



## **Courageous Endurance – Part 7**

### **Maintaining Clear Communication**

**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Well, I grew up in Long Beach, California, with a family dog named Ruff. R-U-F-F. That was my dog's name. It wasn't short for anything but looking back on it, providentially, it should have been short for Ruffian. Do you know that word ruffian? A violent troublemaker. That certainly was my dog. He was part beagle, part boxer. And he would have been a great dog had we been able to control him. But that would have taken like a German sergeant canine dog-whisperer type to work with him for weeks on end. And I was just an elementary school kid so it was beyond me. And he just was who he was. I mean, he was the kind of dog that if you tried to go through the gate, if you cracked it open, he would run out at 60 miles an hour, turn left or right and just run for the joy of running. That's what this dog did. If I left my nice new Rawlings baseball glove out on the back lawn overnight, it would be a pile of leather scraps by morning. You think if you had, you know, a dog like that, and we had our little gates out there in the back. You know if a stranger were to walk up that would be a time you might want your dog to bark. I mean, he would just run up and wag his tail and pant and hope to get a dog treat or something. That's how our dog was out of control. I remember one day that he went and angrily barked at my father, and then that was right before his sharp canine teeth latched into his hand and blood started to go everywhere. And I thought, that's Ruff, right? Literally biting the hand that feeds him. Right? It was a terrible thing. Those 50-pound bags of dog food every week. I remember one of my chores was to feed the dog. And yeah, he was a mess, Ruff my dog. Untamable. He seemed like an untamable creature.

Now at Compass Bible Church the Bible is central. And if you know your Bible well enough here, an untamable creature like my dog, Ruff the ruffian, you might immediately think of the thing that is most difficult for us to tame in our sanctification in the Christian life. As James, the half-brother of Jesus, put it in James Chapter 3, it is that thing that exists behind the gates of our teeth. And so often when our teeth crack open our tongue will run at 60 miles an hour, you know, without purpose or direction. Times that it should bark, it doesn't. And times it shouldn't bite, it does. And James says it's just a restless evil. I mean, there are all kinds of problems that we get into because our mouth does not do what it ought. We sometimes don't speak up when we should. We sometimes say things that injure and damage and that we shouldn't. And it is a restless evil. And he even goes so far as to say in such dramatic terms it's set a lot of forests on fire in our lives and it is set on fire itself by hell. I mean this is an amazing way to talk about this mouth that we have to communicate words that cause so much damage. And all of us as Christians, as he speaks to Christians, this is the perpetual challenge. So if you feel a little bit of guilt when I bring up the problem of our words, I think you're in the right place this morning because our whole goal here is to leave with a little more hope regarding taming the seemingly untamable in our lives. We want to leave with hope because there is a trainer who can tame this and he would like to work with you on it. As Peter said you need to make every effort, right? You going to have to work this out with fear and trembling. It's going to be a lot of effort. But you've got the Holy Spirit if you're a Christian who wants to help you this next week do better than you did last week with the use of your mouth.



Now, this all came to the fore as I was praying through how to preach this second to last sermon in Acts as we look at the Apostle Paul doing one more time. It's almost redundant. Like, wow, we've seen him do this so many times, about to utilize his words, his mouth to do what needs to be done. And as I read this over and over and over again, I thought, well, he does it in such a strategic way. And I think he's been so careful throughout the book of Acts to communicate just what needed to be communicated at the right time in the right way and I thought we need to learn to do that. So we're going to use this as a platform this morning to look at Paul preparing again to say, he says some things in this passage, but it sets us up for our last sermon in Acts next week, Lord willing, as we see him lay out some things that need to be said to the people here in Rome. But before we get to that we want to see him set the stage in Acts Chapter 28 verses 17 through 22, and to think through how the Apostle Paul is careful with his words, use it as a platform for us to look at the book that all of us should have learned a great deal from as children and certainly children in the faith. We need to learn this early in our Christian lives what the book of Proverbs has to say about the use of our mouths.

So we're going to spend most of our time in the book of Proverbs this morning. But be sure you keep one eye on that column that's printed on the worksheet there of our passage. Let me read it for you first, verses 17 through 22 Acts 28. We're near the end of this book study. We're going to look at these verses that set up Paul having a dialog with these men in verses 17 through 20. But also he's going to lay into this in verses 23 and following and we'll see that. Let me read it for you from the English Standard Version. It says in Acts 28:17, "After three days." You remember he's in house arrest now after the big, you know, voyage across the Mediterranean. He's there. He's been given some freedoms in verse 16. He's got his own quarters. He's there by himself, of course, the Roman soldiers guarding the door. But it says, "After three days," he's now settled in this place, "he called together the local leaders of the Jews, and when they had gathered, he said to them, 'Brothers, though I had done nothing against our people or the customs of our fathers, yet I was delivered as a prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. And when they examined me, they wished to set me at liberty,'" they were going to set him free there in Jerusalem you might remember, but "because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case," both in Jerusalem and then in Caesarea, he was under house arrest there. He was in custody there in Caesarea. We had all of this go down, lots of issues we dealt with and we studied, but frankly, the Romans were like, we think, okay, this guy should be let go. There's no reason for the death penalty.

"But because the Jews objected," verse 19, "I was compelled," he felt like he had no other recourse than, "to appeal to Caesar." And that, of course, as a Roman citizen, was going to lead him all the way to Rome and he's finally there. "Though I had no charge to bring against my nation." I'm not against the Jewish people. Right? He's made that clear from the beginning of his ministry, he's not against the Jewish people becoming a Christian and a follower of Christ. It's just that God's doing something new through the Gentiles as well as the Jews and forming, as we read in our Daily Bible Reading this last week, to make one new man, one new organization between Jew and Gentile, and we have this thing called the Church. Now he's all about the Church but he's not preaching against the nation of Israel but the Jews were certainly not happy with what he was teaching. "For this reason," he says, verse 20,



"therefore, I asked to see you and speak with you," the leaders here of the Jews in the surrounding regions and in Rome, "since it is because of the hope of Israel that I'm wearing this chain." Really, I'm just fleshing out the theology of the Old Testament, right? I'm saying nothing really that the prophets and Moses said would happen. This is the fulfillment of it all. And their answer, verses 21 and 22, before he lays into his defense, his formal defense, it says, "And they said to him, 'We've received no letters from Judea,'" the surrounding area of Jerusalem, "about you, and none of the brothers coming here has reported or spoken any evil about you." So, Paul, we don't have any specific charges against you.

"But," verse 22, "we desire to hear from you," we need to hear from you and, "what your views are." We'd like you to explain your views, "For with regard to this sect," that's what they call Christianity here in the book of Acts, a sect, or they called it The Way, which Jesus called himself "The way, the truth and the life." And "Everywhere it is spoken against." People do not like your Christianity in the Jewish quarters, in the surrounding environs of Rome they don't like Christianity. So that was clear. We don't like Christianity, but we don't know about you but we want to hear it because if you're going to promote this we need to understand it. So all this is setting him up for another conversation. But I want to start at the very beginning in verse 17, and I don't want to make too much of the first three verses, but I do want to say it wasn't on the first day and it wasn't on the second day and it wasn't even on the third day. But after three days, he said, okay, I need these people here and I need to say some things. So it's important for us to start there. I want to learn biblical principles from the book of Proverbs to talk about how our mouths should be governed and as Christians in our path of sanctification, how do we work out this act of obedience, trying to get our mouth tamed. How do we do that? Well, we need to start by understanding God's rules, God's principles regarding our mouth. What does a godly person do in regards to their speech?

We're going to look at that in the book of Proverbs. And let's just start that Paul gives us an example. There might have been a lot of reasons why didn't you do it on day one? Why didn't you do it on day two? I don't know. There could be practical reasons, but whatever the reasons are he had a reason. Paul's always got a reason for what he does and he waits until after the third day to have this discussion with these leaders. So I just want to start with this basic concept. We got five-sub points here, but number one of our message this morning, we "Need to Know When Not to Communicate," because for Paul it wasn't on day one and it wasn't on day two and it wasn't on day three. It was after three days he thought it's now time to have this conversation. So you need to know when not to communicate, right? You need to know when to not say anything. And we could go to the New Testament and see all kinds of things like James Chapter 1 that says you ought to be slow to speak, and that doesn't mean your diction should be slow or your pacing, your cadence should be slow. If so, I certainly wouldn't be your pastor. That's not what it means. It means that you should stop and pause before you speak. You should be slow to speak. Be quick to hear. I want to hear but I'm going to be slow to start engaging in conversation.

So let's look at the book of Proverbs. There are several things for us to learn, aspects of this that we need to process and let's start, if you would, with me in Proverbs Chapter 10. We'll go all over the Proverbs this morning, so get ready and please follow along. I want you to know



this isn't my opinion. This is what the Bible teaches. Proverbs Chapter 10, let's start in verse 19, a verse that is quoted many, many times in my household all the time. Here it comes. Proverbs 10:19, "When words are many, transgression is not lacking." Not lacking. Right? It's unavoidable, actually, the more you talk. "But whoever restrains his lips is prudent." You're wise if you restrain your lips. So here's what I'm going to say about speech in general: before I engage in a conversation, before I add my opinion or my perspective on something, I need to pause, I need to wait. And here's the first thing I need to do. Letter "1A," "I Need to Wait for Wisdom's Sake." Wisdom and prudence would say just wait. It's always the wise thing to not jump in with your words about anything. Slow down. Not in how you speak once you do speak, but before you speak let's just let some time go by. It may be in the midst of a conversation, maybe a minute, it may be 10 seconds or it may be three days. But we need to sometimes pause and say now's not the time for me to speak. Prudence, wisdom would say, I need to think about this before I talk. Think before we speak, listen, and make sure we listen well before we speak.

When I got a new bike years ago, I got flat tire after flat tire because I was riding it all the time. I think now I ought to get flat tires a lot less because I don't ride the bike that much. Right? That's just simple, that's how it works. The more you speak the more you are prone to say things you shouldn't say. One of the reasons that it says in the discussion about our untamable mouth that people shouldn't aspire to be teachers, you shouldn't just like rush into wanting to be a teacher like me because I get my words recorded all week long, multiple hours of my talking, my jabbering. It gets recorded, people analyze it and there are plenty of things I've said I shouldn't say because I talk all the time. I talk for a living. And so where words are abundant, when they're multiplied, when there are many, transgressions are unavoidable. It's not lacking, it's going to happen, but if you'd restrain your word, you'd say less or you wait to speak, you will do much, much better. Prudence. You should wait to speak and maybe pause and maybe say nothing for prudence's sake, for wisdom's sake. Okay.

As Proverbs 18:13 says, "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame." And you know some people who don't wait at all. Matter of fact, some people don't wait for you to finish saying what you're saying before they're talking over you to say what they want to say. Anybody? You know how that works. It would be great to get back to a conversation where there's actually like a half a second pause between each person participating in the conversation. That wouldn't be bad. Let's make it a second. Let's make it two. We need to be slow to speak. Letter "1B," Proverbs 17. Go to Proverbs 17 with me. Proverbs 17. Drop down to verse 27, almost to the end of this chapter. Proverbs 17:27, "Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding." He who restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. Here's why we often speak too fast because our spirit is feeling stuff. It gets round up, it gets hot, it gets frustrated, it gets emotional. The connection between my emotions and my words, and you know this, there's a tight connection there. Just in all of us. We feel something, we want to say something. We get angry, we want to say something. We get bitter, we get indignant, we want to say something. And the connection between our feelings and our words we don't restrain them because we're feeling so much. And here is what we need to understand as your emotions cannot dictate your words. I'll put it this way, Letter "1B," "You Need to Wait for Your



Emotion's Sake," because your emotions cannot govern this. Your emotions cannot be the thing that drives it.

Now, there are some things you may analyze after you wait and pause and think, "Is this prudent? Is this right?" You'd say, "Yeah, it comports with my emotion so I'm going to say that." But you cannot bypass your brain because you're feeling something and you just got to say it. So wait, Proverbs would say. Let's just have a cool spirit about things and if your spirit isn't cool then let's just be quiet. There's a lot of conversation under one roof in a household that goes on. And what would be good is if you maybe took some time to take a walk around the block and cool your spirit off before you say anything. Don't say Amen to that or elbow your spouse. But that would be a good principle for us all to live by. Just slow down. Maybe you should go and just chew on your pillow for a while in your room by yourself, door closed before you come out and say something in response to what got your spirit all hot and bothered. Okay? Be careful. Don't let your emotions concern this and drive this.

Verse 28. Here's our third one, Letter "1C," "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he's deemed intelligent." You're smart. Right? You just nod in a boardroom in the middle of a difficult topic, they think, yeah, he's tracking with us. I don't understand what you're saying. Right? I mean, this is a silly thing, and I'm not asking you to be deceptive here, but I am saying this: for your reputation's sake, Letter "1C." Wait. "Wait For Reputation's Sake" you should wait. Because people who just blabber before they get a full concept of what we're talking about, they're immediately written off as a fool. Right? Just be quiet. And you know what? Maybe your brain will catch up with the conversation. Many times I found that to be true. How many times? I spent a lot of time in boardrooms. I'm on like ten different boards all over the country and I want to say things immediately because I hear something and sometimes my spirit's all tied in knots and I want to say something, and I think, no, no, no, slow down. I'm not even sure I understand what they're saying. And it may take another three, five, ten, 15 sentences and I start to say, and now I get what they're saying. Just lay back, slow down, be slow to speak for wisdom's sake. Right? For your emotion's sake, for reputation's sake.

Go to the next chapter, Chapter 18 and drop down to verse 7. "A fool's mouth is his ruin," not just his reputation, "and his lips are a snare to his soul," not just what people think of him. Seriously, he's in trouble. He ruins his own life. He gets caught in a snare because his mouth is just blabbering. So here's the deal, Letter "1D," if for nothing else you need to "Wait For your Future's Sake." You know how many people in this room have probably ruined their future because of things they've said in a meeting, in an interview, in a conversation, in a marriage, in a parenting situation. Be careful. Slow down. Stop. Pause. Listen. Think. Pray. And then you can respond. For your future's sake. There's no telling what damage your future could have because of unfiltered words that are just coming out of your mouth. Put your hand over your mouth and say, I got to wait for wisdom's sake, for emotion's sake, for reputation's sake, for my future's sake.

One more, Proverbs 27:14. Proverbs 27:14. Look this passage up. Now I know this is put in a humorous context, but I've got to think there may have been something even in conversations



you've had this week that are based on this. Maybe Paul for some reason thought that this was the reason we should wait to the fourth day. Proverbs 27:14. "Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice rising early in the morning, it'll be counted as a curse." Now, if I called you every morning at 4:30 and said, "Hey, praise the Lord, get up, rise and shine, I'm praying for you today." That's a blessing, man, coming from Pastor Mike, what a blessing. You're so blessed. It's Pastor Mike calling me saying good morning, praying for you. No. You'd count it as a curse. Right? Except for a few of you insomniacs, most of you would count that as a curse. And all that saying is maybe 8:30 would be better than 4:30 and then it would be counted as a blessing. Why? Because you're not ready to hear it. Letter "1E," you need to "Wait For the Sake of Those Who Hear." There is no telling why someone may need you to not say this quite yet. Maybe they're not ready for this truth. Maybe there's a reason that you should be there for a few days and people hear that you're in prison here in Rome. Maybe there's a purpose for you waiting. I don't know what the purpose of Paul waiting was, but Paul waited. And maybe you need to wait. I know there are many examples and again, you've got to think about my life and all the talking I got to do. And you too, I know plenty of you talk for a living as well. But I'm just thinking sometimes I just have to say I have to wait a while until I share this. I have to wait a while until I engage in this. I have to wait a while until I lay this plan out or I respond to that problem. Sometimes you have to wait. I mean, I've had people accuse me all the time as recently as this week, "Why don't you do it faster?" Well, because I can't always do it faster and be prudent. I can't always do it faster and do the right thing. I need to slow down sometimes. And sometimes it's for your sake that I'm slowing down. Wait for wisdom's sake, for emotion's sake, for reputation's sake, for your future's sake, for the sake of those who hear. Paul waited three days. I don't want to make too much of that. Who knows what the three-day wait was for? Who knows? But he waited three days.

And then glance now at the printed document there that has the passage. I know we're going to get right back into Proverbs, but it says in the middle of verse 17, "And he called together the local leaders of the Jews." Very specific. An invitation went out to a very specific group of people. He didn't say, I want everyone in the environs of this prison to come, come one, come all. I'm going to talk a little bit about why I'm here. He didn't say that. Come Jews, come Gentile. He didn't say that. Hey, I want all the people who participate in the synagogue to come and listen to what I have to say. He didn't say that. I want the leaders of the Jews. I want the leaders of these Jews to come. Paul was intelligent about who needed to be communicated to. It's a weirdly worded point, grammatically correct and sometimes I know communication takes the word "with," but I'm going to use this preposition "to" because it's all about you giving your words to other people. So let's put it this way. Number two, you "Need to Know to Whom to Communicate." You need to know to whom to communicate. You should communicate to the right people. Okay?

And let's just start with this one. Proverbs Chapter 25. You're not far from it. Turn back two chapters, Proverbs Chapter 25. So helpful here. Verse 9. Let's start there. "Argue your case with your neighbor himself." That is so good. Argue your case with your neighbor himself. Do you have a problem with somebody? Talk to that person about it. Do you have an issue with someone. Talk to them about it. Deal with the issue. "And do not reveal another's secret," because guess what? That third party doesn't know your dispute with your neighbor. Your



neighbor knows about the dispute. Your neighbor knows that there's an issue between you and him, but the third party doesn't. And so you're going to go and reveal your secret conflict with your neighbor with a third party. Don't do that. The Bible says don't do that. Because here's one thing for those of you who just want to add other people to the knowledge circle so that you can for a lot of reasons, maybe just have people agree with you, have people think that you're right, have people think your neighbor's a fool, whatever it might be. Right? We often do it in Christian circles under the banner of, "Would you please pray for me? I'm having a problem with the person in my small group, and I just want you to know." Really, what did he do? "Well, here's what he did. I can't believe he did it. I can't believe he said it." If you got a problem with your neighbor then go argue your case with your neighbor himself. Because if you don't, look at verse 10, "Lest he who hears you will bring shame upon you, and your ill repute will have no end." What does that mean? And I know right now, think about your circles. There are people in your circles you would never tell something that is confidential because you know they're going to blab it. And the people who like to go to third parties to talk about their problems are people who will earn a reputation of having loose lips, they're not confidants, they're not counselors, they're not helpers. Right? All they are gossips.

So you need to understand this basic principle, Letter "2A." There are five points here. You need to know whom to communicate to, "Directly to Whom it Concerns." That's the way I put it in my notes. Argue your case with the neighbor himself. Go directly to that person. Not to whom it MAY concern, but to whom it DOES concern. Who does it concern? Well, you better go deal with that person. If not it's going ruin your reputation. Speaking of reputations, go back to Chapter 11, Proverbs Chapter 11. Proverbs Chapter 11. I want to get into the motives now of why you want people to pray for your conflict, why you want to tell people this. You want to warn them because maybe the neighbor will do that to them, too. You hear my facetious sarcasm there, don't you? Proverbs 11:12, Proverbs 11 verse 12, "Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent." Okay, now it's not about belittling to his face. It's about I'm talking to someone else about the neighbor. It is directly related to Proverbs 25. I'm not arguing my case with my neighbor. I'm going to someone else and I'm belittling the person. Okay? Letter "2B," "Not to Bystanders to Ruin Reputations." Because I guarantee 85% of the reason you go and tell someone else is to help them have the same opinion of that neighbor, that person, that member of the church. To have them share your opinion and you're ticked off, you don't like them. And you want them to have that opinion. You probably think that this is a nice person. He' not a nice person. Let me tell you why he's not a nice person. You're trying to ruin a reputation. Here's the key word in this sentence, verse 12, you "belittle" him.

Which, by the way, in logic or in debate class in particular, we talk about ad hominem arguments. This happens all the time, especially when you have a tight, logical argument, someone then doesn't say, well, let's deal with the argument. They deal with you. Well, you're stupid, you're dumb, you're prideful, you're whatever X, Y, Z. They attack you. And here, belittling a neighbor is I'm going to go talk about this conflict I have with my neighbor, but I won't even talk about the case. I'm going to talk about the person. I'm always going to disparage the person for doing what he did to make me angry. So you just need to understand that oftentimes we're talking to people and we're trying to pull down their



reputation because my view of them has gone down. When the stock of someone in my mind goes down, I want everyone to evaluate that person the same way I do. And I'm just saying that's wrong. "Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense." Well, I don't want them thinking he's a great neighbor. You don't want to move in here, he's a terrible neighbor. Stop. Just stop. You lack understanding. You'd remain silent if you were a man or a woman of understanding.

400 years ago John Dryden, a British poet, wrote this little poem about the problem. Listen carefully. This is old language but helpful. "There is a lust in us that no charm contain," something we really want to do, "of freely publishing our neighbor's shame." They've done some wrong and I want to tear them down. "Hence on eagle's wings," like fast, "immortal scandals fly." Did you hear what she did? "While virtuous actions," good things to do, "are born," they do them, "but they die," no one talks about them. Just think of that. "There's a lust in us that no charm contain, of freely publishing our neighbor's shame. Hence on eagles wings immortal scandals fly while virtuous actions are born but die." I just think if we could just look at the things that we say about other people behind their back, how often it is not their virtues that we hail, it's their scandals. It's their problems. It's their stumbling in many ways that we just want to get out there to make sure that everyone knows why this person in my small group or the person I took through Partners or the person who took me through Partners or the person who is in my sub-congregation, this is what I think of them. I think this of them and you should think that of them. You think too high of them. Let me tell you how you should think of them.

Now we'd never preface it that way but that's what's happening. Don't share it to bystanders just to ruin their reputations. Matter of fact, what's lacking in this and if I were just going to dig down on this one thing, this gossip problem that is so prevalent in every community where people get together and fallen creatures, I would go to the virtue of love because love is going to solve this all. Proverbs 17:9, just to reiterate this point, "Whoever covers an offense," you've offended me, but I'm not going to talk about to other people, "he seeks love." I'd like to love this person so I'm going to cover their offense. "Love," by the way, "covers a multitude of sins." That means you can sin against me a lot. Just like I hope your family members who I know are not sinless against you, you've covered it. You don't go around telling everybody what your family members do wrong I hope. You cover it because you seek love. "But whoever repeats a matter," they want to tell everybody "separates close friends." If you're friends with the person I don't like, I'd like to separate the two of you by destroying his reputation. It happens all the time. Love would be a remedy for that. But I'll leave it there.

Proverbs 18. Proverbs Chapter 18. Look at verses 7 and 8, 7 and 8, "A fool's mouth," Proverbs 18:7, "is his ruin, his lips are a snare to his soul." We've already read that but that's true, that's the problem. But then it says. "The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body." Delicious morsels. You know what a delicious morsel is? (speaking dreamily) It's a piece of chocolate cake from a bakery with a nice, shining, glistening stainless steel fork that just cuts through from top to bottom and has a lot of that creamy icing on the top. It's spilling over. And it's just so moist and it goes right in your mouth. And, you know, there are things I can eat. I can eat your dumb rice cakes and your



salad. And it doesn't go down here. It never even makes it down here. But that chocolate cake makes it here. And when I sit in my recliner after I eat that cake, I feel it, it goes down in my soul, man. (audience laughing) Chocolate cake does that. And you know what? There are a lot of people who just want to hear all the scandals. They want to hear all the problems, they want to know all the reasons you don't like the people you don't like. They love it. There will always be an appetite for this. So I'm saying this: don't tell these things to people, Letter "2C," "Who Just Wants to Know." There are people who just want to know. You can say, "Hey, pray for me. I got a really rough meeting going on Wednesday afternoon." Really? What is it? Shove that chocolate cake into my ear and let it go down into my soul. I can't wait to hear the dirt on her. "She said that? Oh, I'll write it in my prayer journal now, that's amazing. I can't believe it." She's chewing that up big time. She loves that. There's icing all over her earlobes just dripping down. Tell me more gossip. You're always going to find people who want to hear the dirt. Always. Always. And it may be hard for you to resist the chocolate cake to say, nope, I don't want to hear it. Go argue your case with your neighbor yourself. You go do that. Argue your case with her. You go do that. They say, "I just wanted you to pray." I'll pray. I'll pray. God knows the details. I'll pray. Not to people who just want to know. Plenty of people just want to know.

Now, there's a nuanced distinction between the next two, right? Letter "2C" was don't tell it to people who just want to know. Go to Proverbs 16, back two chapters. There's another reason I think people want to know, not just because they're curious, because Letter "2C" is curiosity. Letter "2D" here, this is something else. Look at verses 27 and 28, "A worthless man plots evil. His speech is like a scorching fire. A dishonest man spreads strife." And there's a lot of dishonesty when it's like, "Well, I'd just like to pray for you. Tell me more. I just like to help you through this. Tell me more." "And a whisperer separates close friends." There it is again. There's a separation of friends. Friend circles are destroyed by people talking. But here it's the dishonesty of someone acting like they like you, like they're all going to be friends, but they're not. They have violence in their hearts, relational violence. They have scorching fire that's ready to come out. Just feed the fire of my discussion. I would like to do that and kind of add my voice to all of this and commiserate with you. And it becomes a set of discussions that you have that allows people who already have a penchant for not liking everybody. And do you know people like that? They just don't like anybody. And you know why people don't like everybody around them? Because they want to like themselves the most. Trust me on this one.

People who are critical of everyone but themselves and occasionally throw in some critical remark about themselves. By the way, try just parroting what they said in their critical statement about themselves. See how that goes down. I know I'm a step removed. But those people who just love to be critical of everyone, I just say this, Letter "2D," "Don't Share It With People Looking for Reasons to Dislike." And there are several people in your circles who just like to dislike everyone. Why? Because they're on a campaign to like themselves the most. They're running for mayor of their own little heart, and they want to be the king, and they don't want anyone around them to be better than them. And so all they want to do is dislike people. Give me another reason to dislike him. Give me another reason to dislike her. I just like to know. There are people who just have a mouth of scorching fire and they're dishonest people.

They act like they're in a friend's circle but they're not. They're just trying to find out where the pecking order is and they want to make sure they come out on top. Do you know what I'm talking about? You know what I'm talking about, right? The sad thing is it could be you, it could be me. We've got to make sure it's not. Don't be sharing stuff with people who just want a reason to dislike.

How about Proverbs 26? Proverbs Chapter 26. One more, Letter "2E." Are you with me on this? "Know Whom to Communicate To." Well, directly to those whom it concerns. Right? Not MAY concern but DOES concern. Not to bystanders to ruin reputations. Not to people who just want to know. Not to people looking for a reason to dislike. One more, Proverbs 26 verse 20. We'll do actually this whole section here. It repeats another line that we had earlier. Proverbs 26:20, "For lack of wood the fire goes out." Duh. Right? If you don't put anymore wood on the fire at the beach, you go to the beach tonight, start a bonfire in the circle, and eventually it'll go out depending on the firewood you have, you know, it will go out right away. But you got to keep putting stuff on it to keep the fire going. So it is with conflict and quarrels. "Where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases." Now, whisperer is a great dynamic word that shows how people speak when they're not speaking to the person about the problem. If you're going to argue your case with the neighbor? Guess what? You can keep the same volume you have. Right? And I'd like it to be the same volume. Don't elevate the volume. Just speak to your neighbor about the problem. But when you're telling a third party about the problem the voice goes down. "Did you know my problem with my neighbor?" That's whispering. That's the person who wants to share information with people they shouldn't share it with, right?

So the whisperer, the gossip as some old translations put it, right? If you don't have gossips, you don't have the quarrel lasting very long. It's over with. "As charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome man for kindling strife." You want a church filled with strife? Then you got to have gossips. You have to, right? Without that you're never going to have the conflict in the church, it won't last very long. It'll be person to person. That person will argue with his neighbor, argue his case with his neighbor himself and they'll deal with it and it'll be passed, it'll be over. But the damage is done as it's shared. And the quarrelsome man, he wouldn't admit he's a quarrelsome man, but he loves to get in the dirt whether he likes to dislike people. Maybe his curiosity just drags him into it. Nevertheless, you've got to have people like that. Why? Because there's always a market for it. Here it is again, verse 22, different chapter, but here it is. "The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down to the innermost parts of the body." They love to hear this stuff but in this case it's to keep the conflict going.

Jot it down that way, Letter "2E?," don't tell people who just want to "Keep the conflict going." There are some people that when there's peace, they don't like peace. When's the next crisis? And I hope there's something big in the news today so I can get all worked up about it. We would be bored with just good news. Well, that's the problem with someone who has a penchant, an appetite, a desire to say what's the next thing? We got to move on to the next scandal. That's a perverse interest in conflict. That's what the Bible calls a quarrelsome person, a quarrelsome man. Know to whom you should communicate. And the real key here



is Letter "2A," direct it to whom it concerns, not bystanders who want to ruin reputations, not people who just want to know, the curious, not to people who are looking for a reason to dislike, they're hypercritical, not to people who just want to keep the conflict going because they love the drama.

Now back in our passage, we haven't even got out of verse 17 yet. In verse 17 then he's got the right people at the right time and then he's got the right things to say. "He gathered them, and he said, 'Brothers, though I have done nothing against our people...'" and on he goes. Now, his category of speech here is he's going to try to say why he's there. Why is this seminary grad, this Jewish leader who was on his way to the Sanhedrin, the ruling class, the Supreme Court of Israel. Why is he in prison and a part of this sect? He's going to start to explain all that. He's going to give an answer, but we need to know when we're going to communicate what we're supposed to communicate, what kinds of... When is the right time, the best time. When does heaven go thumbs up? This mouth is barking at the right time. Okay? I know each one has had five categories so far, let me give you six categories here. Number three, "Know What to Communicate." What should you be talking about this week? Okay. The first thing, just because it's the issue in Chapter 28 of Acts, I'm going to say as Proverbs 25:11 says, you need to sometimes give answers. Letter "3B" "You Need Words for Answers." People have questions and you need to answer them. People don't understand things rightly. You need to set them straight. Here's the answer. Here's the reason, here's the logic, here's the background, here's the history, here's the context. Let me just tell you what's going on. That's an answer. And some maybe think why do you have a hope in this messiah from Nazareth? Well, let me give you a reason for the hope that's in me. I'm going to answer you.

Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word fitly spoken," it's the right words at the right time, "is like apples of gold in settings of silver." And you don't have to be a female wanting a brooch on your dress to say if someone gives me an apple of gold in a setting of silver, I'm taking it. That's valuable. I mean, that's just a great picture. It's a jewel. It's precious. It's good. It's an apt word, it's at the right time, as it says elsewhere in Proverbs, it is like a kiss on the lips, right? The right answer at the right time. It's just like, that's great. That's what I needed. I needed that clarification. And people who aren't just trying to be critical, people who aren't just in the gossip for curiosity, people who aren't just trying to keep a conflict going, if you give the right answer that can be great. Your words need be used to give answers, explanations, and it can be like an apple of gold in a setting of silver. A precious thing. Proverbs 10, Letter "3B," Proverbs 10. This passage is read probably every year in your Daily Bible Reading you read this and I would say most of us fly through verse 6. This happens in the Proverbs. It's just we read them way too fast. But you're probably thinking about this word "blessings" in the beginning of verse 6 as something God is doing. That is not the context. Okay? So let's read this carefully. This is about our words. Proverbs 10:6, "Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." Blessings are on the head of the righteous, right? But the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.

So there's something going on that's tricky in the unrighteous, the wicked, right? What they're saying, it's not comporting with what should be said. They want to do damage. I'm not

interested in that this time, I'm talking about the word you should give. Well, blessings should be on the head of the righteous. Okay. Well, how is it going to get there? Are we talking about God's blessing? No, we're not talking about God's blessing. We're talking about what the New Testament says when our mouths, when people even curse us, our mouths should be filled with blessing. What does that mean? I'm saying positive things. Blessing. That's a good category. Let's write it down that way. Your mouth needs to be used not only to give answers but, Letter "3B," "Your Mouth Needs to be Used to Give Blessings." What does that mean? That means I'm saying positive things. The righteous man should be hailed for being a righteous man. You should say things on the head of that person. You should say you're a great businessman. You're insightful. You're a talented person. You're work, you do a great job. You serve so well. That's a blessing. You should have your mouth being filled with blessings. You see someone doing the right thing, right? The righteous man does something righteous. You should say so. That's a blessing. A curse would be you're a terrible person, right? A blessing is you're a great person. You've done a great thing here.

I don't even want to get into the psychology of this but you do know the reason a lot of people will not have their mouths blessing anyone else, the hypercritical that we talked about there in Letters "2D" and "2E" of the last point, these people are negative because they want to make themselves the best. And if I compliment you all the sudden now I feel like I'm in a race with you. Like I can't compliment you because, you know, what does that say about me? I'm putting you up on a pedestal and putting you above me. We struggle with blessings. You need to give blessings to other people. Let me give you a couple examples. This one needs to be unpacked a little bit. Proverbs 27:2. Proverbs 27:2. I often talk about this verse when I'm doing parenting seminars because in, you know, your children come out self-centered. Did you notice that? Braggadocious, wanting only what they want, center of the universe. And you need to break some of that early on not by depriving them of blessings and praise, but by making sure it's coming from the right place. You don't need to teach a two-year-old or a three-year-old to praise him or herself. You know that right? There are all about it. They do something good and they are just thrilled with themselves. And here's the deal. You need to teach, I quoted this all the time when our kids were growing up, "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth." This is Proverbs 27:2. "Let another praise you, not your own mouth; let it be a stranger, and not your own lips."

Now, it's not that you shouldn't be praising people for doing good and righteous things, you should. It just shouldn't be coming out of your own mouth. That's called boasting and we shouldn't be boastful. But look at the first word here, "let." Let it happen. So if you're of that weird theological bent where you think when you get complimented you're supposed to go, "No, no, just a terrible worm, praise the Lord, the Lord only." Right? Stop. Would you stop? You think you're being so pious? Stop. "Well, I'm just the worm." If I complement you, I know you're a worm. I know that. (audience laughing) I know that. I'm a worm. I study the Bible. It's a mirror. I see my own garbage. I see your garbage probably clearer than you do. I know you're a worm. But I'm complimenting you and I'm praising you because I'm supposed to. And you're supposed to let me praise you. So let me give a blessing to you with my words and you should receive it. Let another praise you. Well, that's only going to happen when the readers of Proverbs are going to go, "The blessings should be on the head of the righteous." Do you



see what I'm saying? Bless people. Praise them. Admire them. Give statements of praise to them. Let the mouth of another praise you, not your own.

How about this? Proverbs 31. I'm still on Letter "3B," Proverbs 31, blessings, right? Proverbs 31 verses 30 and 31, the last two verses of the book. You know the context. Every lady's done a Bible study on this or a retreat on this, the Proverbs 31 woman, the virtuous woman, she's a great woman. Great. It's true. All that's true. Go for it. Study it. Try to be that. Do it. Aspire to be her. At the end of this, right? This is helpful. Every woman loves to share this because they don't think they're all that charming. They don't think they're all that beautiful. So they think, okay, I like this, "Charm is deceitful." Yeah. That's why I'm not charming. "Beauty is vain." Yeah, that's why I'm not beautiful. Okay. Those are good things, by the way. Just that that isn't the substance. That's not, you know, where's the beef? The beef is not there. That's a bad illustration. (audience laughing) It's just not all that. You can be a great Proverbs 31 woman and not be all that charming or beautiful, "But a woman who fears the Lord," who does all the things that are talked about here, or any one of them at any given time, "is to be praised." That's a command. Praise them, put blessings on her head. And I love this, verse 31, "Give her the fruit of her hands." Well look at all the things in this passage about going to the marketplace and buying this and getting the spindle and helping and making sure kids are clothed. All the things she's doing. Guess what? None of that is going to praise her, right? She makes a sweater for her kid. The sweater is not going to say anything. The point is, "for her works," the fruit of her hands is what comes from that. Hopefully people who praise her for that. And when someone does something good in your small group, when someone does something good who you're taking through Partners, when someone in your sub-congregation has done something righteous this week, praise them for it.

But then it gets harder. Look at the next thing. "Let her works praise her in the gates." The men went to the gates to conduct business. They did transactions there like we saw in the in the book of Ruth. Right? They go to the gates. And in the gates the wife isn't there but here's what's happening. The things she does she's being praised for behind her back. And all I'm saying and the reason I'm focusing on this is because I don't see much of it in modern culture. We've just allowed our culture to help us be more prideful when we need to not care about where we are in the pecking order and start praising people for righteous things. Righteous people should have piled up praise and admiration and blessings from other people on their heads. Even the woman who's not in the conversation being praised behind her back. Most people, when they speak of someone behind their back aren't saying positive things. Have you notice that? They're saying negative things. So our mouths need to be used in this second category, blessings, a lot more than they do. I needed three proverbs to drive that one home.

Letter "3C," Proverbs 27. Go back a couple of chapters, Proverbs 27 verses 5 and 6. "Better is Open Rebuke Than Hidden Love." Well, do you mean just go around rebuking people? No, no, no. We're talking about friends here. Verse 6, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Rebuke doesn't feel good. It stings. Yeah, but if it's from a friend who really cares about me, that's good. "But profuse are the kisses of an enemy." You know most of the people who talk badly behind my back, I've got a few, a lot of times to my face they're very respectful. But I





hear from other people that they barbecued you for lunch. Okay, listen, here's the thing. Flattery is sin, deceptive, manipulative. Praise, we talked about that in Letter "B," you need to bless people more with your words. But sometimes our friends need to be corrected. Letter "3C," you need "Words of Correction at Times," and that is not something you seek to do. It's something that you find yourself forced to do. You have to correct people sometimes. Paul had to correct Peter. You just have to do it sometimes. You just have to do it because you love your friends. Words of correction. Paul is going to correct a lot of people in his ministry. We'll talk more about that later.

Letter "3D," Proverbs 24. Go back a few more chapters. Verses 21 and 22. Here is Solomon, the king of Israel, saying this, "My son, fear the Lord and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise." Because later there would be other people in this office of king. We'll have 40 more kings of Israel that take the office, 20 in the north, 20 in the south. We'll have a lot going on in Israel. And that position should be honored because authority should be honored. And there should be, Letter "3D," "Words of Deference" that come from your mouth toward not only the Lord but also the king. Now, we know the difference between the king and we know the difference between the Lord. The Lord and the king are two different people. One is perfect, one is not. One is holy, one is, I hope, holy from time to time and unrighteous as few times as possible. But I should honor that person. "My son, fear the Lord and the king, and do not join with those who do otherwise." If there are people who don't even make a practice of showing respect for authority, then you shouldn't even be around them? That's what he's telling his son. "For disaster will arise suddenly from them."

Now there is a plural pronoun, right? A third person, plural pronoun. What's the antecedent? What's the predicate for that? What does it shoot back to? The "them" is not the crowd you're running with. The "them" is when they are disparaging the king or you're disparaging the king. You never know what kind of disaster will come from them. Look at the beginning of verse 21, "The Lord and the king." The Lord doesn't like you disrespecting leaders and the leaders may actually be over you, like at your job, your manager, your boss, your board, whatever it might be. You better be careful what you say about them because their response to you, it may not be good. Suddenly "Disaster may arise from them, who knows the ruin that will come from them both." No telling what God will do to you, no telling what they'll do to you. So you should live respectfully. "Well, that's when you have a good king like David, not like Solomon. Right? He's got all kinds of problems." Well, David had problems, too. That's the whole point of the Bible. All the human kings have problems. "We all stumble in many ways" That's the truth of the Bible. But you better respect people in positions of leadership. I call that deference, whether it's your boss, whether it's somebody in charge of something in your world, you ought to have words of deference.

Think about people in the Bible. Daniel. Daniel speaks to Darius, the king, the Medo-Persian King. This Mede king after the Babylonians fall to them. And think about this. He addresses them later in the book of Daniel. He speaks directly to Darius and he said, "O King Darius, live forever!" Ah, you might want to say that about, I don't know, Josiah or Hezekiah or maybe David, but a pagan king? Or how about Nehemiah when Nehemiah is the cup bearer to Artaxerxes? And there's a discussion going on. Artaxerxes asks him a question and



Nehemiah says, "King, live forever!" I mean, that was the respectful thing to say to a potentate. And he said it and I think he meant it. Did he agree that he went off after that that cup bearer session and bowed down to a foreign king? He didn't like that. He didn't agree with stuff Nehemiah did, but he showed him respect and God showed the favor of that king just like Joseph in a prison. Peter, the emperor in Peter's writings of First Peter is Nero. He's a terrible emperor. And yet he is the emperor, he is in a position of power. Fear God, he says and he says, "Honor the emperor." You just got to be a person who shows words of deference. And of course, all your words should be sincere.

Proverbs 16. That was Letter "3D." How about Letter "3E?" This thing. Look at verse 22, verses 22 through 24. Proverbs 16:22. "Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it." It's a good thing. Good sense is going to do good things. Good things are going to come for your life if you have common good sense, biblical sense, "The instruction of fools," in contrast, it's ridiculous, it's dumb. "The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious," that's a good word, "and adds persuasiveness to his lips." He should try and convince people of what he's saying, they ought to be timely, they ought to be right, they ought to be appropriate. "Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." People who can bring you words of comfort, you know that, or encouragement, that's great. Let's just put it down this way, Letter "3E," your mouth needs to be "Full of Words of Comfort," the words of encouragement. So I need words that are encouraging to people. I need to be like Barnabas and say encouraging things. I think of Deuteronomy 3:28 when Moses was told that Joshua was going to take over and God charged Moses, be sure you bring him words of "Encouragement and strengthen him," right? That's what it does. It picks people off the floor. First Thessalonians Chapter 4, that whole great section about the taking up of the Church and Christ's return. All of that, he says with these words, "Encourage one another with these words." Why? Because there are people here at a gravesite and they're sorrowful. People are down, pick them up, pick them up with truthful words, encouraging words.

Hebrews 10:25 says every time we gather together, we "Should encourage one another." You should not leave this parking lot without talking to anyone. Just marching through that lobby. We spent all that money on that lobby. We made it nice. We put chairs everywhere. So you would sit down and your mouth would move. We want you to encourage one another. And guess what? We need that now more than ever. We should spend more money on the lobby. Why? Because it should be happening "All the more as you see the Day drawing near." Right now in this year we should be encouraging more in that lobby and on the patio. We should be doing that more in the courtyard and everywhere else we meet than we did 50 years ago, "All the more as you see the Day drawing near." Words of encouragement, you need that. Your mouth needs to be full of that.

One more. That's five things. Let me give you the sixth one here because I think it's important because we do live in a world where sometimes we do need to be corrected. Sometimes we need to correct. Sometimes there are going to be problems in our relationships. We're going to go and argue our case with our neighbor himself. But what we need sometimes when wrong is pointed out and we see it, we ought to confess it. We ought to ask for forgiveness. We have to grant forgiveness. Look at Proverbs 28:13, "Whoever conceals his transgression



will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." Now, we often think vertically because that's the most important relationship. I want to "Confess my sins to the God, he's faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness." I got to do that. But then James 5 says to make sure that if you've wronged somebody you confess your sin to that person as well. "Confess your sins to one another." I want to make sure that if I have done wrong, I go fix it.

I love Hoshea 14 which says when they sinned against God, go and, "Take your words with you and return to the Lord." That's a great section of Scripture. Take words. Don't just say, well, I know they knew I messed up, I did wrong, I said the wrong thing. They know it and I know it. No, they're not mind readers. Even if you think they know it, say it. Say I'm sorry. Confess your sins. And if you happen to be on the receiving end of that then grant forgiveness. How many times? Well, six? Then you should stop. Sunday school grads is that the right number? I can't remember the number in the Bible. No, it's five? No, seven. Seven that was it. How many times did Jesus say? Seventy times seven? Now I'm not good at math but that's more than seven. That's a lot. The point is you're not supposed to keep track. You love them. Keep no record of wrongs. Forgive them. If someone comes and asks for your forgiveness, give it. We love to withhold our forgiveness because it ain't quite right. I don't think you were really sorry enough.

All right. Here are seven categories or six categories. What do I have? Six? Yeah. I want you to pray every day for these six. And I know, you know, these are sub-points, "A" through "F." And that's why I put them this way. Answers=A, Blessing=B, Correction=C, Deference=D, Encouragement=E and Forgiveness=F. I try to make this so you can remember it. Every day I'd like you to pray, God, I may have to answer for some situation for the hope that's in me. I know I need more blessing. I need to pray for my words of blessing. Maybe I'll be in a situation as uncomfortable as it is to have to correct someone kindly, but I'll need to correct them. If I need to God let me bark when I need to bark. And deference, I always need that. I need to really think about that, pray about that, and make sure I got words of deference. Encouragement, man, the world's thirsty for that. Christians are particularly thirsty for that. I need to encourage people. And forgiveness, yeah, if I've wronged someone then I need to ask for forgiveness. If someone asks it of me, I need to grant it. Answers. Blessing. Correction, Deference. Encouragement. Forgiveness. Maybe that little acronym will help you memorize it. Pray every morning for that.

All right. Verses 21 and 22. Glance at the worksheet here. You see that we have them saying, I don't have any problem with you. I haven't heard anything about you. No one here has got anything against you, Paul. But we do know this, verse 22, everyone is talking against your movement. Everyone thinks this sect is crazy. It is spoken against, everywhere people are speaking against it. Okay. Here's the deal. You may be right now thinking about communication. I think I'll just be quiet. I'm an introvert anyway. I'll just be quiet. No, no, no. You have to have good communication skills. Christians above all else need good communication skills. Let me explain it to you. Number four, let's put it this way. "Know Why We Need Good Communication." And here's the reason. The same reason that Paul needed good communication. Because there's always going to be people who have something



against you. Now, right now, there was nothing against him particularly but now when they learn he's all 100% behind the sect, guess what? People are going to be against him. Just like if you go to your office this week, you go to your workplace this week, you go to that place that you work and you spend time and you go tell them I'm all about the Bible. The Bible, you know those 66 books your grandpa carried around in that leather-covered book. That thing. I'm all about it and what it says is God's divine revelation to man in black and white, his mind on paper punctuated by predicted prophecy and validated by miracles when it came. All of this is God's Word and what it says about divorce and marriage and gender and homosexuality or whatever else it might be. Whatever it says is God's Word and we'll all be judged by. Go tell people that at lunch this week.

The world speaks against our sect called Christianity. And I know there are all kinds of flavors with their rainbow banners out in front of their churches and those downtown, you know, old, abandoned cathedrals or whatever. I'm not talking about them. I'm talking about Bible-believing Christians. They're against us. Right? And when you stand with them you're going to do you know who needs to be good with their mouth? You and me. We need to be good with it. Not only because there are conflicts within the church, but there is a lot of pressure on the externals of the church coming at us. So you need good communication skills. Revelation Chapter 12 verse 10 says that we have someone in the heavenly places constantly accusing us. Not just pastors and leaders, although they're at the top of the list but every Christian is spoken against by "the accuser of the brothers ... who accuses them before God day and night." There are demons checking into the courtroom of heaven saying, here's the reason Bill is a jerk. Here's the reason Brenda follows you and it's not for good reasons. Here are the problems and the sins of Jim in his past. All these things they're saying against you in the heavenly places. Now jot this down Second Timothy Chapter 2, it says there are a lot of people, verses 23 through 26, who are held captive by Satan to do his will in the church. Even within the church, people on our team wearing the same Jesus jersey, you're going to be accused by them because here's what it says, "They're held captive by Satan to do his will." Satan, the adversary, the accuser of brothers. He has people who are ready to accuse us.

Sometimes it's in the name of curiosity regarding the gossip, sometimes it's people who just like to dislike other people. Sometimes people just love the drama of conflict. And all of that's going to happen and you need to be ready to speak clearly and speak well. Let me give you four things, three of them from Colossians Chapter 4. I'd like you to go there in Colossians Chapter 4. Colossians Chapter 4. I want to give you three things from Colossians 4 and one thing from James 3. Colossians 4:4, here's what we need. You can glance at verse 3 to remind you that this book was written while Paul was in prison in Acts 28. He writes this prison epistle. He's got time there, years. And he's writing this letter of the Colossians. He says you know I'm in prison, right? And the doors are closed and there's a Roman soldier on the outside. He has to let my visitors in and out. But I pray that there would be a door open, not necessarily to the prison, but I want a door for the Word to be opened. I want to "declare the mystery of Christ," which he's about to do in the last section of Acts which we will study, Lord willing, next week, "on account of which I'm in prison." I'm in prison for this message and pray, here's the first one, "That I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak." There's



one thing Christians need. Politicians apparently don't need it anymore, but we need it. Here's what we need: convictional clarity," Letter "4A." Convictional Clarity. And I do mean that.

When you hear the word salads on TV, when you hear people who can't be clear, do you know the people who should be the most clear in our culture? Christians, you better have convictional clarity. And I use the word convictional because the parallel passage in Ephesians 6 says, I ought to be bold, pray that I would be bold. I'm not talking about weakness. You should be strong. And you may be accused of being arrogant because you're strong, but you ought to be convictional and you ought to be clear. No word salads, and by the way, be done with the Christian cliches. Please stop with that. Please. I beg of you stop with the Christian cliches. We think we can dress up a ridiculous argument by throwing in some Christian words. And you just need to speak clearly. I'd rather you just explain what you mean than just throwing in a cliché that's supposed to make you sound spiritual. Just say what you mean. Be clear. You need to be clear in every conversation, whether you're arguing your case with your neighbor or whether you're dealing with an accuser from the outside or whether you have someone held captive by Satan to do his will within the church. You need to have convictional clarity.

Look at verse 5. "Walk in wisdom toward outsiders," Typically those who are throwing all kinds of incendiary bombs at you, "making the best use of your time." Now "walk," "Peripateō," this verb here at the beginning, this first word that's translated, it's an imperative verb. Paul loves the word peripateō. "Peri" is the preposition for "around." It's the word to "walk around." You're supposed to walk around, which is his metaphor for living your life in wisdom toward outsiders. Now it's all about saying the right things as we saw in verse 4 and we'll see you again in verse 6, it's about our words. But now he's saying your life too ought to match that. So let's say this: we need convictional clarity and Letter "4A," we also "Need Words and Deeds." Words and deeds, words and deeds. Sometimes we think all people need is our words. They need more than our words. Sometimes you can't just pop off a text in a big controversy and think it's going to be done because you said something clear and convictional. Sometimes you're going to need to get face-to-face with those people no matter how hard it might be. You need to go the extra mile to make a case. And sometimes you need to do that, whatever it might be. You need deeds. Maybe you need to show that you love them in some other way. You need convictional clarity, and you need words and deeds.

How about verse 6? "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Godliness is about sincerity and good motives. You should have good motives. Not the person who's fiery trying to destroy people. So your good motives need to get to the surface by what you're saying. Not with just being nice when you don't mean it. Not flattery, but your convictional clarity with words that match your deeds that need to be said in a way that is, I put it this way, truthfully kind. Letter "4C," "We Need Truthful Kindness." I'm speaking the truth in love. Kindness that is really about presenting the truth. Salt is a great picture of this. Salt is great. You can't eat popcorn without salt. You can't eat an avocado without plenty of salt on it. And once you take that first scoop, after you cut that thing in half, take that seed out and I got to pour salt on it. And then I got once I do the layer, I got to put a layer of salt on the second layer. You got to do the salt, man.





Salt is so good. If you haven't eaten watermelon with salt, you don't know what you're doing, right? Because it doesn't taste right without salt. I put salt on my cantaloupe. I put salt on just ice cream, everything. I'm just kidding. I put salt on stuff because I want the flavor to come out. And all these watermelons we buy, they're just insipid, but a little salt, man, that'll make it good. And you need your words to be seasoned with salt. You need to bring out your real intentions. We speak truth in love. We care about people. We want people to think rightly, we want to give them answers because we care. We want people to have blessings on their heads because we care, right? We want to correct because we care. We want to give deference because we care. So you better season those words in some way with grace so you may know how to give the right answer to the right person.

Convictional clarity, words and deeds. Truthful kindness. One more from James Chapter 3. We're over time so let me just give you that as homework assignment, verses 13 through 18. This is wisdom from above. Wisdom from the earth, it's all about jealousy, "bitter jealousy, selfish ambition," but real wisdom from God it's got to look like this. "Pure, peaceable, gentle," reasonable, I love that, "open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, sincere." God has a kind of communication that comes from wisdom. It's seen in our deeds and it's seen in our words. What we need is, Letter "4D," "Divine Wisdom," and we need more of that. The book of Proverbs is all about it. Go back and study this and if you're in a small group, I didn't have time to talk about James Chapter 3. Be sure you put that at the top of the back of your worksheet and at least read that. Let that govern your five questions there as you discuss them in small groups. Convictional clarity, words and deeds, truthful kindness, divine wisdom. Memorize our acronym and pray for those words.

Will you stand with me, please? Did you grow up with a dog in your house? My dog, I know I talk about my dog. I loved my dog. But he ruined a lot of my stuff. And I didn't even begin to tell you what my dad did in response to the hand-biting incident. You don't want to know. You'd call the animal shelter on him. And it did involve duct tape, though, I'll start with that. (audience laughing) Here's my point. It wouldn't just go better for us if my dog was well behaved, it would go better for him. A little better for him. We couldn't [didn't] let our dog in the house. I know that's against the Orange County rules, too. That dog be in our house. We knew exactly what would happen if we showed him all of our furniture. He would, I mean, it would be over. Inside of our car? Forget it. Forget it. You're not getting in our car. He doesn't even know what the inside of a car looked like. I see these people with their dog on their lap driving around Orange County. (audience laughing) My dog knew nothing of that. Nothing. Why? Because we didn't trust him. You can't put that dog in a car.

I want you and I to work on our words so that God might open up opportunities for us. There are things that God can do with your life if we could just get hold of our tongue. It seems untamable. I understand that. You're going to struggle with it for the rest of your life. But let's do better. Make every effort. Put this at the top of your sanctification list. Let's say this week I'm going to work hard on this. And you know what? The Holy Spirit will be right there saying, I'll help you with this. And, you know, the opportunities that God may open. I don't want you to lose any more opportunities because you were not governing your mouth. I know it's hard. I get it. Just like James. James says if anyone knows what it's like to govern your mouth it's



teachers. And trust me on this, I know. I say so many things I wish I could take back, a few in this sermon. (audience laughing) But just know this. God's ready to help if you're willing to work. Okay? So let's get to work. It's a synergistic thing, our sanctification, not our justification. That's monergistic but synergistic sanctification. We've got to get to work on that this week.

Pray with me. God, I commission these people here who are standing here. I hope many of them are feeling what I'm feeling, that we want to do better in this regard. So help us, please, as we determine to make every effort to add to our faith as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling. We get to work on this unruly problem of our words so connected to our emotions. We don't pause and think. We don't bring blessings. We don't bring encouragement as often as we should. Help us today when we want to say those things because it feels like it'll be a great morsel, a delicious morsel to someone else, let us just hold back and say no, or when someone's trying to give us one, let us say no. I don't have an appetite for that anymore. I'm trying to cut back. Just let us do whatever we can. Have this church be seen by heaven and by your Spirit as doing much better about our words. We need that God for our own future. We need it, God, so help us, please.

In Jesus name. Amen.