

Let Your Speech Be Sweet

Ephesians 4:29 says; 'Let no unwholesome speech proceed out of your mouth, but only such speech as is good and beneficial to the spiritual progress of others, as is fitting to the need and the occasion, that it may be a blessing and give grace to those who hear it'.

Colossians 4:6 tells us to; 'Let your speech at all times be gracious, pleasant and winsome, seasoned as it were with salt, so you may never be at a loss to know how you ought to answer anyone who puts a question to you'.

We know we are to speak the truth at all times, but sometimes the truth is so hurtful and destructive, it is better to hedge around the full truth. That does not mean we should lie about anything, just not cause unnecessary pain by 'speaking our mind'. We need to use tact and let our speech be gracious, while still being honest. There are times when we should tell the 'soft' truth instead of the 'hard' truth. The following twelve examples are all real life scenarios.

Example # 1: A close friend visits you and is about to go for dinner with her new husband. She is looking forward to the dinner and comes to visit you to show off the new dress she bought especially for the occasion. As she twirls around in your lounge room, she is expecting a compliment. The trouble is, although your friend loves the dress, it is the ugliest dress you have ever seen. As a close friend, you would not want to destroy her happiness by telling her the hard truth about how you feel concerning the dress, but you would hedge around it. If the dress actually suits your friend, you could say, "That dress really suits you." "The orange in it brings out the highlights in your hair." "The material is so soft." Then to prepare her for what may be a few strange looks; "I guarantee other women at the restaurant will be checking your dress out!" So you have still told the truth, without destroying her joy and she will leave your house with your friendship intact.

Example # 2: A friend has suffered a major series of tragedies. She has been a Christian for many years, serving the Lord faithfully, but within the space of three years she has lost her four children and two grandchildren to an inherited illness, and after a couple of years, is still sad. You don't understand her ongoing sadness and feel she is living in the past and should get over the losses and get on with things. What you should never say is: "Just get over it." "You have brought this on yourself." "You are reaping what you must have sown." No matter what anyone thinks of the situation, common sense tells us that nobody would knowingly put themselves in that situation; nobody would deliberately sow such destruction into their lives; and especially not a committed Christian. Death is part of this fallen life and we can accept the loss of parents, siblings and friends, but the one death that is the hardest to bear, is the loss of one's child. When a child dies, the parents have to live with the emptiness that lost child has left; the lost little kisses and hugs; the lost birthday parties; the lost Christmases with that child; the lost Mother's/Father's Days with their child. Adjusting to those enormous changes can take up to ten years. Multiply that six times and you have someone who struggles to cope for many years. That is not living in the past. Her present life is without her children and her ongoing sadness is that of someone trying to cope with a childless future, when it has previously been filled with the joy of the children now gone. It would take a very heartless person to say glibly, "Get over it." And it would take an even worse person to blame that woman for her losses. That is what Job's acquaintances did and the Lord was not pleased with them. So what do you say to someone in a situation like that, when you know words are inadequate? Be honest. "I don't know what to say to you?" "How can I help you?" "I can't begin to imagine what you are going through." If you can't visit, you could telephone everyday so they can hear a voice. Even as a committed Christian, deep grief is a very, very lonely place to be; multiple grief's, is overwhelming. Allow them to talk even if they repeat the same thing over and over. Be compassionate, let your speech be gracious and sweet; encourage where possible and keep all negative thoughts to yourself. Don't try to unload any of your problems onto them; they just can't take it at that time.

Example # 3: An artist you are friendly with shows you his new paintings. He is excited because he has arranged a public exhibition and wants your opinion. To you, his art looks like a monkey could have painted them, but you could never say that. So what do you say? Be honest but be tactful. If

you like the colours in one of them you could give him the soft truth; “I love the colours in this one.” “I can see you put a lot of time into these paintings.” “Tell me what this represents.” When none of his paintings are sold, you could sweetly suggest he try ‘another angle’. Take him to an exhibition where several paintings are being sold and suggest he ‘try that out and see how he goes’. The hard truth in this situation could stop a potential masterpiece being painted, and destroy a friendship.

Example # 4: As a Christian, you teach your children about love and forgiveness, encouraging them to forgive each other, rather than argue. One of your children has just been very naughty and you have sent her to her room for time out for the both of you. Before you have the opportunity to let her out of her room, she comes to you with one of your prize winning orchids, torn up by the roots, dropping dirt all over your clean floor. With tears dripping down her little cheeks, she says with a tiny hopeful voice; “I’m sorry I was naughty Mummy. I brought you a flower to say sorry. Can you forgive me like you told us?” What can you do? Scream at her for destroying your award winning orchid or show her the love and forgiveness you have been telling her about? Do you love the orchid or your child more? Even children should be greeted with sweet speech. You would have to thank her for the flower and hug and forgive the little child who needs it right at that moment, then suggest the flower is probably much happier in its pot, and ask her to help you replant it – and hope it doesn’t die. You haven’t told her she has possibly destroyed something you enjoy – which would be the hard truth – but you have hedged around it by repotting your flower and your child’s tender young heart is still intact – and so is your relationship with her.

Example # 5: You have noticed a girl sitting alone in your church and she is as rough as they come. Tattoos, multiple earrings, nose rings, rings through the navel which she delights to show off, rings through the eyebrows, studs in the tongue, hair dyed jet black, fingernails painted black, black lipstick, black clothing, foul mouthed and foul smelling. Do you walk away with your nose turned up? Would it be wise to tell her that you don’t want people like her in your church? You would love to, but you don’t tell her the truth about how you feel about her clothes and piercings. You would love to tell her to take a good bath before she comes back to church again. The hard truth in this case could send a soul to hell. What do you say to someone like that? We need to realise Jesus died for her too, and loves her as much as He loves everyone else. She is seeking God, or she wouldn’t be in church in the first place. As much as you would like to tell her the truth, you know it would not be appropriate, so greeting her with a smile and speaking to her like you would any other new person, would be the Christian thing to do. “Hello. I haven’t seen you before. I’m Sue. What’s your name?” If she tells you her name is Blaze Fury, you probably wouldn’t believe it but you wouldn’t say, “Oh yeah right. I don’t believe that. What’s your real name?” What you could say is, “Goodness me, Blaze Fury is unusual. Do you live around here?” Treating a girl like ‘Blaze Fury’ with love and kindness, could bring her right into the Kingdom of God, saving another lost soul for Jesus, then you would have the joy of watching her grow in grace and learning her real name.

Example # 6: A young lady in the church has recently had a baby. When you ask the mother her new baby’s name, she says something that sounds unintelligible to you. After repeating the poor child’s name three times, you still don’t understand what it is. You feel like telling the young mother what you really feel about the silly name she has given the baby, but instead you smile sweetly and ask her how it is spelt, then tell her what a beautiful baby she has, because you still can’t work out the name. Telling the hard truth would hurt the young mother’s feelings unnecessarily and could cause a break in fellowship. That would be sad, especially if you find out later the name she chose for her new baby is an Old Testament name that you had never noticed before. The truth is; her new baby is beautiful.

Example # 7: You and your wife have made plans to enjoy your wedding anniversary over dinner. You arrive home from work to pick your wife up for the anticipated evening out and nearly faint. She has just spent hours at the hairdresser getting herself all dolled up especially for you, but she looks like a mannequin; heavy make up makes her look like a panda; her new dress is too tight and her hairdo looks as though she has been struck with lightning – but she did it for you. Do you tell her the hard truth about what you really think? You can’t without ending up in divorce! What do you say? How about the soft truth? “You must have spent hours at that hairdressing salon, Darling. It’s lovely that you would put yourself through all that for me, and I love you for it.”

Example # 8: Your teenage son has no idea what to buy you for Mother's Day so you give him a few subtle hints. Mother's Day comes around and you wait to see which of the gift ideas he has bought you. He hands you the chosen gift with bright eyes. It certainly is heavy! When you open it you're stunned to see your Dear son has bought you a spear-gun. You look at him dumbfounded! What could he be thinking? Do you say, "You silly boy. What am I supposed to do with this?" Before you can get a word in he tells you that since he loves spear fishing so much, think of all the fish you are going to have for free! Then he asks if he can borrow it. You graciously hand him the spear-gun and tell him to be very careful when he is out catching fish for you, and thank him for the thought, knowing full well he bought it for himself with the money his father gave him to buy your gift.

Example # 9: There is a big, tall man in your church, who loves to sing as loudly as he can. The trouble is he sings way off key, all the time, at the top of his huge voice. There have been many times when you have tried to broach the subject with him – as have other parishioners – but you don't quite know how to. Your opportunity arises one day over a fellowship coffee, when he happens to mention to you just how much he loves the singing and worshipping God. His sparkling eyes are full of love for the Lord. Now is your chance to tell him exactly what you think of his singing! Telling someone the truth is always the best isn't it? What words would you use to destroy this man's love of worship? The soft truth would be better. "I can see just how much you really love worshipping our Lord. I do too."

Example # 10: Your ten year old daughter wants to try to cook something she has made at school in cookery class. She spends a couple of hours making something that smells delicious. As everyone sits down to eat, you take a mouthful of something that can only be described as road kill. Without anyone being aware, you leave the room and spit it out. When your daughter giggles and says, "Daddy. Take a bite" do you speak the hard truth say, "That is too disgusting. What did you put in that mix?" Or do you say softly, "No, Honey. You made it, you deserve the first bite." And let her discover for herself what she has done wrong, without you hurting her feelings.

Example # 11: There is a woman in your church who has always been friendly to you, even though you really do not like her. You try to avoid her, turn down her invitations for meals using every excuse you can and once in the shopping centre, you even hid from her. But she keeps on asking anyway. You nickname her Miss Dislike and tell all your friends about how and why you can justify disliking her. One day you are going through a very tough time in your life. Miss Dislike comes to you and shyly says, "I have a word for you from the Lord." Well that really is the last thing you need – Miss Dislike telling you something she thinks is from God! Before you can get away from her, she tells you the Word of Knowledge. The word she delivers is 100% accurate, then she sweetly says, "I have always liked you. I knew you were going through this tough time and I have been praying and fasting for you. That's when God gave me this message for you." You feel as though your stomach is turning inside out with guilt. Talk about having coals heaped on your head! She has been praying and fasting for you while you have been ignoring her, avoiding her and not showing love to her! Do you tell her the hard truth? "That's nice, but you know I have never really liked you. I have been avoiding you and made fun of you to my friends." Of course not. If you are a genuine Christian, you would hug her, thank her and look beyond her weaknesses to the committed Christian and sister in Christ that she is; and then go quietly and repent of your sin. It is never wise to tell someone you didn't like them when you first knew them. That piece of hard truth may make you feel good, but is devastating to the person you said it to, because they were probably unaware of it.

And finally example # 12: There is a new baby Christian in your church who has come from a very sad childhood. For the first time in her life, she feels loved and accepted. She tells everyone how special she is to God and how much she loves Him and how much He loves her. You are tempted to tell her the hard truth and say, "You are not alone in this you know; you are just one of millions. God loves everyone equally. You are not singled out." To tell her that hard truth would be too devastating and rob her of the new-found joy. She feels loved and special; something she has never known before, so allow her to enjoy that for as long as she can, because in time she will see that she is one of a huge body of people. A soft truth would work here. "It is truly wonderful to know God's love, isn't it? I'm happy to see you so filled with joy."

Yes it is true we need to speak the truth, but sometimes, some things are better left unsaid. Sometimes it is better to remain silent, than cause someone unnecessary hurt. We really do need the Lord's wisdom, we need to bridle our tongues and we need to be sensitive to other people. We need to put ourselves in their shoes, so to speak, to understand fully what our unkind and unthoughtful words will do to the other person. May your speech always be gracious, wise, loving and give blessing to your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Amen and God bless you.

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