**Lessons from a Lockdown**

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**Day 49**

**Ephesians 4:29-31**

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

***Questions for Personal Reflection:***

1. What is unwholesome talk?
2. How do I build others up by talking to them? How do I determine what is helpful?
3. Does this mean I should no longer disciple people if it will hurt their feelings?
4. How do I cause the Holy Spirit to grieve? How should this truth affect me?
5. Do I struggle with bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander or malice? Which one do I struggle with the most? Why?

***Insight:***

Words should go through a filter before they leave our mouths. We should only allow beneficial words and sentences to go through. If what we say will not be building-up, no matter how true or funny it may be, we should not say it. Everything we say should be beneficial to those who hear (so not just the direct recipient). The words that we speak must be intended to help the hearer and delivered in such a way as to encourage them. As Christians, our goal is not simply to communicate, but to express what is beneficial to others. So, each time we interact with people we should always keep in mind that our intention is to build them up. This applies to fellow Christians and people outside the church. It applies in individual conversations, meetings and even in our preaching. Our purpose in speaking is not to hurt our hearers but to build them up. But this does not mean we should avoid discipling others because it might cause them pain. The goal of our speech is to build people up and sometimes that requires pointing out sins they need to repent of. Sometimes people need to undergo pain in order to grow.

What is building up depends on the needs of those we are speaking to. We need to consider what they need to hear rather than what we want to say. We need to speak not for our benefit but for the benefit of others. This has particular application for those of us who preach, teach or disciple others. In the same way that Paul wrote his letters to meet the particular needs of his recipients, we need to determine the content of what we say and how we say based on the needs of our hearers. It’s not about us, but about them. Of course, there are times when we need to express our hearts and share our feelings with those closest to us and in such cases, we speak because we need help. Sometimes we do speak because of our needs. But even in such cases, we need to speak in a manner that does not tear down others.

The same standard of only building others up applies even to our online speech. Perhaps we should be even more strict on ourselves with online speech because of the potential that our words will reach more people for a longer period of time. What we post, send, share, comment, or react to should only be building others up.

We must not just reduce but totally get rid of bitterness, rage or anger. We must not allow our bad feelings toward others remain in our hearts. Bitterness is what we feel when we hold on to hurts, disappointments and frustrations. We bottle it up inside and it poisons our hearts. Bitterness aggravates the pain we experience from others so we can explode with rage even with the slightest of hurts. What is worse is that bitterness is contagious, it can defile many. We can pass on our bitterness to others like a disease and infect other people. Thus, we should deal with hurts quickly before it evolves into bitterness.

Slander means speech that is injurious to another person’s reputation. We slander when we talk badly of others. This is such a common behavior that we sometimes do not recognize it as sin. We speak badly of politicians, celebrities and other famous people as if it there is nothing wrong. People gossip about scandals involving other people. Slander has increased because of the speed of communication allowed by the internet. With social media people can slander others in various platforms. People seem to think that online slander is not as bad because it is not personal. But it’s actually worse because we can reach more people with online slander and hide behind the anonymity allowed by social media accounts. People have actually become bolder and more abusive in their language online. Even if what is shared is true or is meant to be funny, it doesn’t become less slanderous. As Christians we should have no part in such things.

Malice is the desire to hurt people. Malice is doing things with the intent to harm. It can be obvious or it can be subtle or hidden. Even if the act done is not necessarily sinful, it becomes sinful when done with malicious intent. In 2 Samuel 15:1-12 we see the example of Absalom who behaved like he cared about people. But his intention was to steal the kingdom from King David. So our actions may seem good but our intention may be malicious. Therefore, we should always be aware or our motives. Remember that our motives are weighed by the Lord (Pr 16:2)

We can grieve the Holy Spirit. We can make God sorrowful by our actions. God has feelings and we can hurt him when we sin. Our sins are not just rule violations. Our sins hurt God. Most of us have experienced losing a loved one. We know how grief feels like or at least know how it looks like. That is what God goes through when we sin. More than anything else, not causing God grief should motivate us to get rid of sin in our lives.

During this lockdown let us learn to build up others and encourage God with our words, actions and intentions.