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Ephesians 4:25-5:2, John 6:35, 41-51

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The advertising for the next cycle of elections is starting to pick up speed,

- which means that between now and November, - -

- we will be flooded with negative political ads.

- Oh - people will complain about how awful

- and misleading these ads are -

- but the negative ads will stay on the air -

- because they work. - -

- Politicians know that

- if you broadcast enough negative images and misleading claims,

- and do it for a lengthy period of time, -

- then many people will come to believe the message, -

- even if they don't have independent facts -

- to substantiate the claims - -

- These negative ads and negative statements-

- unfortunately tap into our basic human sinfulness -

- and stir up bitterness and anger

- when we perceive that circumstances

- aren't going our way -

- or that we have been wronged -

- those emotions -
 - that sinfulness sadly is a part of who we are -
 - it's a reflection of the reality that
 - we live in an imperfect world - -
- It is
 - as Paul says in Romans
 - a daily example of the fact that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God -
 - a reminder that none of us is perfect -
 - that all of us have room to grow -
 - to improve, -
 - But Paul doesn't want God's people to simply settle -
 - for being sinful and falling short of the glory of God, - -
 - Paul wants to help God's people to more fully become the people
 - God created us to be -
 - so Paul offers the people in Ephesus - -
 - offers us -
 - some very concrete advice about how to -
 - be an imitator of God - - of Jesus
 - about how to relate to your neighbor -
 - about how to try and overcome
 - the brokenness of sin
 - in our daily lives - -

- And while the advice Paul offers
 - at the end of the 4th Chapter of Ephesians
 - doesn't address every issue that may arise -
 - in our relationships with the world, -
- I think you'll agree that the 8 Keys that Paul lifts up for imitating God -
 - can help open the door -
 - to a new life in Christ and to -
 - a healthier relationship with God
 - and with the people around us - -

The first key is -

Speak the Truth

- This seems fairly simple, I know -
 - but it is crucial to building a whole healthy life of faith. -
 - Speaking the truth -
 - allows us to build trust with our neighbor -
 - allows us to begin to work together -
 - to support one another -
- There are plenty of people who tell us what we want to hear in this world -
 - plenty of situations where it seems easier to avoid the whole truth -
 - but in the end,
 - the only healthy, lasting way to build a relationship
 - with our neighbors

- with God

- is to speak the truth - -

Second -

- Do Not Let the Sun Go Down on your Anger

- Paul knows that everyone gets angry from time to time. -

- The world isn't perfect,

- mistakes are made,

- anger happens -

- that's ok - -

- it's a natural, normal part of life -

- the question is -

- What do you do with that anger?

- do you let it fester and grow into sinfulness -

- or do you deal with your anger in a healthy fashion -

- for Paul that means -

- not to let the sun go down on your anger -

- find the source of your anger -

- and begin to work on in -

- begin to wrestle with it -

- seek ways to move forward -

- that bring resolution

- and peace

- Realistically you may not always be able to resolve your problem -
- or completely deal with your anger -
- by the time the sun goes down,
- but the key is to address it -
- so that this very natural response -
- doesn't become something -
- that divides you from God
- and your neighbor.

- Third,

- Let No Evil Talk Come from your Mouth

- Words are powerful.

- We may not always realized it,

- but they are.

- The words you use can make a lasting impact -

- on the people in your life -

- For example,

- if you consistently say "I love you!" to your family and friends,

- if you consistently say "Thank you" to those around you -

- if you consistently say "Well done", - -

- you help create a climate where

- compassion, appreciation

- and success can flourish

- you honor the gifts God has given each of us,
- and you let God's light shine so that others
- might see Jesus through you - -
- So don't simply mimic the rhetoric of the times -
- that we see online and in ads,
- but instead select words and phrases -
- that represent who you are as a child of God - -
- and build up our community - -

Fourth -

- a close corollary to numbers two and three -
- Put Away: Bitterness; Wrath; Wrangling; Slander and Malice
- Now notice,
- Paul doesn't say -
- these things won't happen -
- Paul says put them away -
- don't let bitterness or wrath,
- wrangling, slander or malice -
- become a driving force
- that has hold over your life -
- We are all going to have moments -
- where these emotions bubble up and fill our hearts and minds -

- the question is do we deal with them -
- do we forgive and compromise
- to we find ways to move past
- and move forward
- or do we allow these painful emotions -
- to shape our days -
- and separate us from others - -
- The desire for wrath,
- the urge to slander -
- may seem like a helpful way to react in a heated moment,
- but in the long run
- lashing out with these hurtful emotions -
- will only bring you pain -
- and serve to pull you away
- from your neighbor
- and from God.

Fifth -

- Be Kind to One Another

- Paul doesn't say -

- you have to like everything your neighbor or family member does -

- Paul doesn't say you need to enjoy all the same activities -

- Paul doesn't even say you need to agree on everything

- Paul simply says -

- be kind to one another -

- show respect

- be gentle and understanding -

- as Luther will say in his explanation for the 8th commandment -

- ‘think and speak well of your neighbor

- and put the best construction on everything’

- they say and do - -

- Reflect God’s love for you and for the world -

- by sharing the gift of kindness - -

Sixth -

Be Tenderhearted, Compassionate- -

- God has shown,

- continues to show great compassion for God’s people

- and God invites us to do the same,

- so Pay attention to the world around you

- Care about the people who are hurting and struggling -

- and Act to make a difference -

Seventh -

- Be Forgiving -

-God in Christ Jesus,

- Paul notes,

- has forgiven us. -
- We didn't earn the forgiveness -
 - we still, to this day,
 - make mistakes and fall short of being who God made us to be -
 - and yet,
 - thankfully God forgives us -
 - God loves us in our brokenness,
 - God walks with us
 - to help us find a better way forward -
 - and God invites us to be forgiving of our neighbor -
 - to be forgiving of ourselves -
 - in response to God's forgiveness of us, -

and Eighth

- Paul says
 - Live in Love
 - Love one another as Jesus has loved you -
 - reflect the same selfless, generous love -
 - that God has for us -
 - in the way you interact with the world around you
 - care about what happens to others -
 - work to help those in need -

- wrap your arms around the hurting -
- open yourself up to relationships -
- It's a risky way to live -
- I know -
- but the impact that living in love -
- can have on you and the world is extraordinary.

Now obviously -

- the chances of us living out all eight of these keys perfectly every day -
- is pretty slim
- and certainly none of us will ever be able to imitate God perfectly,
- but I'm convinced that a life of faith -
- is about progress,
- not perfection -
- So I invite you this week,
- to pick one of these eight keys
- and give it a try - -
- don't try and do all 8 -
- just pick one -
- embrace it,
- try to live it out -
- if it goes well -
- consider adding another key -

- next week - -
- and a third the next -
- some days will be easier than others,
- some days you'll miss the mark entirely,
- but whether you add one key to your life -
- or eventually add 5,
- I think you'll discover that as you heed Paul's advice,- -
- you'll feel more connected to God -
- and you'll build stronger,
- healthier relationships
- with those around you.