Learn from a Master Communicator How to ‘Say It Well’ with Your Words and Life!

In his new book, DTS Chancellor and best-selling author Dr. Charles Swindoll develops three principles that are important to good communication—and to life: “Know who you are; accept who you are; and be who you are.”

That’s a surefire formula for Saying It Well. Dr. Swindoll’s book is a great model for personal Bible study as well as preparation for sharing the message of Christ. It shows how a great communicator has done his craft over a lifetime, and the best part is that you can now reap the benefits of his wisdom and counsel.

No matter where God has placed you or where He has called you to serve, the principles in Saying It Well will help you maximize your strengths and identify areas that need attention. Dr. Swindoll has written another must-have book for the Christian. We encourage you to send for your complimentary copy today!
Dr. Charles R. Swindoll serves as Chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary and is the Bible teacher of the worldwide radio ministry Insight for Living. He is also the founding pastor of Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas. Dr. Swindoll served as the senior pastor of a Fullerton, California, church for 23 years prior to moving back to Texas.

Dr. Swindoll’s missionary passion is to train men and women for ministry worldwide while meeting the spiritual needs of the local community. He has published numerous best-selling books dealing with all aspects of the Christian life.

This message is taken from a chapel address that Dr. Swindoll delivered to a group of prospective Dallas Theological Seminary students as they visited the campus.

In his message to prospective DTS students, Dr. Charles Swindoll quoted a man who said, “If I wanted to be happy for one hour, I would take a nap. If I wanted to be happy for a day, I would go fishing. If I wanted to be happy for a week, I would take a vacation. If I wanted to be really happy for a month, I would get married. If I wanted to be happy for a year, I would need to inherit a million dollars. If I wanted to be happy for a lifetime, I would need to get a good education.” Dr. Swindoll said that as he read the last item on that list, he would add one thing: “If I wanted to be happy for a lifetime, I would also cultivate a few lasting friendships.” Here are the DTS Chancellor’s reasons for asserting that we all need good, godly friends.
When we lived in another state at another time in our lives, I looked up one day and saw a big moving van at a house about two or three doors away on our cul-de-sac. These people had only been on our street for a few months, and it was one of those occasions in which we never took the time to greet and welcome them because our lives were busy.

I thought to myself, I haven’t even met these people and they are moving out. So, feeling bad, I walked over and knocked on the door. The wife opened it, and I said, “Hi, my name is Chuck. I live two doors down.”

She said, “Yes, I know. It’s nice of you to drop by.”

I said, “I feel terrible that we haven’t even met you and now you are moving.”

“Don’t let that bother you,” she replied. “My husband works for Kimberly-Clark [you know, the Kleenex people]. We have moved about 12 times in the last 20 years, so to keep free of the pain of saying goodbye, I don’t ever bother to say hello.”

That’s an isolated woman. That’s an isolated family.

The Importance of Friendships

Cultivating close friendships is not just a nice idea; it’s a very biblical concept. Most of us realize it the older we get and the more involved we are, especially if we meet with a measure of success (whatever that word means). It would include, of course, larger and larger numbers of people who follow you and believe in you and hang on your words and respect you.

The danger of this can be that over the passing of time, you get more and more removed from people, though you look like you are engaged in their lives. But you really are not, because you’ve never really cultivated the habit of developing close, lasting friendships. My mother used to have a little Swedish proverb that hung in our kitchen in East Houston where I grew up. It said, “Shared joy is a double joy. Shared sorrow is half a sorrow.”

That’s good. The secret is in the sharing. The longer you live, the more you will realize the value of being close to your family, close to your colleagues, and close to a few chosen friends. These friends are those you have cultivated and, ideally, will keep for a lifetime.

We Need Friends When We’re in Distress

Someone may be reading this booklet and asking, “Why do I need other people? My life is being blessed with God’s favor, I’m fairly healthy, and I’m on my way toward realizing that great dream of my life. Why do I need others? Why are friendships so important?”

We find at least two answers in Psalm 31, which is a lament psalm. In other words, it’s a sad psalm, obviously written during a very tough time in David’s life. Perhaps he was fleeing from his son Absalom after having failed miserably as a father. Maybe it was another situation in David’s life; but whatever it was, it caused him to turn to his Lord and begin by crying out, “In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness. Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me” (vv. 1–2).

In verse 9 we find one reason why David needed friends: “Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief.” David was in distress, a time when you don’t want to be alone. You know what I’m talking about. It’s when you get that call in the
middle of the night that every parent dreads. Or you come home one evening and find a note from your spouse, saying he or she is leaving. Or you walk into the doctor’s office for the results of your test and he says, “You need to sit down.”

David wrote Psalm 31 under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for future generations to read, knowing sorrow would accompany all of us. There have been days my sorrow has been so deep, I could hardly get up in the morning. Psalm 31 speaks to us about those times without specifying exactly what it refers to, which makes it applicable to all our situations.

We Need Friends When We Blow It

Whatever was troubling David, it caused his life to be “consumed by anguish, and my years by groaning.” He came closer to the reason in the second half of verse 10: “My strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.”

That word “affliction” is translated “iniquity” in the New American Standard version of the Bible, and I think that’s the concept here. We are in distress not only because of life’s circumstances, but also because we are sinful and guilt accuses us.

We Need Friends When We’re Misunderstood

There’s a sense of panic which comes with that. We can feel it welling up in David. He said his neighbors didn’t want to be around him. He was an object of dread to the people who were once acquaintances and followed him. There were people now who didn’t even want to walk on the same side of the street he was on.

Your list of things that wound you may not be the same as mine, but here are some I put down as someone who’s been in the ministry for about half a century: hate mail, angry parishioners, a caustic comment at the door of the church, or an exaggerated story that swirls around you that is mostly untrue, but all of which is passed on and just gets worse in the passing. The cause of the pain isn’t always as important as the pain it causes. I don’t know anyone who enjoys being falsely accused, misunderstood, attacked—but it happens.

When life gets harsh, we need to know how to handle it. I’m here to tell you that you cannot handle it alone. It doesn’t matter what your IQ is or how good your track record in life. When that kind of stuff happens, it rocks you and your mind starts playing tricks on you. That’s when you need the solidarity and counsel of a friend whom you have cultivated. Friends like that are hard to find. I got a note once from an old Marine Corp buddy who cussed loudly when I knew him. He also chased women, drank heavily, and loved the big weapons. He was a great Marine, in other words. But suddenly, out of the blue, he came to faith in Jesus. He had spent most of his idle moments at a bar, and now he spends them in a church.

The longer you live, the more you will realize the value of being close to a few chosen friends whom you have cultivated.
This guy wrote to me and said, “Chuck, there’s just one thing I really miss from my old life, and that’s the great fellowship we used to have at the tavern. I remember how the guys would sit around laughing, drink a few beers, tell stories, and let our hair down. I can’t find a place like that for Christians. I mean a safe place with a few guys who will let me admit my needs and my battles, a place to talk about my faults and then have those same guys put their arms around me and tell me they understand because they have a lot of the same problems.”

My stomach churned when I read his note because I realized he’s right. People don’t spend time at a bar because they are all lushes. They spend it there because they are lonely. The bartenders are really paid to listen, not just mix drinks. You get to a church and you begin to share your battles like that, and it’s amazing in how many prayers your struggles are mentioned. Whom do you turn to? Whom do you trust? What do you do when you don’t know what to do? That’s when you need a friend you have cultivated to help you with the script.

The Power of a Friend

In Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 we read: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”

These are familiar verses, but when you read them again in the light of Psalm 31 you realize that friendship and accountability are essential.

You may be familiar with the popular story of the guy who died at his desk and no one noticed for five days. All the research says the account is an urban legend, because the company involved has never been identified, the New York City medical examiner’s office said it had no such cases, and it has been reported in different settings. But it’s still a great story.

It seems that a man named George Turklebaum, who had been employed as a proofreader at this unnamed New York firm for 30 years, had a heart attack in the open plan office he shared with 23 other workers. He quietly passed on Monday, but nobody noticed until Saturday morning when an office cleaner asked George why he was working during the weekend.

His boss, Elliott, said George was always the first guy in and the last to leave. So no one found it unusual that he was in the same position all that time and didn’t say anything. He was always absorbed in his work and kept to himself. Nobody expected him home for supper. Nobody asked him how he was doing. The moral of the story is that we need each other. George was a lonely soul who didn’t realize the tragedy of his aloneness until it was too late. I don’t want that for you, so here are four things I want you to take with you:

First, seriously consider the value of cultivating an intimate relationship with a few individuals now, before you find yourself alone at your desk, so to speak.

Second, ask yourself some probing questions. For example, Why do I remain so isolated? Am I afraid of the risk? Am I afraid of being burned by someone? Have I been hurt before
because I got close? Am I ashamed of something that, if found out, will ruin me? Why do I think I’m okay alone? What could happen if I remain isolated?

These may be difficult questions to deal with. But I can assure you that your private world will become too much for you to handle—tomorrow if not today.

Third, get active. Choose at least three other people of the same gender to cultivate close friendships with, people with whom you begin to meet regularly. Choose people you respect and can trust, people who love you but aren’t intimidated by you. People who are objective and wise and genuinely spiritually minded, who have your good at heart and will be loyal, but not blind. Remember, the spiritual life is never meant to be a solo journey.

Fourth, start at home. Truth be told, some people are pretty isolated from their spouse. I see it all the time. I don’t know how many times I have been counseling with a couple and she’ll look at him and say, “Do you feel like that?” I want to say, “May I introduce you to one another?” They’ve only been married 26 years, and she doesn’t know how he feels! How do you avoid that kind of isolation? Try something novel: talk!

We all need a friend; we need several friends. But they don’t come automatically. Friends have to be cultivated. So reach out and touch someone.