



Summer Family Reunion

1 – Keeping a Cool head in a heated Conversation.

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today I get to kick it off with a message that's been percolating in my heart for some time called *Keeping a Cool Head in a Heated conversation*. The people making the ruckus down here, these are the Treasure Lake Board of Directors. You need this, so take notes. I was going to call it How to Attend an Alderman's meeting. But I'm not. I don't want to talk about alderman's meetings. I don't want to talk about... Even online. Let's just talk about what happens for you and for me when we find ourselves in a conversation that's getting away from us.

Maybe we were invited into it, but maybe we were the cause of it. Fight or flight? I'm flight. When the conversation gets heated, I like to get out of the room. I actually like to stir it up a little bit and then I get out of there as quickly as I possibly can.

But some of us know there have been those moments in conversation when we've been self-righteous and we need to be right, we need to win, we need to prove our point of view. We know the conversation is going in a way where we're pushing people away. We're moving away from them.

When Paul speaks to the church at Ephesus, he says, in Ephesians 4: 29, ***Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth.*** So, in our conversations, that it would be wholesome. That's actually a word my family loves to use. When we see something done well, we'll look at each other and go, "That was wholesome." ***...but only what is helpful for building others up...*** We need more of those conversations today where we're encouraging one another, building them up. ***...according to their needs...*** When was the last time you went into a conversation thinking about the other person and what they needed out of it verses what you needed to get out of it or what you were going to prove in it? ***...that it may benefit those who listen.*** If you are a believer in Christ Jesus, our language, our conversations that we have should invite people in, should draw them closer. We should be building people up. Our conversations should be wholesome, healing, reconciling.

And that is the desire today. What do we do? I'm going to give you very practical... Gary Smalley used to call these handles that you can take out, walk out with, lead with as we look at simple but powerful principles from the scripture, as followers of Jesus, how you and I can lower the temperature of our conversations.

We read in Proverbs 6 very strong words. There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him:

1. Haughty eyes
2. A lying tongue
3. Hands that shed innocent blood
4. A heart that devises wicked schemes
5. Feet that are quick to rush into evil
6. A false witness who pours out lies
7. A person who stirs up conflict in the community

You know them as well as I do, and I don't want to be part of constantly looking for a fight. We say it around here all the time. You don't have to engage in every fight you're invited to. And you and I, in recent years, have been invited to a lot of fights. We're asked to join in. But how can you keep a cool head in those moments?

Speaking of conflict in a community, two churches in this small town started going at it over theological issues. They were using their church signs. It's one of the reasons I don't have a church sign. I don't want a church sign. I've asked us not to have one. This one out here, the marquee that you can take pictures by the picture wall. We love that, but I said to make it really simple so people can't get... You've been by churches that have hostile church signs. I've never met one person in my life that when you ask them how they came to know the Lord, they said "A church sign." Never met that person. What kept you out of church? "A church sign." It's interesting how people use them. They go back and forth with each other.

I love what took place in this town... I'm sorry, leave it to the Catholics to stir up conflict first. Look at their sign. I think you are going to have fun with this. I don't know why they felt the need to put this on the sign, but I think they were picking a fight. They put on their sign, "All dogs go to heaven." The Presbyterians were having none of it. The Presbyterians were like, "We are going to be theologically correct." So, they responded across the street with "Only humans go to heaven, read the Bible."

The Catholics were not going to stop. We're going to go on for a little bit here, just brace for impact. The Catholics put on their sign, "God loves all his creations, dogs included." Can you imagine the sign guys at these churches getting called at midnight, "When you get to church, 6:00am, get up there quick. Because the Presbyterians responded with, "Dogs don't have souls. This is not open for debate." To which the Catholics said, "Catholic dogs go to heaven, Presbyterian dogs can talk to their pastor." I can tell you if I was the pastor of this church, if I would have just given the freedom to the sign guy, this would have read, "Catholic dogs go to heaven, Presbyterian dogs go to..." Don't say it.

Here's how the Presbyterians responded. "Converting to Catholicism does not magically grant your dog a soul." I'm going to give best sense of humor to the Catholics on this one because here's how they responded. "Free dog souls with conversion." And the Presbyterians didn't quite catch on. They were still a little uptight. Here's how they responded. "Dogs are animals, there aren't any rocks in heaven either." To which the Catholics said, "All rocks go to heaven."

I thought we should do this. Now I want a church sign. I want to dual back and forth with Faith and Wisdom over there. Let's just go at it. I'll call Jeremy at First Baptist. He'd have a ball with this. "Hey, let's pick a fight in town and go back and forth. Anyway, I don't think we're going to do that.

You might describe what you've experienced in conversations over the last couple of years as almost like dumpster fire or firing squad. We've weaponized anger. You'll hear people say that as well. It got so fevered. One of my favorite signs is at a Mexican Restaurant in Texas. Some of you know what I'm talking about because you follow them on Instagram. If we had a church sign, we'd steal half of their signs. Not the ones about tequila, but the other ones, because somebody is clever. And at the height of all the anger and outrage in our country, they put this on the sign outside their restaurant. "Has anyone tried unplugging the United States and plugging it back in? Now, I'll get a church sign if we start doing that type of stuff. On their signs, they talk a lot about communication. I saw this one as I was scrolling through their feed this week. "The phrase 'don't take this the wrong way' has a zero percent success rate." And some of you have been invited into that conversation. *I don't want you to take this the wrong way...* and then ka pow.

Today, we are going to look at seven simple but powerful principles from scriptures to keep a cool head in a heated conversation, but I want you to think about, follower of Jesus, what it means to be redeemed by the gospel. And it should redeem every part of our lives – our mouths, our language. We know that the tongue has the power of life and death. These are conversations that invite people in, build them up. They're wholesome. They're reconciling. They're healing.

1. Do your part for peace. We have to start with you. No matter if you started it or you were invited into it. It starts with what's going on in your heart. We know from Proverbs 4: 23 – ***Above all else, guard your heart. It is the wellspring of life.*** Meaning every word you speak flows from your heart. So, you have to own your part. And what Paul says to the Romans is this. ***"If it is possible...*** In other words, I'm about to command you to do something but I know there are limits to what I command you to do is what he's saying. There are times when you will have zero control over this. But if it is possible and be on the lookout for it. ***If it is possible, as far as it depends on you and your part, live at peace with everyone.***" Pursue peace.

Jesus put it this way in Matthew 5: 9 - ***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*** If you are a follower of Jesus, you are at peace with God. And when you are at peace with God, this should bring peace in your relationships with other men and women. You should be the person pursuing peace. Now the difference between a peace maker and a peace keeper is a peace keeper is one that can avoid difficult conversations altogether rather than staying in the conversation and finding a way to lower the temperature, they are like *get me out of here as quickly as possible.* We're not talking about peace keeping. We're talking about peace making. Being adults who follow Jesus standing up and saying, *I'm not going to run away from this conversation.* When we talk peacemakers from the scripture, Jesus is not teaching us to be social reformers. He's teaching us to be reformed by the regenerating power of the gospel. And that's where it starts with each and every one of us when we find ourselves in these conversations. Do your part for peace.

2. Now, starting with you, it's going to take some skills. The scripture gives us plenty of skills for keeping a cool head in a heated conversation. Patiently listen to the other point of view. You're like, *Most people I talk to are so ignorant when it comes to what's going on. And they're not right and my job is to make them right* Let me encourage you. Listening says to people, "You matter." Listening say , "you matter and you're worth my time." And listening is a slow word. I remember years ago, my daughter was small. She goes, "Dad, I need to say something to you. I need to talk to you for a second." I was kind of running out of the house and I was like, "Real fast, real fast." I said those words. Listening is not a fast word. Hurry is the enemy of intimacy. Try it sometime this week, guys. When your wife wants a conversation with you, tell her, "Talk really fast." See how that goes for you. It's not just listening; it's patiently listening.

Look at what the scripture says in Proverbs 14: 29. ***Whoever is patient has great understanding...*** able to see it from another point of few. ***but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.*** You see this throughout all of the Proverbs. It is anger, it is hatred. Actually, the scripture says that stirs up conflict. That's why you have to take a look inside first and find out, *why am I so mad all the time? And why are all of my conversations so heated?* We want to be a patient one, listening and understanding.

Proverbs 18: 13 says, ***To answer before listening...*** You've heard Adam Donyes say this all the time. Social media has given us the opportunity to share our opinion without sticking around for a conversation. We've become bad listeners. And a lot of us listen to reply. You can always see this in a person's non-verbals. When you're sharing something with them, and you can tell they just want you to be done so they can share. Inside, what you want to blurt out is "Your wrong!" We are always listening to reply but we need to listen to understand their point of view. ***...that is folly and shame*** to answer before listening.

I'm going to show you a few more of these signs from Texas and you know Texas has a hard time sharing their feelings. "Of course, your opinion matters, just not to me." A guy in the first service, about the third row, said amen to this. This is an illustration going in the opposite direction. I called him out three or four times. He was a guest, so we welcomed him.

Church Swindoll and his book on grace. I've learned so much about grace from Pastor Swindoll. He talks about listening to his teenagers. I love this illustration because we talk all the time around here about wanting influence with our kids. Do you want influence with your children? Do you want influence with your adult children? Do you know how you get that? Listening, leaning in, inclining the ear. Great listeners have great influence. He talks about listening to his teenagers. Listen to what he says.

"Leave room for an opposing viewpoint. If you don't have room for an opposing viewpoint, you're not going to do well when you get to teenagers. Teens can be among our best teachers. I know ours have been. They haven't always been right nor have I. However, I have learned in rearing teenagers that they are great at pointing out another point of view."

Now I have adult children. And even when I know my child is on the same page with me with on an issue or maybe a current event, they are quick... And I think their generation is blessed by this because I have children who are strong and grounded in the faith, but they will often say, "Hey, dad, you know so

and so would hear that like this... Have you ever considered...?" "I've considered it a lot longer than you and I've known they've been wrong a lot longer than you've been wrong. It's your adult children that will come to you and be like, "Have you ever thought about it from this point of view?" He says, they'll share with you another point of view. If for nothing else just to make me think. Just to challenge me. To remind me that there is another way of viewing things. I can assure you it has helped me in ministry. It has certainly helped me in my relationship with those to whom I am personally accountable. Then these words... He says opposition is good for your humility. To say I'm not always right. But we have to be careful.

A couple things about listening before we move to the next principle. Listening does not mean I agree with you. When our kids were small my son would come ask me a question and I'd be like, "Go ask your mom." You've had this happen. By the time it gets to mom it's talk to dad. We both agree what should happen, but I didn't say I agreed with him. I was listening. Sometimes people see us listening... Listening says to you that you matter. You're worth my time. You're worth me leaning in and inclining the ear.

I just wish our nation could get this next one. Disagreeing with you doesn't mean I hate you. Follower of Jesus, let's get good at this. We're going to disagree with what people believe, their worldview. In the month of June, you're going to deal with this. Disagree with someone without hating. I can 100% disagree with you and have an opposite opinion from you and not hate you. But we live in a world that says if you're going to love me and you're going to receive me, you have to agree with me." Not true. I can love you and completely disagree with you.

I can listen to your opinion and feelings without seeing them as an attack on mine. You know what that's called? It's called Maturity. A mature person should be able to hear another point of view and realize *that's not at all what I believe. That goes 100% against my convictions. And I'm going to share my point of view and I want to share it in love so they know. I want to speak the truth in love, but I don't have to leave feeling attacked.*

3. Find common ground. If you find yourself in a heated conversation, find common ground. In Romans 14, Paul is speaking about strong and weak believers. In every church I've ever been to and in this church as well, there are those who have walked with the Lord for a long time, and they would be mature in their faith. There are those who are brand new believers. Paul is saying is don't in this text and he does so well in explaining. It's a great text if you want to read all of Romans 14 today. He's saying, "Those of you who have walked with the Lord and are mature in the faith, don't leave behind those who are weak in the faith. Speak to them in a way that brings them along. Encourage them. Help them. Build them up. Don't be a stumbling block to them. Walk alongside them.

Here is some of the passage in Verse 19 of that chapter. ***Let us, therefore, make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.*** The idea here is focus on what you hold true together. In our church, we call these essential beliefs verses not essential beliefs. You and I could spend a lot of time talking about non-essentials and be in heated conversations, but we've got to come back to the cross of Christ. We have to come back to the foot of the cross and realize this is what we hold true, this is what

is essential. What Paul is saying to strong believers and weak believers is always come back to the common ground and the common ground is at the foot of the cross. That's mutual edification.

Almost 20 years ago now, we were doing an ordination in our church for two young men called to ministry. About 15 of us gathered around this table and they sat at the end. If you don't know what an ordination is, it's like a couple hours of just question after question after question. What do you believe? We got to the doctrine of Salvation and the question asked was what the differences of Calvinism verse Arminianism are. Now if you are brand new to the faith or you've never heard those terms, I can boil it down. The simplest way I know how to say it is answering the question did I choose to God, or did he choose me?

We got into it and I mean these guys were ready. They were throwing out the differences. Then there was one old guy at the table. He was like 55 years old. He's walked with the Lord for a long time. He asked a question those two guys weren't prepared for and none of us around the table were prepared for. He said "You know what? You're really clearly explaining. You've done a great job talking about the differences between Calvinism and Arminianism, but can you tell me, in just a few moments, how they are similar? These two guys go, "We didn't study that."

Then I just for fun, at the end of the table, looked to all the people that were there saying, "Hey, let's answer that question for them. How are they similar?" And everybody around the table diverted their eyes like at a Branson show trying not to get picked as a volunteer. They disengaged. And isn't that happening in the church all the time? We can point out our differences. We got them and we are ready for them, and we've got the arguments to go with them. Where do we find common ground? He says mutual edification. Why aren't we having more of those conversations? Building each other up.

4. Say the right words in the right tone at the right time. This is for the husbands. You're like "That's a lot. I've got the right words. I've even got the right tone. My timing is terrible."

Amy orders from amazon for our house and for the church and does a lot of ordering. Me and the UPS guy do lunch together, I mean we are dear friends. So, everything gets sent to the church and everything gets sent to our house. So, on Amazon, she has two addresses that she toggles between. Every now and then, it's going so fast that she'll place some big order for the church and it gets sent to our house. I show up and with joy in my heart I load it up in my truck and I drive to the church and I put it in the back. I don't say anything. Until a couple of years ago...

She was ordering these carpet squares that you see here and in the lobby. I came pulling into the driveway one night and right in front of the garage door was a pallet of carpet squares. I about lost it. I was having a great day and I saw this pallet and... You're wondering what's the big deal? I don't own a forklift. Maybe you rich people that got the money to blow around like that have forklifts sitting around. I ain't got no forklift. Just to get in the garage, I've got to unload this pallet of carpet squares. I hope you appreciate what you're walking on this morning. I'm unloading them and Amy comes home, "Oh hey, Babe, sorry about that." I'm like, "No problem." Cause I know that's not the right time. But we do need to talk. I waited three days because that day was not the day.

We're at Little Hacienda and I wait until we are halfway through our enchiladas, and I say, "Let's talk about addresses for just a quick second." Scripture is full of practicals on this. The right words, the right tone, and the right time.

Proverbs 12: 25 – ***Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.***

We have to understand a lot of the heated conversations we get into are driven by anxiety, depression in the other person, mental illness. We just talked about it. The needs of the other person. When was the last time in a conversation that got away from you did you pause and think *I wonder what's really going on*. Because in that moment, what a great time to share a kind word. Because anxiety weighs down the heart, but boy you can cheer someone up. That's bringing down the temperature.

Proverbs 18: 12 – ***The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*** It brings life or it brings death.

Proverbs 15: 1 – ***A gentle answers turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*** Anger and hatred stirs up conflict withing in the community.

Proverbs 15: 23 – ***A person finds joy in giving an apt reply and how good it is to have a timely word.***

To think through what we are saying and how we say it.

The Mexican Restaurant in Texas, here's another one for you. The guy didn't say amen on this one in the first gathering. I love it. "I need a speed bump between my brain and my mouth."

5. You say it best when you say nothing at all. I take our 5th principle from the words of Keith Whitley. You want to bring down the temperature? Zip it. think about restraining words. Scripture says, ***The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint.*** Those that often less is more. ***And whoever has understanding is even tempered.***

Chapter 20 verse 3 says ***it is to one's honor to avoid strife.*** Now if you've ever been to counseling, sometimes the counselor will tell you, "Your problem is you avoid conflict." It's a little bit different than what the scripture is talking about here, but I think you can honor someone by not continuing to stir it up. I've always asked my counselor friends to show me the line between honoring someone and avoiding strife and avoiding conflict. That's what I do. I don't even want to talk about it. But I have to learn to stay engaged and use my words with restraint. Right time, right tone, and right words. Be very careful.

Theologian Will Rogers once said "Never miss a good chance to shut up." And that is the lesson for me.

Let me just say this to the husbands again because I feel some of this was so directed toward us. You don't have to say everything you think. You can have a thought and go *I think I'm going to keep that to myself*. But here's the secret. Don't tell your wife, "I just held back. If this conversation would have been last week before Ted's message, this is what I would have said. But because of what Ted taught,

I'm growing, holding back my words." That's bad, don't do it. And don't be like if she says something... With the wife, it's the same thing. You don't have to say everything you think.

The last time from Texas. I love this. "If my mouth doesn't say it, my face definitely will."

With my adult kids, I can restrain my words; my words aren't the problem. It is my face. My face can be the problem.

6. Be okay with being offended, but never be okay with being unloving. Some of you are offended all the time. Something happened and *that goes against my convictions, goes against my belief; I'm going to be mad all day about it.* You're just mad and outraged and offended all the time. Do you know what Paul teaches the church at Corinth? He actually tells them.... There were lawsuits among them. There was conflict and strife. Paul was dealing with strife a lot in the church. He had to remind them a lot. He actually tells them, we don't talk a lot about it in church, He actually says to them, "It is better to be cheated, it is better to be wronged, it is better to suffer injustice than to be unloving. Look at what he says. These are rhetorical questions that don't need an answer. He says the very fact that you have lawsuits among you means that you have been completely defeated already. You've missed the point. You've gotten away from the foot of the cross and you're going after one another.

Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

Sometimes I get drawn into conversations and people want to meet with me to settle a dispute with their subcontractor. That could become my full-time job in Branson, Missouri. Listen, I've been cheated by subcontractors in this town. I've paid for work that never got done. This church has paid for work that never got done. You know what we don't want to do? We don't want to get everything all wound up. I've been cheated. I've been frustrated, but is this going to ruin me? No. Is this worth me becoming unloving?

About 15 years ago, a lady asked to meet with me, and she shows up with this whole stack of papers. She goes, "Before I send my taxes in, I'd like you to go over them." I grabbed them and I said to her, "Looks good to me. I don't know." She's still serving a 15-year sentence. You go to H & R Block, my friend. We can be so easily offended. Some of you have been offended this week. How's your heart doing with it? That's where Jesus takes us as we close this out.

7. Before you give a piece of your mind, check your heart. Before you give your point of view, taking this person out, check your heart. You can call a time out in a heated conversation. Did you ever think about this? You can call a time out in a heated conversation and back away. Set a time to return. Let's say it's a coworker or your spouse or a child or a parent. You could be like, "This is out of hand. Our heart rate is up. Greg Smalley taught me years ago that once your heart rate goes up, in that next 15 to 20 minutes, you are not going to get a lot accomplished, so get away, lower your temperature, and the temperature of the conversation. And this isn't the time to call your allies. This is the time for you to do business with the Lord. Quit giving the kids the time out and give yourself a time out. Get away and say, "Listen, this isn't where I thought it would go. You're mad and I'm mad and we're getting worked up. Give me 30 minutes." The key with this is setting a time to return.

You just spend that 30 minutes not gathering the allies and reinforcing your ammunition but doing business with the Lord. “Lord, the words coming out of my mouth, I do not like what I just said. I don’t like what I’ve heard. I actually shocked myself when I said this. Forgive me. Give me wisdom. Give me discernment. Give me restraint where I need restraint. Give me the right words. I don’t want reckless words; I want gracious words. I want healing for them and for me. I want to be reconciled in this relationship.”

Jesus’ followers, ask “Why are you guys eating with unwashed hands.” Jesus gives a biology lesson. Many of you have been in church for a while and you know this lesson that he gives.

Matthew 15: 17 – 20 – **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 come from the heart, and these defile them.** If you are wondering, *why am I saying what I’m saying? Why do I speak this way? Why do I behave this way?* Start here in the heart. It’s why as parents we don’t obsess over our child’s actions or words. We obsess over their hearts where all of that is coming from. It’s time for us to start looking seriously at what’s going on in our heart. **19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. 20 These are what defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile them.**

Every conversation you’re having with someone right now that gets heated, there is a story behind it. There’s a story about what’s going on in your heart and there is a story about what’s going on in the heart of the other person.

A couple of months back, a lady in our church came up to me and she was very emotional. This is a lady in our church with very strong opinions. She has a very strong point of view. I have a very strong point of view. And I hope you don’t hear in this message that you can’t have opinions. Have opinions. Who has opinions? Who has strong opinions? I pastor you people. There are more than 12 people in here with strong opinions.

She came to me, and she was hurt by something I had said. It was after a service one Sunday and there was a lot going on. That’s no excuse for what I’m about to tell you. There was a lot going on and she said, “You said this in jest. You were being funny, but it hurt.” I listened and she said, “When you said...” Then she told me her story. I’d never heard her story. I had never heard what was going on in her heart. She said, “This is how I was raised.” She walked through it and then she said, “You said, When you were joking, you said, verbatim, the words my dad used to say to me.”

Right there I saw the connection. I was immediately convicted, and I confessed before my Father in heaven and to her. I said, “I apologize. I am truly sorry. Those words were reckless. They never should have been said.” She hugged me.

She goes, “I love our church, I love you, I never want anything to be between us.” Then I paused and I said, “You know what? This is powerful because I never heard your heart. I always get a piece of your mind, I always know what you’re thinking. I rarely know what you’re feeling. I rarely know what’s going on inside.”

Then I just encouraged her. I said, “There are a lot of people in our church that have experienced this with you. I know it. And I want you to have great relationships at our church.” And I said, “Give them more of your heart. Share more of this – what’s going on. Because this is where true intimacy lies. Not in a piece of our mind and always being right and always needing to win, but the desire is that we have relationships and conversations that invite people in, build them up, wholesome healing and reconciling.”

Father, I hope that your word today, the practical word of it, the convicting side of these texts would change me and shape me and guide not just conversations one on one and face to face, but online conversations as well. Let’s be conversations people. Let me be a conversation husband, a conversation father, a conversation pastor, a conversation friend. Let that be true of us throughout this congregation. Thank you for what you continue to do at this church in a time when everything seems to be so heated on everything ever discussed. That we would be a people being transformed by the gospel each and every day. With healing and reconciling conversations.

I pray for the one that’s never placed faith in Jesus that today would be the day of their salvation. That they would step out, meet with someone from our prayer team, confess sins that need to be confessed, seek guidance and prayer for relationships that are broken and hurting. For the one that has never placed faith in Jesus that today would be that day that they confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he’s been raised from the dead that they would be saved.

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