

This week we were challenged to speak the truth in love. How can we do that effectively with those we are around the most? Let this week's readings and thoughts guide you.

Monday, April 30 – Read Proverbs 10:6-12. With so many focused books and resources, we sometimes begin to think that marriage and family life is a unique, specialized field. In some ways, perhaps—yet the Bible often reminds us that the values that guide all healthy interactions apply, if anything, more strongly to our families. The principles in these seven Hebrew proverbs speak clearly, if not specifically, to family life. Verses 6-11 all contrast people who are honest, trustworthy and upright with those who deceive, who reject wisdom in order to pursue their own ways and who do violence, if not physically then emotionally. In what ways have you felt the difference between marriages and families that embody the “righteous” attitudes and speech listed here with those torn by the “foolish” or “wicked” qualities? “Love covers all offenses” in verse 12 used the same Hebrew word as verse 11’s “the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.” Here, said commentator Paul Koptak, it meant “the covering that promotes healed relationships ... Hatred stirs up, love smooths over. Discord and dissension spring from hatred, but love nurtures harmony.” When has love healed in your life, not by ignoring a problem, but by being the glue that points beyond the problem to an essential connection worth preserving?

Tuesday, May 1 - Read Colossians 3:12-14. The apostle Paul trained to be a rabbi (cf. Acts 22:3). It’s no surprise that, after he became an itinerant Christian preacher, he taught his Gentile converts the principles of speech and relationships found in Proverbs. But he added a powerful additional motive to his teaching: Jesus’ example. “As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other,” he wrote. Paul called all of Christ’s followers to show five qualities: “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” When have you showed those qualities toward someone you love, or has that person showed them toward you? What other responses might you or they have chosen? Would those alternatives have made things better or worse? Every week in worship at Covenant, we pray, “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” Colossians said, “As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other.” How does accepting, down deep inside, that God forgives you transform your approach to forgiving others? What factors make seeing yourself and others as “forgivable” particularly significant in building durable marriage and family relationships?

Wednesday, May 2 – Read Colossians 3:15-17. Paul went on to tell the Colossian Christians, “The peace of Christ must control your hearts.” He wrote that to people who lived in a world at least as cruel and unsettling as ours, perhaps more so. Not only that—that Greco-Roman world often turned its hatred, violence and scorn particularly on its Christian citizens. Paul’s counsel about peace, praise and gratitude was a survival manual for people who lived in a spiritual “combat zone.” Songwriter Allan Roberts wrote the often-recorded song “You Always Hurt the One You Love.” What aspects of your history and temperament make “the peace of Christ” particularly important for you in your closest relationships? The Message renders verse 16, “Let the Word of Christ—the Message—have the run of the house.” How can you live that out? Verse 17 took in a lot of ground: “WHATEVER you do, whether in speech or action, do it ALL in the name of the Lord Jesus.” What does it mean to you to do whatever you do in Jesus’ name? How can you work, shop, drive the car, react to today’s news, cheer for the Tide or Tigers, or your kid’s baseball/softball team or discuss the family budget and future holiday plans “in the name of the Lord Jesus”?

Thursday, May 3 – Read Colossians 3:18-21. Too often, both men and women get stuck on verse 18, one of the most often misinterpreted and abused verses Paul ever wrote. We get a clearer sense of what he meant from a parallel in Ephesians 5:21, where he said “Submit to one another” before specifically speaking to wives and husbands. Verses 19 and 21 may sound mundane to us, but were revolutionary in a world where most pagan moralists lectured women and children on how to behave, with no related duties for husbands and parents. Paul’s command to husbands was “Husbands, love your wives and don’t be harsh with them.” In the Bible, “love” referred to a chosen set of attitudes and actions, not just an emotional state. How does this show that Paul did not intend to “let husbands off easy”? (In Ephesians 5:25, he got even more explicit: “Husbands, love your wives just like Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.”) In what ways have you seen mutual submission strengthen loving relationships? In Paul’s day, the Greek, Roman and Hebrew legal codes all gave parents virtually unlimited power over their children. How did Paul’s vision of family life lived under God’s principles emphasize mutual respect and caring, rather than a one-sided, tyrannical relationship? How can you, as a parent or a child, live out the principles of verses 20-21?

Friday, May 4 - James 3:14-17. James devoted a good part of his letter to the effects, positive and negative, of our speech and the inner sources from which that speech springs. He noted that “bitter jealousy and selfish ambition” can wreck any relationship, including those in a family. But he was equally convinced that true wisdom comes “from above,” and that divine wisdom will surely shape our souls in ways that create peaceful, generous living. Scholar William Barclay noted, “There is a kind of person who is undoubtedly clever, with acute brain and skillful tongue; but his effect, nevertheless, in . . . any group, is to cause trouble and to disturb personal relationships. It is sobering thing to remember that the wisdom he possesses is devilish rather than divine.” Have you ever known (or been) a person like that? What does it take to turn that kind of intelligence and skill in speech to more positive purposes? Barclay also observed that the true wisdom described in verse 17 “at all times brings men closer to one another and to

God.” What are some of the daily practices that most help you to remember and internalize “the wisdom from above”? In what ways can you sense that wisdom reshaping your life and relationships for the better?