



---

## Part 2 – A Matter of Life and Death

### The Right to Remain Silent

#### Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today we continue in this series called A Matter of Life and death and Travis kicked it off last week. I've been excited for this message called *The right to remain silent*. We're talking about restraint. If you know someone in your family or among your friends who really enjoys talking or you would even say they talk too much, would you raise your hand. I would like to see. If you are that person, would you raise your hand. Okay, honesty is a good thing.

Does anybody here have anybody in your family or among your friends that loves to use the term "To make a long story short." Do you know who uses that expression? The person who has no clue how to make a long story short. They are ten minutes into a story and then they say, "And to make a long story short..." And you want to say "to make a long story end." That's what the expression should be because your inner voice is screaming, Land the Plane! Let's get this bird on the ground!

You are looking at a guy who talks too much, right? And I have a lot of opinions, which it is fine to have opinions. But I sometimes share my opinions way too much. So, this message... This message, just like the Revelation series, is preparing us for a November election. We have a lot going on. We have a lot that we are invited into, but we have to be reminded, follower of Jesus, that restraint is part of humility. We're going to see today, even from the example of our Savior, how important restrain is in our walk with Jesus.

Proverbs 18: 21... which is where Travis kicked us off last week, says, ***The tongue has the power of life and death.*** It brings life and death to your family, to your marriage, to your relationships, to your church, to your community, to your workplace, ***...those who love it will eat its fruit.*** You know we live in a day and age where there's just a lot of noise. And you and I are invited every day into conversations, and we're asked to add our voice or opinion to every topic out there. Many of you know, and you've experienced this firsthand. When you do add your voice to a topic or share an opinion, you are

misunderstood at times. Sometimes misrepresented. What we also see today is we don't even need to be informed on a topic to have a strong opinion. That's called social media. We can spout off and act like experts on every topic. Add to that what we've experienced in the last four years of cancel culture. Cancel culture has done a couple of things. One, it has many Christians speaking up even more for fear of being silenced. Some obnoxiously vent on every issue of our day, but then others have done just the opposite. They've been silenced. We are going to look at that today. The Bible calls us to a restraint that adds influence and power to our voices.

In First Thessalonians, Paul says this in Chapter 4: 11. I've always loved this text and try to make it my life's ambition. He says, ***Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you.***

I heard Francis Chan share on this earlier this year. He was talking to a room full of young people, I would say that were all pretty much in their 20s. He was sharing this text, and he asked the room, "What was Jesus doing at the age of 23? What does the bible tell us Jesus was doing at the age of 23?" It was silent in the room. Frances said, "Well we know he was a carpenter. He then asked them, "What was he doing at the age of 25?" Still silent. He goes, "Well, we know he was still a carpenter." What was he doing at 27?" Still silence." He goes, "Hopefully, he was a better carpenter." Then he says, "It's almost like Jesus made it goal his and ambition in life to lead a quiet life in his 20s. To mind his own business and work with his hands.

Today, we are being told to make your living and be an influence. That you've got to speak up as often as you possibly can about things being thrown your way. I've seen this with pastors that will get online with these moments on social media and go, "Ask me anything." Well, you know my smart aleck mouth and how it works, I want to ask him something I know they can't answer. Why? Because I know these pastors; they are not an expert on everything. So, why would you ask people to ask you anything? I know they are meaning from the Bible, but there's just so much out there to say, "Hey, I need to speak up on everything."

Today we want to talk about adding power to our words. Proverbs 17: 28 reads, ***Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.*** I just want to encourage you. I know we love the words authentic, real, vulnerable, and transparent, but I would add to that list with discerning, restrained, knowing that you don't have to speak up and out on every topic.

Elisabeth Elliott said, “Never pass up an opportunity to keep your mouth shut.” My friend... the initials are Kent McMillan, has this on a magnet on his refrigerator. I found it this week because I thought of you, Kent.

*It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt. And all God's people said... Amen. – Mark Twain*

I'm getting that magnet for my fridge as well. You see, restraining our words, believer in Christ Jesus, does not silence us. That's not what we are talking about today. It gives our words power. That when we do speak, our words have even greater influence. I rarely tell you that you have to go see a movie, but this one you have to go see. Amy and I saw it on Monday. We went to the 12:20. The place was packed. It's probably my favorite movie in the last five to ten years. It's the movie *Regan*. Regan has always been my favorite U.S. President. Amy told me it was a 2 ½ hour long movie.” I go, it could be four hours and it wouldn't be long enough to recognize this man. Why? Because he's a great communicator, a great storyteller.

But what I love is when you watch that movie, just pay attention to how much he restrained his words. That when he restrained his words, it added even more power when he did open his mouth. He's just a great communicator am hoping Kamala Harris and Donald Trump go see that movie to learn how to bridle their tongue. To add even greater... Look at all the Trump people groaning. You know exactly what I'm talking about. Running your mouth all the time is not good for leadership. Restraining your words adds influence and power to your voice.

I love the scene in the movie... I made the mistake earlier of saying Ronald Regan ended communism. Hush. I meant to say he ended the Soviet Union, and I believe that. I get communism is not dead; and if we are not careful, it's going to make a comeback in this country. That's my opinion. I had to get corrected on that, but the meetings that Ronald Regan, when he flew to Geneva and when he flew to Iceland to meet with Gorbachev, Those meetings... Obviously, we were not in the room, but I thought Dennis Quad did a phenomenal job portraying this. But when in Iceland Gorbachev started to meet...

The whole big thing with Regan was Gorbachev wanted us to end our Star Wars initiative and not have a defense against the missiles. He said, “We will eliminate the missiles if you get rid of Star Wars.” You see in the movie that Regan just kind of pushed away from the table, Think about the power of that. It's risky. I'm not saying restraining isn't risky, but he pushed away from the table.

The whole movie is told from the eyes of a former KJB agent who is just incensed with this guy named Ronald Regan who is standing up to the evil empire. But his silence and his restraint added so much.

So, believer, I just want you to be inspired today. We should be known for boldly proclaiming the truth, amen. But we should also be known for our restraint and compassion. And don't allow our running of our mouths to effect this right here. We are talking about a restraint that adds influence and power to our voice. Jesus was never manipulative. He was never controlling. He never coerced anyone. He was mission-focused and others centered. And he would walk away from people in situations if necessary to stay on mission and others focused.

We read in 1 Peter 2: 23, ***When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats...***

If I could encourage believers today, let's do what he did. ...***Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.***

Let us learn, Follower of Jesus, especially in this season, to practice some online restraint. Online restraint means you don't need to post every thought. You don't need to post every opinion. I would also encourage you don't post when you're mad. Don't post when you're venting. Don't post in the parking lot of your lawyer's office. You know what I'm talking about. Avoid throwing a pity party. When you go online and you start venting and throwing the pity party, yeah, a lot of people pity you, but not for the reason you think they are pitying you. Online restraint.

I would encourage you to pass your texts, emails, and posts by a reliable friend or family member before you hit the post button. And spend a little more time educating yourself before you become a speaker on a subject, before you become an expert. People are going to attack you, they are going to misunderstand you, you're going to be misrepresented. This happens in our world and in our lives, but we don't always have to retaliate, we don't have to make threats. The bottom line is when we speak out on everything, we lose credibility with the most important thing. We don't have to speak out on everything.

Let's look at five ways to practice restraint and get very practical with this in the message today.

**1 - I want to just share this first and foremost with husbands.** You don't have to say everything you think. If a thought pops into your head, it doesn't have to come out of your mouth. I know what's happening. There are senior adults in here that say, "Here's the problem. If I don't get that thought out immediately, it's gone in 15 to 20 seconds. So, I don't care where you're at in your story or in your argument, I have to get it out quickly. The problem is you're constantly listening to reply and not listening to understand. So, yes, be real, transparent, vulnerable, authentic, all the words we love to use, but be discerning.

Proverbs 18: 2 says, ***Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinion.*** So, as followers of Jesus, we want to be good listeners. We want to lean in, incline the ear, let the other person share, and even when something pops into our head or an opinion or something that makes even more sense, we don't have to say it.

I was on a trip with a new friend this week and he cracked me up talking. He goes, "Here's the problem. Sometimes when my wife is talking, she is sharing this story and she could start the story right here, but she starts it way back here. I have to go on this journey with her to get it to here and it's just like... and I have nothing to say because I had all these thoughts along the way that just went out of my head.

Here's why you don't have to share every thought. My senior adult friends are going to remember this. These are some of my favorite commercials growing up. Does anybody remember E. F. Hutton? These are great commercials. E.F. Hutton is talking about financial management, but in a crowded restaurant or airport, there's clanging of utensils on the plate and it's loud with the hustle and bustle of a restaurant. They try to find the noisiest places that you and I frequent. Bags are hitting and it's just chaos, but when someone mentions the name E.F. Hutton, the commercial goes completely silent. Everybody would stop everything and lean in. "What did E.F. Hutton say? Because I want to know." I want that for each one of you. I want every grandparent in the room... You may not have the energy to speak as much as you used to, but when you do speak up, that your words would have such weight that everybody would be like, "Ron's about to speak, lean in."

I've been in meetings over the years with a man in our town. His initials are Jack Herschend. He doesn't say a whole lot, but when he does speak, if you're still talking, I want to look at you and say "zip it. Let's listen." I want E.F. Hutton.

Proverbs 11: 12 says, ***Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.*** Our silence helps us learn. Our silence helps us get to

know other people. Our silence is telling the other person that they matter, that they are worth your time. I may not agree with you. Remember, listening doesn't say I agree with you. I need to tell this to every young person still living at home. Asking your parents a question and then listening and not responding doesn't mean they are on your page. So, don't go to Mom and belike "I just talked to Dad and he's with me." No, Dad didn't say anything. Listening doesn't mean I agree with you. Disagreeing doesn't mean I hate you. Healthy people aren't threatened by the opinions and feelings of other people. And they can listen and get to know someone.

**2 – Let others praise you.** Proverbs 27: 2 says, ***Let someone else praise you and not your own mouth. An outsider and not your own lips.***

Thursday night, we had almost 400 of our volunteers who make the campus work each and every week. At this church, we do a worship night for our volunteers. It was a wonderful evening, and I shared this passage with them. I said, "You don't need to praise the work you're doing for the Lord. Let it come from my lips today and tonight. Thank you. What you do matters. What you do has an eternal impact for the Kingdom, and it's very important. Keep going. I thank you for it."

I was getting a haircut last Monday and a few chairs down... I don't know if my new friend is in here today, but he's seventy years old... I won't say his name. He hasn't been in church in his adult life but he hasn't missed a Sunday in the last four months. As he's sharing with me... We talked about the Revelation series and having a good conversation. I loved what he said at the end. He goes, "Hey, whatever you do, don't get rid of that bearded fellow in the parking lot. His initials are Cameron Lawrence. Cameron is going to be mad at me for saying this. He says, "We look forward to seeing him every week."

Here's why I shared Cameron. Almost every week, Rex (Our Care Pastor) will pop his head around a corner or show up in a meeting and he'll say, "Hey, do you know that young lady that was talking to me? Cameron will say yeah. Hey, you know that older gentleman... Do you know that young man. Cameron... I just want you to know they prayed to receive the Lord Jesus Christ this morning. I want you to know and I just want to praise for a moment all our volunteers that make it happen. From the parking lot to that announcement from Rex, think about everything that took place between the two. When you drop your child off and someone warmly welcomes your child and then warmly hands that child back to you in about an hour and 15 minutes... and you better have your receipt.

My friend Johnny W says, “We don’t exchange without receipts. And if you don’t have your receipt, the best we can do is give you back a child of equal or lessor value.

Sometimes I think we get going in ministry and we forget the difference we’re making. You don’t have to praise what you’re doing; let me do that today. Let me say thank you. Now maybe at work sometimes you’re like “I have to remind my boss often how awesome I am.” Everybody here knows that person at work that’s constantly tooting their own horn. I’m not going to ask you to raise your hand if you’re that person, but I know the reason you do that. You’re like, “Ted, if I don’t tell them, they won’t know.”

That’s not true. I can guarantee you if you’re knocking it out of the park and doing a great job at work, it is noticed. If you’re a leader in our community, if you own a business, or you manage somewhere in town... Let someone else do that. You be the one that does that for your employee. They don’t need to come to you and remind you. Call it out.

So, this is where restraint is part of humility. Amy sent me this this week... She reading a book with a friend right now on humility by Andrew Murry. She sent me this snippet from the book. *“Humility is perfect quietness of heart. It is to expect nothing, to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me and when I am blamed or despised. It is to have a blessed home in the Lord where I can go in, shut the door, kneel to my Father in secret, and I am at peace as in a deep sea of calmness when all around and above is trouble.”* We don’t need to run our mouths in times of distress,

**3 – Be the one where rumors come to die.** Let it end with you. I love Proverbs 18: 8, ***The words of a gossip are like choice morsels...*** what’s your favorite morsel, what’s your favorite candy? I want you to think about that right now. Mine is Milky Way. Snickers just have peanuts that get in the way. I love Milky Way. And it’s been years and years since I have eaten a full-size Milky Way. I don’t eat the full size. I feel irresponsible when I’m eating a full-size candy bar. But you know those little ones? I can down four to six of those in one sitting. Why do I feel better about myself when I’m eating the little ones? Amy buys bags of Milky Way and keeps them around the house. What’s your favorite? “I would never eat a muffin.” There are like 600 calories in a muffin, but I can eat those mini muffins. I just love that word picture because that’s how you and I treat rumors. We can run from the big things, but what are the little things that we are constantly feeding ourselves with. What are the little snippets that people like to throw out there? Let it be dying with you,

Proverbs 18: 8 – ***The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inmost parts.*** Don't add anymore fuel to the fires.

We go on to read in Proverbs 26. ***Without wood, a fire goes out. Without a gossip, a quarrel dies down.*** Let this be true of your home, true of our church, true of our community. Woodland Hills, let's be known in this community that when people want to start gossiping about things that aren't true... Just let it die with you, knowing it is not going to be spread in this town because of me. It's going to end here.

***As charcoal to embers and as wood to fire, so is a quarrelsome person for kindling strife.***

I love one of the things I have in my office from Bill Rogers, an elder of our church for years, a retired pastor from High Street Baptist. When he was clearing out his library, he brought me some boxes. One of the little plaques in his box sits on my desk, and it simply says, "Those absent are protected here." If you want to come in and talk to me about someone else, the problem is they are not there to share their side of it. So, I need to stay focused on you and how you can take personal responsibility for what's going on in the situation.

You know someone at work that's not very productive because they talk too much, and they like to spread rumors. Let them know yours is not an office to stop by, it's not a registered stop by, it's not a cubical to stop by. This person is not going to entertain what you have to say.

**4 - When angry, stay silent.** When mad, don't post. I want to start with a passage. Maybe some of you have heard this because this is some of the worst premarital counseling I've ever heard given. It's always given with good intentions, but it's not accurate and it's taking the Bible out of context.

It's simply this: ***in Your anger, do not sin.*** Do not let the sun go down or the sunset while you're still angry.

Who has heard in your walk and over the years that you should never go to bed angry? Coming right out of Ephesians 4: 26. How many of you have ever gone to bed angry?

Early in our marriage, Amy and I practiced this. We can't go to bed angry. The problem was we would always start our fights right after sunset, which meant we had 24 hours.

That's not at all what Paul is saying here. We've misunderstood this for years. If you have a study bible, I want you to look at your study bible now under Ephesians 4: 26. There's going to be a letter somewhere in that verse. Just go down to the bottom and lookup that letter in the notes and you are going to see Psalm 4: 4 because that is the text that Paul is quoting.

Here's what we read in Psalm 4: 4 – ***Be angry and do not sin***, now watch this... ***Ponder in your own hearts on your bed and be silent.***

That's the opposite of how we've been taught Ephesians 4: 26. Meaning lay down and do business with the Lord. You may not have the solution to whatever you are in conflict with in your marriage. You may have no resolution, but you can go... How many of you have gone to bed frustrated, there's something that needs to be decided, we're out of energy, we can't fight about it anymore, but when you wake up the next morning, it just doesn't seem to have the oomph that it had the night before. We've all experienced that one. So, take it to the Lord, be silent because in your anger... And this is one of the reasons you may fight for hours and hours into the night because it's not going to the Lord. So, when angry, stay silent. Take it to the Lord. Take personal responsibility.

**5 – Let others share without interruption.** Proverbs 18: 13 – ***to answer before listening, that is folly and shame.***

We want to be good listeners. I was really practicing this years ago. We did family camp for years with our friends Jill and David Jones and their kids, and Andy and Stephanie Watson and their kids. We raised our families at camp. So, you can imagine the chaos. I'm sitting there on the porch one morning with my friend, David Jones. I'd call him a good friend until he said this. I'm talking to him, and I go, "You know what, David, I've made the decision that I'm going to get better at listening. I talk too much and I just need to be a person of understanding and listen better."

David looked over at me and he said, "You know, that's going to be refreshing." I go on vacation with this guy!

Last week, I was invited by a group of guys to go on a 500-mile jet ski trip in Alaska. When I was first asked to go on this trip, I said no because the timing didn't work and there was just too much going on. When I told Amy about it, she goes, "You most definitely need to go. You love Alaska, you love fishing."

I go, “this is a jet ski trip, 500 miles.” I went on this trip with 12 type A guys and 3 guides. It was the adventure of a lifetime. I have so many good memories, made so many good friends, but there were a few moments where I went, *Jet Skies really aren't made for the ocean*. Leading up to the trip, Amy was sending me all these video of Orca whales messing with kayaks and paddle boards. That's when you know you've got a good wife. They were nipping at them and tearing the rudders off the boats.

The first day was Juno, Alaska to Petersburg, Alaska, 137 miles. They broke us up into two groups – 5 and 7. I was in the fast group and Greg Bettis was in the slow group. I have to say this because he's going to say a lot of my story isn't true. He wasn't there. So, I'm with a group that has a professional guide who has been 150,000 miles. He circumvented the earth on a jet Ski. And then a professional Jet Ski racer. They must have looked at me and said, “This guy is an athlete and probably should be in the fast group.” They put me in the fast group. The first hour and a half was amazing. We saw a pod of orca whales, a pod of humpback whales. And then we got out into the Bering Sea.

Now, it's the Pacific Ocean, but for this story I'm calling it the Bering Sea, because have you seen the d\Deadliest Catch? Okay, imagine that with a jet ski. Now, there were only two to three foot waves, but two to three foot waves on the ocean, the wind and the storm... I can demonstrate that two hours if you would like me to. Once we got past the calm sea, this is what we did for two hours: gun the jet ski and hit the water, up and down and up and down. I was questioning my purpose in life, I hated it. I was like *this is the dumbest thing I've ever done in all my life*. I start falling back from the group. These guys are professionals. I'm a half mile back. My friend Todd, from Atlanta comes back around, and yells at me. “Ted, the faster you go the better it will be!” That is not true. The faster you go, the higher you go and harder the impact into that next wave.

And to make matters worse, I didn't dress properly. We had a dry suit on, but I put my raincoat on in the inside of the dry suit and so my hood served as this scoop into my dry suit that every time I hit a wave and it hit me in the face, about a gallon of water went into this scoop and down my back and filled up my dry suit. Finally, Todd comes back and he goes, “Come on!” As he's getting back, I'm like, “Just go. Leave me. I'm done. I'm camping over there on the shore.” For those two hours, I was like *this is an adventure, but this is just stupid*. I'll be honest with you, I got back, and I was exhausted. Every night we did a devotional and we just got some conversation starters going. That night I wasn't feeling all that spiritual, but I engaged.

I want to introduce you to our guide who was in the back. His name is Dom. Dom was a 24-year-old from Northern California. He is a precious guy. And Dom, I hope your watching. He said to send him this link after this morning. And I do, hope you do tune in, Dom. Thank you, first of all, for saving my life. He retrieved my hat. Thank you for that, Dom. Thank you for the snacks. The snacks were my favorite part of the whole trip. I had Kind Bars and Milky Ways. I was so entitled. You have no idea how entitled I was fighting the Bering Sea.

Dom, one night... and only one night. That's what's amazing. He only showed up one night. I think just by accident he joined our group of 12. We went into this room in the hotel, and we sat around the table. That night was on listening to understand, not to reply, which every type A needs to learn how to do. It was fun because we all had a lot energy and things to share. So, we're talking, we're interrupting each other, but for four and a half hours we go, and Dom doesn't say a word. At the end, I asked him, "Dom, would you like to share anything?" He said, "I've never experienced something like this. I didn't know stuff like this existed. I didn't know guys got together and were this open with each other and sharing. We were asking questions like "How would your wife describe you as a listener." "What are you going to do to be a better husband, father when you go back?"

It was fun, it was engaging. We have friendships for a lifetime from that group because we survived the Bering Sea.

I just said, "Dom, can you tell us about your faith?" Dom started to share, and it was pretty clear to me how the rest of that night needed to go. I opened up my Bible app to Acts 17. I just said "Dom, I love when I go places around the country and I hire a fly fishing guide. They typically worship creation. They are very connected to creation, they love creation. I told him, "You're already a worshiper, you're just one step away from worshipping the creator, the one who made it all.

One guy came by my Jet Ski while we were looking at the most beautiful glacier I've ever seen and we were up close to it.

He goes, "Have you ever seen a more beautiful church?"

I said, "Yeah, I have." This ain't a church. This is creation. The church is the body of christ, the family of God. It's the children of God.

I shared with Dom, and I said, “Can I just read for you this passage?” Out of Acts 17, I love these words that Paul shares. ***The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of Heaven and Earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man, he made all the nations that they should inhabit the whole earth. And he marked out their appointed time in history and the boundaries of their land, God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him though he is not far from any of us.***

At that moment, all 12 guys in that room and Greg Bettis was in that room, as well and he would tell you, the Holy Spirit was moving in Dom’s life. It was pretty cool to watch a group of 12 type A’s say nothing.

I share this with you because I don’t want to miss moments when the Holy Spirit is moving because I’m running my mouth. And I’m okay with many of us who grew up with the evangelism style of “If you were to die today, would you go to heaven or hell?” Okay, why don’t we ask someone about their story or about their faith? What if listening to someone led you to a place in scripture that doesn’t fit with the formula you learned?

I get up from the chair and I looked at my new buddy, John Mark, who know his Bible. I go, John Mark, are you going to talk to Dom or am I. John Mark goes, “I got it.” I watched him go over and Dom, with his head like this, I listened to John Mark share the gospel with him. He walked him right through the Romans road and at the end asked Dom, “Would you like to become a follower of Jesus.” That night, we moved from creation to seeing Dom worship the creator and become a new creation. I went to bed that night going, “Every jump of the Jet Ski was worth it.”

I want to encourage you this week. See where God is moving and join him in that. When the Holy Spirit is moving, let’s keep our mouth closed and open it at that moment when there can be great power and influence with our words.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I pray for our new brother in Christ, Dom, as he heads back, after this week’s trip, to California that we can find a church for him to plug into and believers in Christ Jesus that can surround him and encourage him in his journey. Thank you for this church. Let us be people of influence, have voices of influence that we can share and encourage others. Teach us restraint and humility. For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus that today would be the day of their salvation. We pray all this in the Jesus name... Amen