

Learning to Say the Right Words

Family Talk - Part 7

Titus 2:11-14

Carl McCunn was a likeable Texan with a love for the outdoors. In the late 70's he moved to Alaska and took a trucking job for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. He made good money, a lot of friends, took up photography and planned to make an expedition that still, to this day, bewilders everyone who hears his story.

At the age of 35, he embarked on a five-month photography expedition in the wilds of Alaska. He'd spent a year planning every detail. He solicited advice and purchased supplies. In the Spring of 1981, he hired a bush pilot to drop him at a remote lake 70 miles northeast of Fort Yukon. He took two rifles, a shotgun, fourteen hundred pounds of provisions and five hundred rolls of film.

He arrived, set up his camp there in the isolation of the wild – surrounded by nothing but nature, where he would spend his five months of hiking, hunting, fishing and photographing the splendor of his surroundings.

He was blissfully unaware of one overlooked detail that would cost him his life.

He had made no arrangement with anyone, to be picked up.

It didn't dawn on him until August. His only hope was that a friend would remember his plans and notice his absence.

And so every day he searched for food and scanned the skies for rescue.

No one came. By the end of September, the lake was frozen and the snow began piling up. Hiking out was now impossible. His supplies were nearly gone as well as his ammunition.

The details of his final days are known to us because of a 100 page diary found near his body where he detailed those last months of starvation and

the freezing cold. He was found by authorities nearly a year after he had first set up his camp and begun his expedition.

In his diary is perhaps the greatest understatement of his life as he wrote, "I think I should have used more foresight about arranging my departure."ⁱ

He had planned every detail for his expedition . . . but he'd never made plans for his exit.

He'd planned everything for his living . . . he'd planned nothing for his leaving.

Frankly, that is the story of most human hearts today. They think only of living and nothing about leaving.

Nearly 2 people die every second on planet earth. More than 6,000 an hour – 155,000 every day . . . around 57 million a year.

I find it wonderful that the grace of God has made every provision – not only for living in this wild world of ours, but in leaving this world.

In fact, the only way you're ever going to *live* in this world heading in the right *direction* – and the only way you're going to *leave* this world heading for the right *destination* – is the grace of God.

We are saved by grace – we live by grace – we are taught by grace – we die in grace and go to heaven on the promise of God's grace for those who've believed His gospel.

In Titus chapter 2, where I invite your attention, the Apostle Paul has been delivering what I've called a family talk. And as he comes to the end of addressing every member of the family, he sort of pulls the cart over and says, "Listen, it's really all about the grace of God at work in your heart and life."

The grace of God . . . the graciousness of God.

Notice verse 11. For the grace of God has appeared. For – that is, everything I’ve been talking about to you is directly connected to and empowered by and encouraged by the graciousness of God.

Whether you’re an older man or an older woman, or a younger man or a younger woman or even the household servant – **the grace of God has appeared, notice, bringing salvation to all men.**

In other words, this is your way outta here.

So what have you done with the gracious offer of salvation from God? This is God’s exit strategy for your life.

Would you notice carefully that Paul is *not* saying that all men are *saved*; don’t misunderstand him here. He’s not preaching universalism here.

The connective conjunction that begins this sentence – this very long sentence that stretches from **verse 11** all the way through **verse 14**, is a connective word tying back into the context of the previous verses where Paul has addressed different *categories* of people.

You could understand Paul to be saying here in **verse 11 – For the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation to all kinds of people.**

Whether you’re a man or a woman; young or old; bond or free; rich or poor; Jew or Gentile, married or single or widowed, parent or parentless; citizen or foreigner.

Anybody can be a member of the family of God – and if you are a member, you got your membership card solely by believing in the gospel of the grace of God.

But when you get saved, grace isn’t finished. You’re going to grow in grace – **2 Peter 3:18** – that is, you’re going to grow in the gracious character of your living Lord.

Paul effectively say, “Listen, I want to keep the cart parked on the side of the road for a few minutes more and explain to every member of the family how grace impacts every aspect of your life.”

That’s what he does in verses 11 to 14.

So what I want to do is outline what Paul has to say by giving you three different words or expressions to learn how to say – three expressions determined by and governed by, the grace of God.

In fact, if you want to measure how you are growing in grace, just ask yourself the question – How often am I saying one of these three things.

And the first word to learn how to say, by the grace of God in your life, is the little word – “no” . . . n – o.

Leaving Your Past Life

This has to do with the kind of lifestyle you are in the process of rejecting on a daily basis.

Notice **verse 11 again. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men** – now watch what grace does – **instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires.**

Paul sort of personifies grace and says that grace shows up and begins to teach us how to say “no”.

I thought grace was all about saying “yes” . . . it is, but the first thing grace teaches you to say is “no”.

The word translated “instructing” has wonderful implications from God’s Spirit through Paul.

Paul could have chosen the word *didasko* (διδάσκω) which refers to a more formal, classroom setting for instruction. *Didasko* only works when you show up at a certain time for the lecture. Paul doesn’t use that word. Instead, he uses the verb *paideuo* (παίδευω) which gives us our word, pedagogy. It refers to teaching a toddler – a little child – typically by a parent.ⁱⁱ

This kind of teaching is informal, most often, and throughout the day, whenever teaching opportunities arise.

In other words, the grace of God is a teacher that takes us where we are . . . and daily teaches us whenever teaching moments arise.

Which means grace condescends to teach us at our own personal speed. Grace is the kind of teacher who reinforces truth according to our own personal needs and style of learning.

Grace is the perfect tutor.

Paul writes that grace is **instructing** us – the tense of the verb is present tense which indicates that this is continuous.ⁱⁱⁱ

If you missed a lesson or two yesterday, grace will show up and teach you today. And if you didn’t quite get the lesson – which none of us ever master – since the subject of our lesson is the character and nature of our gracious God – grace will show up again and again and again to lead us through the lessons all over again . . . in fact, for the rest of our lives we will have the companionship of this teacher called grace.

And grace will tutor us in how to say and live by three expressions.

The first expression is that little word – “no”. Notice *verse 12. Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires.*

The words *to deny* mean to refuse – to renounce – to disown.^{iv}

Paul is effectively saying, “This is the kind of life you’re leaving behind.” You’re renouncing it.

A young couple in our church told me recently that they decided to literally renounce everything they could think of that might stand in the way of their commitment and growth – they poured down the sink all their alcoholic beverages; threw away their music collection, books, magazines; began spending their money differently; took an immediate shift in their view of life . . . they effectively said, “We’re finished living on the fence.”

We’re going to start saying no to things from our past life.

Paul expands the same thing to the Ephesian believers as he writes, ***“Don’t walk any longer as the Gentiles walk – the unbelievers – in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of . . . the hardness of their heart; and they . . . have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. But you did not learn Christ in this way – in other words – Grace didn’t tutor you to live this kind of life as a Christian – in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness . . . (Ephesians 4:17-24)***

All that to say, learning to walk in Christ, tutored by grace, means that you will, first of all, be taught *how* to say and *to what* to say – no.

The person who says, “Hey, I’m under grace and that means I can say yes to everything” isn’t really being tutored by grace.

Because grace teaches you, in this text, how to say “no”.

[Growing up in Christ], one author wrote, is impossible without the discipline of refusal.^v

But isn’t that just like life and learning as a human being. If you have children, you know how you spend so much time with your toddlers as you’re literally raising them and training them and

protecting them by more than any other word, telling them what? – no.

No . . . no.

You’ll say that many more times to a young child than you’ll say “yes, yes”.

You’re little angel toddles over to some little curio sitting on a shelf in the living room and reaches out his pudgy little hand to grab it . . . and you say, “No, no.”

He looks over at you without blinking an eye, stares you directly in the face and grabs it. He has just decided that you aren’t as tough as you look. He’s decided that he can take you on.

That’s what I think of your “no, no.”

No wonder Mark Twain said, “When a child reaches the age of two, put him in a barrel and feed him through a knothole . . . when he turns 13, plug up the hole.”

I’m not recommending that, but Mark Twain must have had kids.

And part of the challenge of growing up is responding to the word “no” . . . without that word, it would be difficult to survive – I mean, what’s wrong with playing in the street, eating candy for supper or playing in the rain when it’s lightning . . . every one of those things is a blast when you’re a kid. But somebody said “no” . . . and ruined the party.

The truth is we need grace to teach us what to say no to, because our parents won’t be around forever and they might not have taught us in the first place and our peers certainly didn’t teach us and the world system is designed to erase every “no” and replace it with “now.” What are you waiting for?!

Francis Schaeffer, a Christian philosopher and author, wrote some 40 years ago, “We are surrounded by a world that says “no” to nothing. We have a society that holds itself back from nothing. Any concept of the word “no” is avoided as much as possible . . . absolutes and ethical principles must give in to selfish [pursuits]. Of course, this environment fits exactly into our natural disposition, because, since the fall of man, we do not want to deny ourselves either.”^{vi}

No wonder we need the daily instruction of grace.

Paul writes, ***“Grace will teach us to say what we have trouble saying – saying no to ungodliness and worldly desires”***

What are worldly desires? Simply put, they are anything that you as a growing disciple of Christ might do or say or desire or pursue or participate in

where you would be embarrassed if Jesus happened to show up and come along for the ride.

This is how you are to leave your old life.

Living Your Present Life

But there's more. Not only does grace teach you how to leave your past life, it teaches you how to live your present life.

Notice what Paul writes next in *verse 12*.

Instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and – don't stop there – to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.

Don't just stop with "no" . . . grace will teach you when and what to say "yes" to.

In fact, the tenses of this verb, "*to live*" indicates that it takes place at the same time you are denying your old life.^{vii}

In other words, you are saying "no" to ungodliness and worldly desires while at the same time you are saying "yes" to living sensibly, righteously and godly.

Part of the misconception of Christianity that can become discouraging is the belief that you'll arrive at some point where you'll never have to say no again and everything will be an easy yes.

I mean, surely a mature wise committed Christian gets to the point where he never has to bother saying no – those temptations will have given up at some point and he'll only need to say yes and it'll be easy street.

Not according to Paul. And not according to the rest of the Bible.

Even Paul, as a mature believer, transparently admitted that he struggled with doing things he didn't want to do and not doing the things he knew he should be doing – ***oh wretched man that I am, he wrote, in Romans 7.***

You are never beyond temptation; you will never outgrow the need to say "no" to something – and at the same time you are never beyond the need to affirm something.

While we cannot live the Christian life without saying "no" – we can't live the Christian life without at the same time saying "yes".

Christianity isn't just about denial . . . we don't just shun ungodliness, we embrace godliness in its place.^{viii}

We don't just put off the old man . . . we put on the new man (***Ephesians 3***).

And Paul tells us that grace will tutor us to say "yes" to three different attributes:

The first one, here in *verse 12* is ***sensibly – or sensibility***. This word has shown up several times already in this letter to Titus.

Sensibility is one of the qualifications of an elder in chapter 1;

- it is required of older men in chapter 2 and verse 2;
- of young wives and mothers in verse 5
- and in the lives of young men in verse 6.

But now Paul broadens the application of this word to the entire church family. No one is exempt from saying "yes" to this characteristic.

This word means to live with discretion . . . to think and act with self-control.

It's a word that refers to someone who has a sound mind. That is, the believer doesn't allow his mind to be controlled or distracted by either circumstances or culture.^{ix}

In other words, he daily makes up his mind to follow the truth.

Paul then adds another course in the curriculum of grace – not only is the believer to live sensibly, but ***righteously***.

Paul only uses this word two other times in his letters – once to defend his own actions as upright (***1 Thessalonians 2:10***) and the other time to describe the believers moral obligation to stop sinning and live righteously (***1 Corinthians 15:34***).^x

Living righteously simply means that you live by the divine standard of what is right.

And can I get on a little hobby horse for a moment. More and more you are hearing people talk about their "values".

They have family values . . . personal values . . . the values that made this country great . . . people who "live according to their values", etc. etc.

That word values, dear flock, means absolutely nothing, by the way . . . because it can be defined any way a person wants to define it.

You may value human life, but another person may with equal passion value the right of a person to die whenever they want to. You might value traditional marriage, but others with equal intensity value same sex marriage.

The word value is subjective – it is defined by whatever it is you personally believe in. Someone might value a hotel because it has rooms where they can smoke – while others value a hotel because there are no smoking rooms on the premises. People have

values relating to everything from American made products to organic foods.

Whatever you value is based on whatever you believe, feel, and want to do. And values are as varied as the wind.

What has been lost to the English language in our generation is the word which “values” replaced . . . and we didn’t notice it until it was gone.

Values replaced the word – virtues.

And there’s a world of difference between the two. Webster said it best when he defined virtue as conformity to a standard of right.

No wonder that word has to go.

Objective standards of rightness – or righteousness – are replaced by a relativistic culture that doesn’t want to conform to any ethical or moral or even spiritual absolutes.^{xi}

Values, by definition, do not conform to any external standard of right or wrong – they are merely created by the person claiming them in order *to be perceived as a person of virtue*.

A man says, “I hold firmly to these values” . . . and people think, “Oh, he’s such a man of virtue.”

No they’re not . . . they are a person of values – and a person of values is not necessarily a virtuous person.

A person, who holds to values, is simply holding to a standard of stuff he feels good about . . . at the moment . . . because values can change – virtues do not.

William Sangster, a well-known pastor in England who was serving at the time the Titanic sank told in one of his sermons who a wealthy woman had already found her place in one of the lifeboats, about to be lowered into the North Atlantic. She suddenly thought of something she needed and was so desperate she was allowed to get out and run back to her stateroom. She was granted only a few minutes time before the boat would be lowered without her. She got out and ran until she reached her room. She rushed to a shelf above her bed. There her jewelry box sat and in it were her diamond studded jewels. She shoved it aside and it crashed to floor. Behind that box, sitting on that shelf were three small oranges – she grabbed them and ran back to the life boat and climbed on board. William Sangster wrote, “[The danger of death] had boarded the Titanic. One blast of its awful breath had transformed all values . . . priceless things had become worthless and worthless things had become priceless.^{xii}

There is coming a day when the world will stand before God and discover that according to His standard of rightness that many of their values were not virtues at all.

Paul says, through Titus, “Now that you’re a believer, let the grace of God teach you, through the word of God and by the Spirit of God, what is right.

Paul adds a third word – the word **godly**.

This is the opposite of ungodly – ungodliness which the believer is to deny.

This has to do with an appropriate attitude toward God and the things of God.

It is godlikeness in perspective and spirit.

Paul adds at the end of verse 12, we’re to live this way in ***the present age***.

Christians live in this present age. We don’t live like for it; we shouldn’t live like it – but we do live in it.^{xiii}

And this is how we’re taught to live.

Looking for Your Future Life

So grace teaches you how to leave your past life, it teaches you how to live your present life, but there’s more to the curriculum of grace . . . grace also teaches you how to look for your future life.

Notice ***verse 13. Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.***

This verse is rich, isn’t it? Among other truths, this verse happens to be one of the strongest statements on the deity of Jesus Christ in all the New Testament.

Some would try to say that Paul is talking about God the Father and God the Son – ***our great God and our Savior, Christ Jesus.***

But there is only a single definite article in this Greek title – in other words, the great God is also the Savior and that happens to be Jesus Christ.^{xiv}

You could reverse reading in your English New Testament to capture the idea – ***Jesus Christ is the Savior and our great God.***

- The pronouns in the following verse are singular – pointing back to Jesus Christ.
- Furthermore, in the Old Testament, God is often referred to often as great. In the New Testament, the reference to God’s greatness is always attached to God the Son.
- Finally, and just as importantly, whenever the New Testament speaks of God appearing – it is never used of God the Father or God

the Spirit but always in reference to God the Son.^{xv}

Which makes sense, given the fact that we're told that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of deity – He is the physical manifestation of the invisible God (*Colossians 1:15*).

And Jesus Christ, our great God and Savior is going to do what? He's going to appear. He's going to appear!

We're looking for Him even now.

This is a reference, in this context, to the church in any age, looking for the rapture of the church by the sudden appearance of Christ.

- The Thessalonian believers were commended for waiting for God's Son who was coming from heaven (*1 Thessalonians 1:10*);
- Paul further told them that they would be delivered from the wrath to come (*the latter part of verse 10*);
- Paul also writes that he expected to be alive when Christ came to catch away – in Latin – to rapturo – to rapture – the church that was living away to join Him in the air (*4:17*)
- Christ is going to come to earth to set up his Kingdom reign for a thousand years – and He will descend from heaven *with* the church. (*Revelation 19*).

Paul is telling us here in Titus to look for that time when Christ will come *for* His church.

Christ will fulfill His promise to protect His bride from the wrath to fall on planet earth for 7 years – a time of trouble called the Tribulation period. And afterward, the redeemed, with Christ, will descend from heaven and establish Christ's Kingdom on earth where we will rule with Him for a thousand years.

We can't take the time to review all the eschatological events of Revelation. We covered that a few years ago – I preached, I don't know, 75 sermons on the subject – we thought it would never end.

But for now, here's the point . . . grace is teaching us to look up. Grace is teaching us to look forward to the coming of Christ – which may be today.

Grace is teaching us to say, "No" and "Yes" and here's the third expression – "Maybe today".

Maybe today – our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ will come with a shout – and rapture us away. There's your exit strategy. He's it!

Listen, have you planned your way out of here?

Most people will say, "I'm set for life – I have all the provisions I need."

So what . . . you're going to die . . . do you have a way out?

Your way out happens to be *the way, the truth and the life – no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6)*

And Paul says, "While we're on the subject of our great God and Savior, let me tell you what He's done for those who've placed their faith in Him alone."

First, *verse 14 informs us, He gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed.*

He redeemed us – every slave Titus was preaching to would understand that terminology – it came out of the slave market.

In the slave markets of this day, a buyer would approach the auction block upon which a slave stood and where buyers bartered. Having met the price that owner would remove the slave's chains and that slave would belong to him.

Jesus Christ buys us out of slavery to sin and purchases us as His own slaves . . . which is why Paul began this letter by telling Titus that he considered himself nothing more than a *slave belonging to God (Titus 1:1)*.

He redeemed us, did you notice, *from every lawless deed*. The tense of the word redeemed, points back to the act of Christ on the cross – a previous act with ongoing power and implication.

From every lawless deed – that means you can't do something tomorrow where Christ will say, "I didn't know about that one".

No – *every* lawless thought and act and desire has already been paid for on the cross in the past, by our Savior's own death.

Paul adds another action by Christ here – He's *purifying for Himself a people for His own possession*.

He's redeemed us in the past . . . He's purifying us and cleansing us in the present . . . and notice, he's making us zealous for good deeds all around us.

The Puritans would call Christians "empowered with new affections."^{xvi}

Are we really zealous people for God? Are we really affected people?

Are we really zealous about our faith?

Woodrow Kroll wrote in one of his books I have; some time ago he was preaching in Chicago and caught a taxi to get to the airport. He writes, "My

cabby was a Muslim and I engaged him in conversation. We passed a large building that had been converted into a Mosque and I asked him how many men attended there for prayer. He said, “The 4:00 pm service has about fifteen hundred worshippers. The 4:00 am service is not as well attended – only around 900 come.” Kroll writes, can you imagine 900 Christians praying at 4:00 am in the city of Chicago or anywhere else for that matter?^{xvii}

He went on to write that although most Americans claim to believe in God, they evidently don’t believe in attending church. At least not like Muslims attend their prayer services.

In fact, if you took all the un-churched in America – those not attending church anywhere – if you took them all and made them their own separate nation, they would be the eleventh most populated nation on earth today.^{xviii}

What kind of message are *we* communicating to our world today?

Are they hearing us say “no” to the wrong things: are they watching and listening to us say “Yes” to the right things? Do they hear us talk about the return of Jesus Christ *for* the church – do they watch us live with the anticipation of, “Maybe today?”

I was given an article from the Wall Street Journal where a physicist wrote in the commentary section what many are now coming to grips with – unfortunately clinging to the wrong hope. “The latest data from space satellites are unmistakable; the universe will eventually die. Galaxies are being pushed apart. Someday, when looking heavenward, we’ll be quite lonely, with other galaxies too far

away to be observed. Worse, it will be deathly cold. As the universe accelerates, temperatures will plunge throughout the universe. Billions of years from now, the stars will have exhausted their nuclear fuel, the oceans will freeze, the sky will become dark, and the universe will consist of dead neutron stars, black holes, and nuclear debris. Is all intelligent life on earth doomed to die? It seems as if the iron laws of physics have issued a death warrant. But there’s still one possible exist strategy; leave the universe itself. Do the laws of physics allow for the creation of wormholes connecting our universe to a younger, more hospitable universe? In 2021, a new space probe, LISA (Laser Interferometer Space Antenna) will be launched which may be able to prove or disprove these conjectures. Can a gateway be built to connect our universe with another? For intelligent life, there is no choice. Either we leave for [another] universe, or we die in the old one.^{xix}

“Can a gateway be built to travel from our universe to another?” The answer is, yes.

Paul writes, “Looking for that blessed hope – and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior – who happens to be, Jesus Christ.

Some day . . . one day . . . maybe this day . . . He will come for His church.

In the meantime, practice saying and living these three different expressions. Learn to live them – grace will teach you how.

“No . . . Yes . . . Maybe today.”

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 6/24/2012 by Stephen Davey.

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i Max Lucado, God’s Story Your Story (Zondervan, 2011), p. 93

ii Adapted from Charles R. Swindoll, Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus (Zondervan, 2010), p. 299

iii John A. Kitchen, The Pastoral Epistles for Pastors (Kress Christian Publications, 2009), p. 532

iv Charles Ray, First & Second Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (AMG Publishers, 2007), p. 178

v Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, The Disciplines of a Godly Man (Crossway Books, 1991), p. 73

vi Hughes, p. 345

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- vii Kitchen, p. 533
- viii Ibid
- ix Adapted from John MacArthur, Titus (Moody Press, 1996), p. 117
- x Kitchen, p. 534
- xi Diana West, The Death of the Grown-Up (St. Martin's Press, 2007), p. 71
- xii Quoted in The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart, Charles R. Swindoll; Word Publishing, Nashville, 1998; p. 469
- xiii Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Faithful (Victor, 1984), p. 116
- xiv Kitchen, p. 536
- xv MacArthur, p. 120
- xvi Swindoll, p. 301
- xvii Woodrow Kroll, The Vanishing Ministry in the 21st Century (Kregel, 2002), p. 40
- xviii Ibid, p. 41
- xix The Wall Street Journal Online, "Huddled up with LISA" January 20, 2005