

Family Business part 1: Communication

1 Timothy 5:1-2

Introduction: A little over 17 years ago, two elders from Grace Church of Simi Valley approached a young man who was working at a college at the time. Their pitch was straightforward: we are looking for someone to help us train and equip the young people in our church, particularly the Jr. and Sr. highers. There had been turnover in the ranks and some rebuilding had to take place. But there was more than simply plugging in one pastor/director for another. There was a recognition that there had to be an **investment** in the younger generation for the church to continue to thrive. This was incredibly wise, not only because it gave me a job, but because it recognized the nature of an effective, perpetuating church.

The church is built to be **inter-generational**, meaning it is made up of not only every tribe, tongue, and nation, but also has every age group represented. We delight when we have 9 day olds and 90 year olds in the same service, building in the principle of older teaching and modeling for the younger. This is exactly how families work, especially around gatherings, when grandparents (and maybe great-grandparents) are in the same space as multiple generations following them. The hope in the church is that values and convictions are passed down and the baton is handed off at some point to allow the next generation lead (kind of like deciding when to switch houses for Thanksgiving and Christmas).

For a time, the push over the last decade has been to hand off leadership to Millennial's, but the chatter was more about abdication rather than delegation. Abdication means there's a handoff of leadership responsibility but also from accountability, where delegation still owns the weight of the outcome. Young leaders, families, and people in general NEED older, wise, and seasoned counsel. Always. Failure comes on **two sides: 1) The older generation refuses to train and hand off responsibility to the younger**, thus when they are ready to be done, the younger people are GONE or INEPT. The church goes from a seemingly thriving spot to death quickly, and fingers point outward for blame. This seems like the outcome of so many **kings of Judah** who did not train up their sons for the throne, and thus a good king was always followed by a poor one. **2) The younger generation refuses to listen patiently and learn from the older.** There is a sad precedence for this in **1 Kings 12** as Rehoboam followed his father Solomon as King of the united monarchy, inheriting the most powerful nation in the world. However, in youthful hubris (nothing new under the sun) he *"abandoned the counsel that the old men gave him and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him and stood before him."* (1 Kings 12:8). He surrounded himself with young, foolish, impetuous youth, raised the stakes on the people ('my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.'), and they rebelled. Instead of a united powerhouse, Israel split into two increasingly impotent nations on a course for destruction.

As we come to a short section in 1 Timothy, we are reminded of a few things. 1) The church at Ephesus was influential, but messed up (as any place with real people will be). They had bad leaders who were teaching false things and leading people astray, problems with older and younger widows, elders who needed to play their roles and women who were glad to take their spot, and general immorality that needed to be addressed. 2) Timothy was left by Paul because Timothy was **faithful, gifted, and commissioned to do so**. In other words Paul knew Tim had the goods to level the church up after he left. 3) Timothy was struggling, was starting to let fear take hold, and was wavering in his proactive

leadership. 4) Timothy needed to step up and play his pastoral role in the church, to be a leader in the **family**.

Paul wanted to prepare Timothy in how to **communicate and interact** with people as family members rather than overreact in anger. Any lesson in communication will teach that **how** one communicates is almost as important as **what is communicated**. He HAD to deal with the issues and sin that was going on, and **staying silent or indifferent was not an option**. In giving this challenge to Timothy, Paul gives the church a **unique model in handling communication, confrontation, and care**.

*Do not rebuke an **older man** but **encourage** him as you would a **father**, younger men as **brothers**, 2 older women as **mothers**, younger women as **sisters**, in all **purity**.*

Notice a few things about these verses. 1) There is clear differentiation in ages, and how different ages are to be approached. For Timothy, older men were to be like fathers, which is fascinating since Timothy did not have a believing father nor one that we know much about, and older women as mothers. Paul knew about these relationships in the church, since Rufus' mom had been a mother to him as well (Rom. 16:13). 2) Notice that older men and women were to be fathers and mothers, but younger were not to be like **children**, but rather brothers and sisters. This always fascinated me as to that classification, not necessarily seeing why it was that way until I experienced it with my own dad. My relationship with him is always respectful since he will always be my dad, and though I will always be his son, he does not treat me like a child but more like a brother! In other words, since we are brothers in Christ, leaders, and fathers, we have much in common and he trusts me in ways that one would not necessarily do when a child is in your home. So there is **respect, trust, and mutual affection** between older and younger as we grow together.

What this gives us is a paradigm of sorts of how we treat each other in the church, since we will always be in a place where there are those older than us and younger than us. So we glean principles from this metaphor that actually revolutionize our relationships in the **home and the church**.

Consistent Communication in the Family

As we look at this passage specifically, it is about **confrontation** between Timothy, the pastor the church, and those who were out of line. What was clearly lacking, as is lacking in almost every relationship that we have, is good, consistent, loving communication. In fact, in a family, communication is the key indicator of health, whether a family actually deals with real issues or simply masks them with artificial and cursory knowledge and activity. Most all of **marriage counseling** that is done has a source of communication breakdown, where spouses no longer talk, or when they do it is argumentative, angry, and tears down. So if we are going to encourage one another in the truth, we have to work on our **family communication**.

What we lack: Often what we lack is **time**. We are so busy moving from place to place that we are around each other but never stop to actually talk and listen. What we lack when we only engage in cursory conversation is **intimacy**, sharing of life and that which exists below the surface. What this actually reveals is that we lack **intentionality**. Communication is hard work, is a two way street, requires self-evaluation and humility, and is far easier to talk about nothing than dig into something.

Assumptions we make: In relationships where true communication lacks, we are left with **making assumptions**. Some of us assume everything is fine, only to find our friend, spouse, child, or disciple is crying out for help. When there is a lack of communication we make assumptions **on the other end**, reading into things, assuming the worst, and allowing distrust to grow. Relationships are built **to grow**,

not stagnate! I have not met a couple or friendship that truly thrives without a commitment to ongoing, willing, and loving communication.

Avoiding the issues: When this pattern takes hold, we begin to **avoid the real issues**. In the name of "not wanting to hurt feelings" or not "making them mad", we avoid talking about what's really going on in our heart. We begin to **talk about the person rather than to them**, we brood, stew, and pout. We come up with many an excuse as to why we won't talk about it now, and would rather live in miserable ignorance than joyful communication where things get on the table, assumptions are clarified, sin is confessed and forgiven, and restoration is accomplished.

Turning the Table: Paul actually wrote the believers at Ephesus about these issues, and how Christians turn the table to begin to communicate in healthy ways, both within the **family and church**:

- **Commit to speaking the truth in love, with the goal of growing up in Christ** (Eph. 4:15-16) - Speaking the truth means just that, we SPEAK! We speak to build up, to encourage, to love. We use our words kindly and appropriately. We speak to those that we love will pursue Christ as their greatest gift. We speak truth and put away falsehood (4:25), not lying when asked a question, and not stopping at half-truths or re-directs.
- **Refuse to let the sun go down on our anger** (4:26-27) - We commit to resolve our issues of the day in that day, not allowing them to stack up by sweeping them under the rug.
- **Use words that build up, do not corrupt, and do not tear down** (4:29) - We use our words as an opportunity to give grace, build up, recognizing that we have a tool to use in our family that is more powerful than any weapon the world can produce. Our words can tear down the strongest and build up the weakest.
- **Put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice by asking for and giving forgiveness** (4:31-32) - In any family, wounds will happen. We will hurt each other, sin against each other, and say things we do not mean. When we withhold the process of forgiveness, bitterness and anger follow closely behind. **Forgiveness** is a choice every believer can give, and is given as God in Christ forgave us. It **comes at a cost**. It is the **gateway to restoration**, as we commit to holding it no longer against the person, but knowing that it was paid for by Christ on the cross. So much bitterness and anger in families is directly a result of a **lack of forgiveness, and far too many are willing to carry that to their graves rather than deal with the reality.**

We are at our strongest in a family and church when communication flows. This requires **thoughtful listening, question asking, and answering**. It means carving out real time to look each other face to face and have unfettered access to each other's life, mind, and heart. Timothy had to exercise loving care by a willingness to communicate clearly. This meant that he had to be willing to **confront where sin presented itself**.

Cautious Confrontation in the Family

As a pastor, Timothy had the frontline responsibility of confronting the sin of young and old, men and women, all of those in the church. No one really likes this job, and anyone who is overly aggressive in confrontation is most likely going to do it wrong. But encouragement and strengthening of people in their battle with sin is imperative for the health of the church.

Why we approach matters: Respect but not silence

Confrontation of sin is essential in the church and family. Sin spreads like leaven in bread (1 Cor. 5:6-7), and must be dealt with at an individual level, since that is where it plays (Heb. 3:12-13). We cannot walk in the light with Jesus and actively sin (1 John 1:6). Unfortunately sin is an equal opportunity threat, and it affects young and old, so though Timothy had to respect the older men and women and fathers and mothers, this respect did not mean he should stay silent. Silence in the face of clear sin is really an expression of self-love, not selfless love for another.

How we approach matters: Appeal over Rebuke

"You don't take a knife to a gunfight...that's the Chicago way." Those who took down Al Capone knew well that you need the right tools and weapons if you're going to take on a formidable enemy. When we are confronting sin, **HOW we approach is so important**. We can either create a gateway or allow someone to pull up their drawbridge as we try to approach. So there are several principles to consider as we approach someone in their sin:

- **Appeal over rebuke** - Sometimes we can approach someone in anger or built up frustration, and the consequence is an angry confrontation. This is how conversation builds to argument, as we stop communicating and begin shouting. Rebuke for Timothy would have been too strong for the moment, and would have come out of a mounting frustration. The word Paul used for appeal here was **encouragement**. The word "Parakaleo" means to "call alongside" has a range of meaning of strengthen, encourage, appeal, help. This is how we approach a **father**. With respect. With caution. With humility. With appeal. Not guns blazing. If I ever had to approach my dad with a word of confrontation, I'm sure there would be tears involved, much prayer, and almost a reluctance. The same is true of a mother, brother, and sister. When we approach each other, we remember that it should be with the same caution as it would be our own family.
- **Use the right tool** (1 Thess. 5:14) - "*And we urge you brothers, **admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak. Be patient with them all.***" One of the reasons we approach with encouragement and appeal is that often **BEHIND** the sinful activity or waning obedience is faintheartedness, or weakness. Approaching by appeal means we don't come with a **hammer when sandpaper is needed**. Sometimes people need an encouraging word rather than judgment. Sometimes they need a shoulder or listening ear. They know they are wrong, know that change is needed, but don't know how to get there. I've also found that in approaching by appeal, God often softens my own heart in the process, moving from being frustrated with someone to seeing them through pastoral sorrow and care.
- **Let love rule** - The goal is not retribution or getting someone to cry, but to express love, encouragement, and help. Our goal is love, building up, and care. Confronting sin is one of the hardest things we do, and when love compels us (2 Cor. 5:14), then love remains the goal for our own heart and the one we are confronting.

Considerate Care in the Family

Notice that in approaching older and younger women, Timothy was to approach **with all purity**. We've talked extensively about men's and women's roles in the church, but here Timothy was to make sure he upheld the women in the church with purity, the same he would expect and demand of his own mother

and sister. As a man who has 1 wife, 2 sisters, and 3 daughters, caring for these ladies is of utmost importance.

Thoughtfulness

If he were to encourage the ladies of the church it would require thoughtful inquiry, respect, and care. We believe the Bible teaches that the primary place of discipleship among women are WOMEN (Titus 2:1-7), but that does not mean women and men are cut off from relationship. Just like wives, daughters, and sisters are vital in the family, so are our older and younger ladies in the church. As a pastor and man, I should find appropriate ways to encourage the women in our church, **to listen to them, to ask their input, to gain their insight, and to value their contributions.** This also means that there could be times to confront sin where appropriate.

Protectiveness

I remember when my brother and I came home from college one Thanksgiving and something was different. We came into the house and smelled perfume. Not a little or a subtle hint, but a good wafting. My sister was going on a date for the first time with a new guy, a Dutchman and childrens pastor at a church in town. My brother and I had the same reaction when we knew what was going on: *do we need to take this guy out and lay down the guidelines of dating our sister, or just skip the formalities and take him in the back and kick the snot out of him?* Well, I'm glad we did not follow through with any of that nonsense since it would be awkward at family gatherings with my brother-in-law now, but the sentiment is there today. We should uphold the purity of the women in our lives, both in word, deed, and attitude. We should treat them with respect, should never manipulate their emotions, or take advantage of their kindness. We should seek to never put ourselves in a position to do anything stupid or even have that be a consideration.

So we seek to view the church as a family, viewing each other through the lens of fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers. We interact, communicate, confront when necessary, and care for each others purity. When this happens we stop assuming, stop avoiding, and start tasting the joy of real, full, and loving relationships. Committing to this will not only change our marriages, it will change our families, and ultimately our church.

Questions to Answer:

- **How is the communication in your home?** Do you have things left unsaid or topics that have been avoided? What needs to change in the way you communicate with family/friends that would reflect 'speaking the truth in love'? Do you have friendships with older/younger in the church that you communicate with?
- **Is there anyone in your life you need to encourage, appeal to, or confront?** Is there anyone that you've been harboring bitterness or anger against?
- **Read Titus 2:1-1-8.** Where do you see this paradigm playing out in our church? Where can we improve? How do we better connect younger with older so that modeling, mentoring, and learning can take place?

Ways to Pray:

- Spend some time praising God for His sovereign grace, for His divine purposes and how He displayed His glory in Jesus Christ. Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and remember what God is preparing us for.
- Pray for our "PRAY - PLAN - RISK" friends that God will use the events of the past months to soften hearts and bring salvation
- Pray for wisdom of leadership as momentum continues to build for moving back to gathering together. Pray for our own preparation to love everyone who decides to come back right away and others who will take more time to do so.
- Pray that we will stay focused on our mission, our Savior, and each other rather than things that we cannot control that cause us to become fearful, angry, and divisive.