

VISION FORWARD



THE WORLD NEEDS CHRISTLIKE COMMUNICATORS

In college, one of my professors, Dr. Forneiri, once told our class that by the end of the course he would forge us into ‘Aristotelian weapons’. We nodded enthusiastically, even if we weren’t quite sure what he meant, because let’s face it, that sounds awesome! The goal was to grant us the ability to recognize the ‘spin’ of propaganda so prevalent in all our communications, and to equip us with the means to reason through the arguments presented. He didn’t want us to be bamboozled! More poetically stated, he wanted his Aristotelian weapons to be capable of disarming the disingenuous demagogues and riposting rancorous rhetoricians.

Discourse in the public square is filled with propaganda, incomplete information, and superheated by misunderstandings and emotions. To paraphrase a recent Babylon Bee headline, “‘I disagree’ now autocorrects to read ‘I hate you and everything you stand for.’”

While the speech and conversations in the public square or ‘out there’ may be troubling, we can stop scrolling. We can close the laptop and turn off the television. But let’s zoom in. Our discussions at home and at work have moments that look just like the discord and rancor in the culture. But the discord is more painful when we’re up close and personal. Maybe you’ve been dreading seeing a particular coworker because they immediately fire up conversational attack mode. Maybe you

are struggling to restore a relationship with a sibling, a parent, or a child, because they’ve placed you into that “enemy” camp.

As my college professor before me, I want us to be equipped to handle the conflicts that arise in the realm of ideas. But it is not I who will do the forging and we won’t become the weapons of any Greek philosopher. We don’t need to be masters of rhetoric (though it doesn’t hurt!). We need to be willing to discipline, to guide and instruct in our discourse.

What the world desperately needs is *Christlike communicators*. As disciples of Jesus, Elim Grace, we are peacemakers in a world of agitators, fools, firebrands, and bystanders. We can disagree and not leap to slander. As disciples of Jesus, we can disagree, even deeply, without hatred welling up within us. We are a people commanded to love our enemies after all! Let’s look at the living word of God for instruction in discipling our discourse.

BE A LISTENER

“If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.” Proverbs 18:13

We’ve all jumped the gun and made assumptions. Fired off at the mouth too soon and quickly regretted it. When we’re entering into a discussion about a divisive and important issue, *listening* is all the more important. After all, how can we expect people to listen to us, if we won’t listen to them? Christlike communication means we’re willing to actually listen not only

to the words, but listen also for the heart of the people we're talking with.

In the gospels, there are several occasions where we are told that Jesus knew the hearts or the thoughts of those he was interacting with. You may think that's because it's Jesus! Nothing can be hidden from him. That's true, of course. But Jesus was fully man and fully God. If we are listening, with our eyes and ears, we too can at times have a good idea what the people we are talking with are thinking. And as to the supernatural discernment that Jesus has, if we are abiding in Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells within us also, and we can and should pray for discernment and wisdom to hear the heart behind the words. If we wait to speak until we have heard, we stand a better chance of knowing what to say.

BE BOLD, BE MEEK AND BE PREPARED!

"Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus." Acts 4:13

Peter and John boldly told the facts of the gospel at risk to their lives. To speak the truth demands boldness, because truth is often offensive and unwanted. Those who profit from deception have no desire for truth. This biblical boldness isn't an invitation for us to impose ourselves on everyone about everything, "telling it like it is". *Parahesia* (παρησία - boldness, taking the risk when it may cost us) in speaking truth must be balanced by the council in **1 Peter 3:15** by which we are exhorted to utilize *πραΰτης* (meekness, or humility) to bring forth an *ἀπολογία* (apology - from where we get apologetics) — a reasoned, well thought out response. This was the word for an argument or defense given in the ancient court of law.

So our boldness must be in step with God's heart *and* God's truth. Boldness must be rooted in Christ's love for us *and* our love for God and our neighbors. Which means we should be most bold speaking the gospel.

1st Peter 3:15 says, ***"but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect"***

Peter is specifically talking about our hope in Christ — the truth of the gospel — but all our speech should operate in this mode. Bold, salty, gospel grace-filled words conveyed with gentleness and respect that testifies to the fact that we know Jesus. Especially if we aren't given that gentleness and respect in return. And we should be prepared! Steeped in the word and deeply informed on the topics we are engaging in. When Jesus engaged with the Pharisees, he always demonstrated a more comprehensive and deeper understanding of the scriptures than they did. If you only know your side of an issue, you only know half the story.

CHRISTLIKE COMMUNICATORS PRAY

This world may not want us or like us, but they need us. Sin destroys all it touches and we know the only way to end bondage to sin! So we cannot be fools, unaware of how high

the stakes are or bystanders who avoid the fray. We also cannot be firebrands, spouting words in reckless counterattacks trying to stir up division and rancor. We should strive to be Christlike Communicators. Which is of course, impossible in our own power, and we come back to prayer. Jesus was in communication with the Father at all times. I truly believe if anyone has ever 'prayed without ceasing,' it was Jesus.

TIMING IS IMPORTANT

"To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!" Proverbs 15:23

"Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing." Proverbs 27:14

There may not be a best time to have an intense discussion, but there are definitely worse times! The acronym H.A.L.T. (hungry, angry, lonely, and tired) can be a useful pre-discussion checklist to run through before diving into a divisive issue. When possible, engage at a time when all participants are prepared physically and mentally for the strain. However, if a difficult person leaps upon you like a frenzied news anchor after a few shots...

LOVE THEM ANYWAY

"A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Proverbs 15:1

"There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing." Proverbs 12:18

"But I say to you, love your enemies and bless those who persecute you" Matthew 5:44

You're going to end up in a conversation with someone who is operating in the mode of the culture. They're aren't going to listen to you, even if you listen to them. They aren't going to speak with humility. Even if you refute their arguments, they'll change the topic. They'll be childish and mock you. They'll lie outright and deliberately. They'll belittle your faith, the bible, and God. They're going to attack your character. It's going to hurt. Especially if we're zoomed in and this is someone you care deeply about. *Don't begin an engagement assuming the other person is a liar or a fool, but if they prove themselves so, don't pretend they aren't. Proceed with caution and love them anyway.* Just like Christ loved you when you were an enemy fool.

A PROPHETIC WORD FOR ELIM GRACE (from Elder Phil Ryan)

To those of you who feel you have little to offer the Lord in support of Elim Grace and to those of you who are Elim Grace prayer warriors hear this. The Lord is going to be installing a fuel injection system into the engine of Elim Grace. Make no mistake here, PRAYER is the engine of Elim Grace. I say again, PRAYER is the engine of Elim Grace. Those who think

that you have little to offer are all invited to take part, young and old alike, including our children. Even this week some of you will open your bible or bible app to read and I will drop prayer targets into your heart and mind, maybe for a person or situation or for an Elim Grace prayer target, and you will start praying and time will go by and you will get up and start on with your day and say to yourself, "Wow! I feel great!" That's because while you were giving yourself to the Lord in prayer, the Holy Spirit was pouring the oil of gladness into your life.

For Elim Grace prayer warriors, I will rev up your prayer engine, so that you will greatly desire to spend this time with Me in prayer as I direct you, and I will give you insight for your prayers, like where the strongholds are and how to pray to take them down. You will pray and I will accomplish the taking down of them.

You who think you have little to offer are going to become a part of the prayer engine of Elim Grace, as you give yourself in times of prayer, declares the Lord. And it's not about the number of minutes, it's about spending time in prayer before the Lord as the Holy Spirit leads.

If you are one of the people who think you have little to offer the Lord, how should you respond to this prophetic word?

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to begin to drop those targets He desires you to pray for into your heart and mind.

The Holy Spirit will use your concerns. "I wonder how Mr. X is recovering from his operation the other day." That's the Holy Spirit prompting you to pray for Mr. X.

The Holy Spirit will use your worry. "Man, how are we going to pay this month's rent? And my neighbor is worse off than we are." That's the Holy Spirit prompting you to pray for your neighbor, THEN you can pray for your own situation, too.

Remember, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." (Philippians 4:6)

2. It's not about the amount of time. It's about connecting with the Lord in prayer. NEVER be concerned that you only have 2 minutes to pray. The Holy Spirit and you will enjoy whatever time you can find.

But let me share where you can carve out little opportunities for prayer. You have a sink full of dishes and the Holy Spirit drops into your heart and mind a prayer target. Just put the dish down, spend two minutes praying right where you are and then finish the dishes.

3. The Holy Spirit will use your family. Example: two of your children are fighting, you have to

deal with the situation anyway, so take both aside and start praying for the Lord's peace in your family and that your children would learn to work together and love one another. Then ask each one to pray for the other one. Yes, I know that you will need to coach them a few times, but they will get it soon enough. Invite your children to join you in prayer.

Here's one for you. I was just starting into changing my grandson's stinky diaper when the Lord dropped a person into my heart and mind for prayer. I finished up the diaper change and sent my grandson off to find a toy. I sat down intending to pray for the person when the Holy Spirit said to me, "You just robbed your grandson of the Amen to your prayer." I realized that if I had simply stabilized the diaper situation and taken his hands and prayed, he would have quickly realized that I was praying and when I stopped he would have said AMEN, as he does every time there is a prayer in our house. The Holy Spirit further reminded me that He would have honored his amen. Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." So include your children when possible and with persons/topics they will understand praying for.

If you are one of Elim Grace prayer warriors or you want to be, how should you respond to this prophetic word?

1. The term prayer warrior is defined as anyone who is committed to praying for others and others situations and the church's prayer needs. Therefore, to be or to become a prayer warrior is all about your commitment to pray.
2. When this prophetic word says that the Lord will "rev up your prayer engine so that you will greatly desire to spend this time with Me in prayer," that's an invitation to knowing the joy of the Lord both in and as you pray. Again, this is not about the amount of time but it is about committing to pray when the Holy Spirit gives you prayer targets. Again, it is about response, not minutes.
3. When the word says, "I will give you insight for your prayers, like where the strongholds are and how to pray to take them down," that's about listening to the Holy Spirit while you pray and while you are silent before the Lord. The word "stronghold" refers to a point of fortification or place of safety. When Joshua took Jericho, it was all about following God's instructions, not about having the right man power or tactical advantage. Over and over David and others who lead Israel would inquire of the Lord if they should go to fight another army, and God would not only tell them yes or no, but also how to go

after the battle. Remember, the battle is the Lord's and often our prayers are His tools in the battle to provide us victory.

Note: if you have a question about what the Holy Spirit asks you to pray in the taking down of a stronghold, just ask the pastoral staff. They will gladly provide any guidance or encouragement needed.

Like anything new to you, there is a learning curve and you will not hear the Holy Spirit's promptings perfectly. Therefore, you will miss opportunities. You will not realize that the prompting is for right now and may delay or forget about the prompting. Do not waste time worrying or condemning yourself over any of these issues. It is NOT what our Lord desires for you. Think of it this way: any time you follow through and pray as the Holy Spirit prompts is an opportunity that His face will smile upon you and the oil of gladness will be poured out into your life.

LET'S BE HONEST (by Pastor Jonathan)

Dear Elim Grace,

Let's be honest: *Do you wonder why you should pray, if God already knows everything?*

It's true. God knows everything about me and my life. God was present at the beginning of creation and of time, but not time as I understand time. Time comes to me in successive moments, one after the other. But God sees all of time, every moment past, present, and future, at once. C.S. Lewis said time is God's "unbounded now".

In ways we can't comprehend, God has taken all our prayers from the beginning to the ending of time as *He* knows it and has incorporated them all into His good and perfect will. So we must not think of prayer as something that comes to God AFTER he has determined what to, but BEFORE in eternity.

Your prayers matter because God who is before time and outside of time has seen your prayers and worked all of them together for good according to His purpose in time. In many ways, it's never too late to pray.

But more to the point of prayer, God wants to work in *me* through my prayers.

God doesn't only want to know everything ABOUT me. He wants to know ME. "Search me, O God, and know my heart!" (Psalm 139:23) cries the Psalmist. God wants to have a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP with me. He wants me to open my heart up to Him.

To know and to be known by God (Galatians 4:9) is the highest and deepest joy in all of creation. The Apostle Paul proclaimed, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." (Philippians 3:8)

The reason the Son of God stepped out of eternity and into time, out of heaven and into His creation, is that I might have

"fellowship with God," a "life abundant". "This is eternal life," prayed Jesus, "that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17:3)

In prayer God wants to treat me not as an object, but as a person. So in prayer I must come to see myself as I am — not an inanimate object, but a personal being before God.

There is nothing more precious we can do with our time than live in close relationship and deep fellowship with God. Than come into His presence with thanksgiving through prayer.

Pastor Jonathan

A KEY THOUGHT FROM PASTOR JOE:

"There may not be a best time to have an intense discussion, but there are definitely worse times! The acronym H.A.L.T. (hungry, angry, lonely, and tired) can be a useful pre-discussion checklist to run through before diving into a divisive issue. When possible, engage at a time when all participants are prepared physically and mentally for the strain."

How often do you think through the right time to have a crucial conversation?

For more on having crucial and difficult conversations, watch "**Hard Talks Made Easier | Joseph Grenny**" on Dave Ramsey's **Entreleadership** Youtube channel.