our life (Proverbs 11:12; 10:19; 13:3).

Jesus revealed that the problems we have with our speech patterns are really symptoms of something deeper:

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45 NIV

...Whatever is in the heart overflows into speech. Luke 6:45b TLB

...For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Luke 6:45b NKJV

...for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart. Luke 6:45 NASU

Harmful, destructive speech patterns are symptoms of a heart problem! For "the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart" (Matt. 15:18 NIV).

Jesus said that the most important commandment was to love God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength. When we fill our heart with loving God, His love will overflow into our speech. When His love fills our heart, our mouth will speak in His love.

Jesus said the second most important commandment was to love our fellow man as we love ourselves. If we obey this commandment, we will never say anything to anyone that we would not wish to have said to us. We will never use a tone of voice in speaking to another that we would not wish to hear addressed to us.

Loving God and loving our fellow man is the discipline of the heart that is necessary if we wish to correct harmful and destructive speech patterns in our lives. The second discipline we must develop is the discipline of the ear: listening, especially to God and His Word. Draw near to God to listen (Eph. 5:1-2; Prov. 28:9; 25:12).

The discipline of the heart and the discipline of the ear will require a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We may be able to go for a while by exerting self-effort, but without the conviction, power and assistance of the Holy Spirit we will not be able to maintain our resolve to speak only what is helpful and beneficial.

In our quest to speak "only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29) the Bible reminds us to:

- listen to and respect the wisdom and experience of our parents and elders,
- think before we speak,
- choose wisely the time to speak,
- avoid the company of those with unrestrained speech,
- be careful of what we say no matter where we are,
- not speak evil about another person.

Paul reminds us to "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (Col. 4:6). An easy definition of grace is "giving good that is not deserved." The person to whom we are speaking does not need to deserve that we speak graciously and kindly to him/her. Furthermore, our conversation is to be seasoned with salt. Our conversation should be "tasty" to those who hear it. I also think of the healing nature of salt. So many times we have the opportunity to heal by our words. A kind and gracious word can revitalize a drooping spirit, lighten a heavy load, encourage a faltering faith, sooth a ruffled temper, or heal a wounded heart.

"If we are going to be the kind of people God wants us to be, it isn't going to come naturally. It will take a work of God. We will have to work at it within the power of His might" (Matson).

In the movie "Nobody's Fool" there is a little boy who is afraid of everything and everybody. His grandfather gives him a stopwatch and encourages him to be brave for "just one minute." When he has mastered being brave for one minute, his grandfather tells him to be brave for "just two minutes." This week, let's agree to carefully guard what we say in our first five minutes with anyone we encounter. With God's help, we can let our conversation be full of grace and seasoned with salt for "just the first five minutes." I suspect that if we will guard the first five minutes of our time with other people we will experience some surprising benefits in our homes and work places.

Just the first five minutes.

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Dobson, James. "The First Five Minutes." *Focus on the Family* magazine. April 1999, Vol. 23, No. 4. Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family. 1999.

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