

SPEAKING THE TRUTH TO OUR NEIGHBORS

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Just in case you're not feeling real challenged by scripture lately, let's take a look at Ephesians 4:25-27, 29: *So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are all members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil. Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.*

It was in 1978 that those words first reached out and grabbed me. I was a Christian single, attending a church I loved and served in many different ways. I volunteered for the nursery staff, and told the organizers that I'd be happy to work every single Sunday as long as they wouldn't schedule me for when there was a guest preacher. But they had. This was the second time it had happened.

It was 3:00 A.M. I was so mad I was vibrating and couldn't stay asleep. I paced the floor, boiling with anger and no place to put it. Finally I tried to pray and then grabbed my Bible, and there it was: Ephesians 4.

Okay, Paul says, you're going to get angry occasionally; that's the way life is. But don't let your anger lead you into sin. If you wallow in that anger and keep on brooding, the devil has his foot in the door and can sneak right in – so don't hang onto it. And keep an eye on yourself. And then, as if all that weren't hard enough, Paul says in v. 29 that we are to let no evil talk come out of our mouths. As in “no”, **no**, and *no*.

Well, I was busted. I'd just spent a good hour thinking of the angry words I wanted to say to those nursery organizers. After all, I worked hard and anyway, the bottom line was that I wasn't getting what I wanted, and evil talk was what was on my mind.

But the Spirit had nudged me. I knew I couldn't stay angry. I knew that even if I were going to speak truth to my neighbor about the nursery scheduling, it would have to be done in a spirit of reconciliation and strengthening community. After all, mad as I was, I knew we were all members of one another. And my relationship with God, with my church, and with the friendships we'd built there, mattered a lot more than venting my anger and (as we say down here in the South) showing my butt.

Ultimately, after another minute of brooding but many, many minutes of prayer and studying scripture, I just let the whole thing go. By that time I'd expressed all my anger to God (honestly, you know, that stuff doesn't shock him) and it was out of my system. I had a good time playing with the wee ones and later, when someone who heard the speaker said it was the best teaching he'd ever heard, I told him I was glad for him and God and I shared a laugh.

For whatever reason, there were no more nursery scheduling misunderstandings. And I was thankful, but thankful also for my frantic, enraged night and the true things God showed me through his Word. I may have missed the great out-of-town teacher, but the Teacher himself came and taught me just what I most needed to know.