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## A Good Example

### Part 1 – In Speech

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Today, we launch a new series called *A Good Example*. It comes from the outline given to us in 1 Timothy 4: 12. Before we get there, I want us to start with Hebrews 13: 17 because this is what kind of kicks off Leader Love Month. As we talk about what it means to make a leader's job, as Stephanie mentioned today, and I loved the gasps when she said it takes 380 people each to make Sunday mornings work.

What does it require to make a leader's job a joy and not a burden? There are a lot of leaders in here, not just at our church, but throughout our community, who often would describe their job as thankless, who would say that they try to help people and serve people. We have officers in here that protect people. A lot of times, their job is not a joy but a burden. Yet, they do it. They still show up every day to work.

The scripture tells us ***Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority***. We looked at that word *submit* last week. What does it mean to fall in line under the leadership of another person? ***Because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account***. So, as you think about the leaders who serve you and as you are going to be writing these great notes to, understand that for the people speaking into your children this morning, there is a weight that comes with that. There is a responsibility that comes with that, and they take it very seriously. And you and I have an opportunity in that when we think about leaders. ***Do this... You are submitting to their authority, do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden for that would be of no benefit to you.*** –Hebrews 13: 17

In this new series we are starting today, it's five weeks on *A Good Example*. We're going to look at maturity in the body of Christ. Maturity that is expected of every leader, but that should be developed in every single believer. So, we are going to look at five areas of maturity that every believer needs to develop, and we are going to look at five areas of maturity that all leaders are expected to have.

Paul, if you can picture this... Can I see the hands of all the teachers in the room? You know what it's like after a student completes your class or course. You're hoping to send them out of that class ready, like they are ready to go. That's kind of the feeling you get when Paul writes to Timothy in 1 Timothy. He has left Timothy in Ephesus to lead the church. There is a weight that comes with that because Timothy is a young pastor, we think between 35 and 40... When you see the term *youth* today... Youth, in that day, was used to describe those under the age of 40. It's a little different in our culture. So, think about it. Paul is leaving a young pastor to lead a young church. If you keep that in our mind when you read 1 Timothy, you get his angst as he writes this letter, you get his challenge to Timothy.

It's like, "Ok, Timothy, you have to display of this maturity that we're talking about and how the church should get along as a family, as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. But before you start preaching and teaching this, you have to be this. You have to set the good example."

Here's what we read in 1 Timothy 4: 12 - **12 Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young...** Just because you're young... And we do know this. Typically, we should grow in maturity as we grow older, but we know age is not a guarantee of maturity. Can I get an amen on that? Everybody in here, every single person in here can name one person who is young who is, as we say, wise beyond their years. Like this is a young person and the maturity they display at a young age is unbelievable. And especially if you set them up against all their peers. This young man, young lady displays a lot of maturity. But you can also... Maybe you saw it in the parking lot a little bit today. Someone who is older that is not displaying a level of maturity that that age, that that gray hair should display. So, you see, age is not a guarantee of maturity.

But what Paul says is don't let anybody look down on you right now because you're young, because when you're young... Young people, I hope you get it in this series. When you're young, you can display a lot of maturity. You can be wise beyond your years. Then he's going to say, **...but set an example for the believers...** And here's our outline for the next five weeks. **...in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.** These are the five areas of maturity that, as believers in Christ, we want to go after and grow in maturity. Again, we expect leaders to be mature in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, but it's also something to be developed in all believers.

This message today, as we start with speech, is one of those that probably, along with a message on anger, needs to be given once a year to every church everywhere. I had started writing this a few weeks ago, but two weeks ago, I found myself in a meeting at the Chamber of Commerce. We were gathered around, and we had two school superintendents that I will not name in the room. We asked them, we wanted to know, "What has it been like leading in the schools these past two years?" Let me tell you, there was a lot of emotion in that room. I learned a lot.

One of the superintendents used such great word pictures. I don't have time to give all the word pictures that he used. He started his time off by saying this, "What's the most stressful decision a school superintendent makes in a given year?" Does anybody know the answer to that? It's snow days. I'm thinking budget, personnel, lunch programs. He said, "We have the most stress making the call to cancel." That's because some of you get a little lippy. I was on Facebook and some of you got a little lippy on Facebook about calls being made. He said, "You don't sleep that night. You're driving around and you're so stressed."

And here's how he described the last two years of the pandemic. I thought this was brilliant, and it really took me there. He said, "The last two years of trying to do school has felt like making a snow day call two to three times a day." That's a great word picture, isn't it? Then he gave another one. He said, "Imagine you order a club sandwich, hold the bacon." He lost me on that right there. What kind of idiot holds the bacon? Actually, give me two pieces of bread with bacon; that's what I want. You can hold all the other fruits and vegetables you put on that thing. But I tried to reengage with the word picture.

Ok, you order a club sandwich, hold the bacon. He said, “We make you a club sandwich, but we... Now, he’s talking about school – teachers, administrators. He says, “We make you the club sandwich, but we accidentally leave the bacon on it. We give it to you. You get it and your first response is frustration. “This isn’t what I ordered.” He said, “What does a normal person do?” Take the bacon off and give it to some deserving person that now gets double the amount of bacon on their sandwich. He said, “That’s not what’s happening today with students and with parents. Instead, they give the whole sandwich back and say, ‘This is not what I ordered.’” You see what he is saying? This is so good. We may have him come and speak. It was so powerful, so good. He said, “We’re trying our best to deliver education to the students, and you do one thing, you make one bad call, one decision that somebody doesn’t like and they hand the whole thing back to you.

There were people that were on Zoom or conference call and one of them chimed in with, “Now we have to figure out a solution in our community, what do we do? One guy said, “We need pastors to start preaching more message on kindness.” I said, “Hey! Settle down! We’re looking for a multi-faceted approach to this thing. Multiple directions we’re coming in at this thing and not putting it all back on the church.” So, with that, we launch this series. I told him I was already planning on *speech*, but, man, I was writing notes and the bulk of this outline came out of that meeting. I should have been more in the meeting, but I was typing away because it all fit.

Here’s what we’re going to start with as we talk about our speech today. Believers, as we move toward maturity, **the tongue is powerful**. Proverbs 18: 21 says, ***The tongue has the power of life and death.*** You can kill a relationship, or you can bring a flourishing tone and message to a relationship. Some of you have brought life to your workplace because of your tongue. Others are so toxic that they bring death every time they walk into the room. The tongue is powerful is where we start; our speech is powerful.

This is also what scripture teaches about the tongue. **It determines the direction of your life and the quality of your relationships.**

In James 3: 3 – 6, we get three great word pictures and I love this. You get bits, rudders, and fires, so keep that in mind this week when you think about your tongue. Bits, rudders, and fires.

***3 When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal.*** A 2,000-pound animal is turned with just a very small bit. ***4 Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go.*** ***5 Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.*** ***6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body.*** Isn’t that interesting when you think about this. A lot of times, we like to think of other parts of the body that are worlds of evil, that bring on a lot of hurt, but it says the tongue, this small part of your body ***...It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.***

What are we learning today about the tongue as we talk about this small part of the body? We're actually saying your words matter. What you say matters. How you say it matters. And when you say it matters. To me, this is the key when scripture talks about the tongue. If you do a search on this, on your Bible app, you're going to find verse after verse after verse teaching us about the tongue, it's power and what we should do with it. And this is the very first thing that Paul tells Timothy in 1 Timothy 4: 12. In maturity, you need to grow in your conversation. The words that you use, how you use them, and when you use them. Your words matter.

I was looking for signs this week. I love signs because I've been by some bad signs. I love this one. You get restaurant signs, bathroom signs all the time, but this one I love. "Tables are for eating customers only." Words matter. As a pastor I really appreciate this one from Mount Pleasant Baptist Church. "Do you know what hell is? Come hear our preacher." See, words matter. Now, if there's one that is so close to home... my friend John Branyan has a whole bit on this. But I think you need to change your church name when you live in Flippin, Arkansas. You're actually inviting lost people to the Flippin Church of God. Could you imagine if they ever need to call the police for help? "I'm at the Flippin Church of God! Get me the Flippin cops! Right now!" Let's go with Amazing Grace Church of God, or Healing River Waters Church of God. There are a lot of other names we could use. Flippin, let's change your name. I want to open a donut shop in Flippin. I'm going to save that for Date Night Comedy in November.

Let's look at the what, how, and when, and what the scripture says. What you say matters. Keep in mind, with communication and our speech, only 7% of communication is found in the actual words, the sentences we put together in a conversation. Scripture talks about several types of words, the kind of words that we use, in Ephesians 4: 29. It's probably the first one many of us go to as that unwholesome talk. **29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs...** This is that bringing life to relationships. Again, whether it be in the schools or in the restaurants...

One of the things I shared with this superintendent was "I know what you're going through, but let me tell you, it's everywhere. It's everywhere right now." As I just shared with you about the schools, many of you in the restaurants are feeling the exact same thing. We have people here that work in the airlines. The airlines are feeling the exact same thing. Churches are feeling the same thing. Everywhere you go, every type of business or ministry that you're in, you're going to experience this. Life or death coming into it. So, we, growing in maturity in speech, we won't let unwholesome talk come out of our mouths, **but only what is helpful for building others up according to their need that it may benefit those who listen.**

In Proverbs 16: 24, we get kind words. We've taught this to our kids since they were very young. **Kind words are like honey – sweet to the soul and healthy for the body.** There it is again. Bringing life not just to conversations, but to our relationships. This is why we speak words of honor, high value over one another in our homes, in our churches, and in our community.

Proverbs 12: 18 talks about the reckless words. **The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.** Again, it brings healing; it brings life. And we want to grow in this

type of maturity. Say it again, going back to 1 Timothy 4: 12. We expect everything we're talking about right now in all of our leaders, but we want to see it develop in all believers.

So, we have unwholesome talk, we have kind words, we have reckless words. In Proverbs 15: 1 we have gentle words. ***A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*** This is why I made a comment... They asked me to do a survey on a flight I was on recently. I've never done surveys. I don't ever do surveys. "Can you stick around for two questions at the end of this phone call?" "No. I want to watch my children grow up." That's what I always say. I don't want to take a survey. What are they going to get to? "Do you have time for one question? Do you have time for half a question?"

But I decided to go ahead and answer the survey because I see it happen too much. Someone gets on a plane, and they are mad, and they are making their point about the masks. The flight attendant... There are two types of flight attendants. There are ones who can escalate and there are ones that can deescalate, and I've seen them both. Why? Because a gentle answer... That's de-escalation, but I've watched plenty that are really close to retirement. They should have retired a couple of years ago, but they are just ticked. And I get it. It's weighing on them. I asked one of the superintendents, "Do you ever speak up to these parents, I mean really go back at them when they come at you?" She goes, "Every now and then, my mother voice comes out; I let my mom voice come out." But I've watched them. You know the people you have a gentle answer. They're not going to add any fuel to what's going on here. I'm going to be one that comes in and tries to calm it down, a gentle answer.

So, what we say matters, the words we use matter, but how we say it, I'm going to say, matters more. You know this. You get in way more trouble for the how than the what. Proverbs 15: 23 says, ***To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season...*** like just spoken at the right time, the right place, with the right tone, ***...how good is it.***

Proverbs 15: 28 goes on to say, ***The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer...*** This isn't one of my skills. I need to grow in this maturity. I need to take more time to think through what I'm going to say. ***but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.*** The how takes time. All of us in here are good with a snippy remark. We're good with the really fast answer. We're going to see in a second where that's coming from, and we need to deal with that. That's the priority of this.

Proverbs 29: 20 says, ***Do you see a man who is hasty in his words?*** You've seen that. You would say that man is a man or woman who needs to grow in maturity. ***There is more hope for a fool than for him.***

Here's what we know. ***My approach, your approach, gets me in way more trouble than my opinion.*** Amy and I have a lot of different opinions on a lot of different things. And I have learned that my approach is the key to it all. This is the secret – my tone. Why? It's because 7% is the words and 93% of what you say is in your posture and in your tone. It's in what we call non-verbals. Your attitude walking in with the words, your approach is everything. If I'm standing close to you, it means I'm not a threat to you. If I'm standing back from you with my arms crossed, it means I'm closed and I don't want to talk about this anymore. If I'm scrolling through my phone, I'm not saying anything, but what that's saying is you don't matter that much to me.

And I can listen to another person's opinions without seeing it as an attack on mine. But I want to ponder my response. I want to slow it down. That leads us to the last one.

**When you say it matters.** This is one of my favorite parts of the text that you're going to see. Hold your tongue. I think in our day it can also be translated hold your thumbs. Because this is also where it's coming out (on the phone/social media). When you say it matters. James 1: 19 says, **My dear brothers and sisters...** Again, believers in Christ, **...take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen...** I've asked Amy I don't know how many times how good of a listener I am. I remember the first time I asked her this question. I wanted a rating of 1-10. How am I doing as a listener? We were at Sugar Leaf and Carson was there. I go, "One to ten, how am I doing as a listener?" Amy goes, "Five" I said, "I don't need an answer right away. Why don't you take the lunch hour and just think it over and give me answer at the end of lunch."

Amy is good at this. She always wants to bail me out when she knows I'm struggling. She said, "Do you know what moves you from a five to an eight? It's when I have your undivided attention. That means you're in the room, you don't have a phone in your hand, you're not distracted, but I know you're thinking about something. Your mind is somewhere else. When I have your undivided attention, Ted, you move immediately from a five to an eight." Men, did you hear that? I think I speak on behalf of women worldwide when all they want is this: "incline the ear." It is the Old Testament term, They just want you to listen closely. And when she's done talking, what are the words she wants to hear? She wants to hear, "Tell me more." Because fools love to express their opinions, but people of understanding are great listeners.

So, be quick to listen, **slow to speak...** You're like, "Yeah but what if she's sharing something with me that needs a solution and I have a solution? And I have a way to fix it and we don't have to keep dragging on with the details in this conversant because I've got enough information..." **and slow to become angry.** Isn't it something how this has flipped for most of us today? All of us are angry. We're angry all the time. That's what's happening. School superintendents know this. Parents are ticked so they speak and if they have time in their anger and their speaking, they'll stop and listen. It's just the opposite of what we're told to do. Quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

Proverbs 10: 19 says, **Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent...** Here it is. **...hold their tongues.**

Proverbs 17: 27 – 28 says, **The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding...** There it is again. I don't want to be a fool. Understanding and foolishness are never linked in the Proverbs. The fool is quick to speak, quick to become angry. The understanding person is slow to speak and wants to listen. **...is even-tempered.** So, next time the school calls a snow day that you don't think was right, give some understanding there. The next time your church cancels an 8:30, be quick to listen, slow to speak. **28 Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.**

Finish it with me, that great theologian Keith Whitley said what? You say it best when you say nothing at all. That speaks volumes.

Proverbs 11: 12 – ***Whoever derides... or belittles ...their neighbor has no sense, but the one who has understanding holds their tongue.***

Again, just to speak, to go back to the how, the non-verbal's, I found it this week and I love it. It's this picture. "Controlling my tongue is no problem. It's my face that needs deliverance." What you say, how you say it, and when you say it matters.

Let's talk about this last one. Proverbs 26: 20 – ***Without wood, a fire will go out, and without gossip, quarreling will stop.*** How much wood are you throwing onto the embers of a quarrel in your community, in your family, in your church. How much wood are you throwing on it? Or are you one that when you hear gossip... are you one that puts an end to it? It stops with you. It won't be shared with another person. It won't be given to another person. It ends here.

The scripture in James says the tongue is uncontrollable. It is untamable. You can't tame it on your own, but you can with the Lord's help being filled with the Spirit, walking in reverence to Christ.

We read in James 3: 9 – 12 ***With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father... You saw this in the imago Dei series. ...and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness... in his image. 10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. 11 Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? 12 My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.***

The tongue takes us, and it is expressing what's in the heart. So, that's why if your heart is filled with unresolved anger, poisoned, and the Lord is not working in your life, you are not studying the scripture, you're not reading the scripture, you're not spending time alone with the Lord in prayer, and you are just filled with this anger, you're going to be quick to anger whenever a situation presents itself that allows you to spew that. But if God is working in your life and you're growing in maturity as we are going to be talking about with this series *A Good Example...* And, young people, if you're wanting to be known as wise beyond your years, you don't let the season, the stages, the circumstances, the slow service, a store being closed get to you. You're slow to anger. You're slow to speak. Your first response to a situation that presents itself that you don't like, your immediate response is quick to listen. *I'm going to hold my tongue here, I'm going to listen. What's going on? Why are they doing this? Why did they close?*

Jesus said it this way in Matthew 15: 17 – 18, as he gives this great biology lesson. ***17 "Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? 18 But the things that come out of a person's mouth... the what, the how, the when ...come from the heart, and these defile them.***

I would encourage you in this season, in this challenging season, in this difficult season, when it is easy to be angry and when it is easy to express your opinions, to take a moment to pause to ask the Lord for help. Standing in line or taking an hour to get your food at a restaurant, whatever the case may be, that you would pause and seek the Lord's help.

Don't just go into behavior modification with this series. We're seeking a maturity that starts in the heart. This church will never be interested in behavior modification. We want the Lord to do the changing. We want you to invite Jesus into your heart and into your life and know that he is your savior and the Lord of your life. Then the words that come out of your mouth are reflecting the heart, they're revealing what's going on in the inside. You've heard it said I don't know how many times during this pandemic... This pandemic didn't cause a lot, it revealed a lot. It revealed the health of people. It revealed the health of organizations. It revealed the health of churches. It showed what was in a lot of hearts out there. You and I, all of us in here and all of us watching, we are to be growing as believers in this maturity. Today we start with *speech*, next week, we're going to go to *love* since it's Valentine's weekend. But we want to grow in maturity, all of us as believers, in the things we already expect of leaders.

Father, thank you for this series. I do pray that Woodland Hills can be a good example in this community. I would love to hear from teachers, administrators, officers, restaurants, waiters and waitresses, store clerks and managers that say, "Wow, the people that we encounter from Woodland Hills are just a joy to work with; they are a joy to be around. They handle adversity so well. They handle the circumstances so well. What a good example." May we go into the schools this week, into the community this week, whether it be southwest Missouri, northwest Arkansas, and may we be a good example to those as they watch us in speech, in love, in conduct, in faith, and in purity.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.