Dear Readers,

Hope this Feb issue for Year 2010 of the encouragement email passages and activities for our RE Teachers able to encourage you in your pursue for this year. Once again, do send us your feedback and/or contributions using this email: sch.edu@tjc.org. Enjoy!

Excess is as bad as Deficiency—Using Praise in Conversation

A is my colleague as well as a Christian. Whenever there is an important business meeting, I will invite him to attend because he creates a genial mood with everyone when his around. He is not a gregarious person in private but whenever he talks to people, he is able to leave a favourable impression on them within a short time and communicate freely with them. Once, when I praised him for this virtue, he replied with perplexity, “Doesn’t the Bible say to ‘Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.’ (Col 4:6). This caused me to come to a sudden realisation.

B is a church sister and the youngest in her family. Thus she is greatly doted on by her family members. She is a simple and earnest person but does not have good interpersonal relationships. Many do not like to talk to her which causes her to wonder why people seem to be avoiding her. One day, she poured out her grievances to me; asking if her outspokenness makes people feel uncomfortable. I said, “I was just going to remind you. Your words often make people uncomfortable and since many people share the same sentiment, you should examine yourself.” She replies, “How can that be? I’m just being frank in speaking the truth! Everyone is hypocritical; saying only good things. I will not be like that! What’s wrong with telling it as it is?” I told her, “There’s nothing wrong with telling it as it is but you must learn how to do so. Speaking the truth must be done in love. Especially since even your words of praise make people feel uncomfortable, it could be a problem with your way of thinking. This is one aspect you can consider and strive to improve in.” Following that, I raised many examples for discussion and we both felt we have benefited from the conversation.

C is also a church sister. She is always full of smiles and polite in her speech; praising everything and everybody. She only speaks positive words and never talks about anything negative. Some say she is “virtuous” but others say she is “hypocritical”. She claims she only wants to be herself regardless of the opinions of others.

D is my former colleague. He is by nature, a solemn and honest man who frowns upon many issues and people. He is forthright in his speech and will never let a matter go if he is in the right.

Colleagues will only talk about work with him and never about personal matters. In actual fact, he is a man of principles, only that he is very harsh with his words. Each time I have the opportunity to work with him, I often thank him and praise him for some of his virtues and help. One day, he asked me out for a meal and I agreed readily. During the meal, he admitted he thought I often praised him because I wanted to make use of him. However, he later realised I was very sincere and that my praise was specific as well as truthful thus he wished to learn from me. I gladly discussed attitudes towards life as well as the beauty of handling interaction and encouraged him to learn to praise others. He later moved on to another company but we continued to keep in touch. I realised he became more and more gracious in his speech. Although he was still as honest, he was no longer harsh in his speech. He began to have more friends and made great progress in his work.
When I first met D, he never spoke any words of praise and could not put up with the civilities of conversation. To him, many people used only these polite words in their conversations to praise each other, which seemed very hypocritical. Thus in his interaction with others, he would never use any words of praise. He felt that he should speak whatever is on his mind and not these civilities. As a result, he spoke very forthrightly, causing others to feel suffocated at times and sometimes even to the point of being mean.

C is the opposite. She is very polite in her interactions with others such that sometimes people feel very distanced from her. I know that she is sincere, for besides being polite, she is always able to discover praiseworthy points in others so that they feel gratified. However, if one speaks only pleasing words all the time, it will inevitably cause others to feel that he or she is being insincere after some time.

Interaction between people includes both communication as well as socialising. Being polite and praising others is a form of courtesy and also a good way to create a harmonious and congenial atmosphere so that meaningful communication can take place and interpersonal relationships can be maintained. But being polite to the point of being distant and praising to the point of being unrealistic or with the intention to win favor for oneself is going overboard.

C knows that she is being criticised for being hypocritical but she persists in being herself. Once when we were talking, I told her, “Your virtue is being appreciative of others and being able to find a positive point of penetration to discover something worthy of appreciation and then highlighting it. This is a talent.” Appreciation is to like something with a positive attitude. However, when we like something, besides having subjective appreciation, it should also be based on objective facts. By not taking these facts into consideration and praising in an unrealistic manner, one will be guilty of flattery. By speaking from an angle of appreciation and praising in conversation to affirm a person, C is actually doing something good. However, “excess is as bad as deficiency”. When one’s words feel like flattery to others, it is overdone. If it is just an act of flattery, it would not be so bad but if it is done for some other purposes, it becomes ingrating and toady, which is a misuse of praise.

Therefore, using praise in conversation is a beautiful thing. It is courtesy and appreciation but can become hypocritical civilities and flattery when overused. I often use A as a model for he is very good at looking for opportunities to praise others. Nonetheless, he does not only use generic praise like ‘You’re so great!’, ‘You’re so pretty!’ or ‘You’re the best!’ but gives very matter-of-fact, thoughtful, individualised and suitable praise. Examples will be to praise the person’s role, characteristics, performance, virtues or the help they have rendered. The important thing is to speak words of praise with a basis.

B is a different example of speaking in “excess being as bad as deficiency”. Although she feels that she is being factual, her problem is that she always expresses her thoughts from a negative point of view, be it in terms of criticism or praise. This makes her listeners feel uncomfortable. For example, when everyone is thanking God that many truthseekers attended the evangelistic meeting and especially for Sister E who brought twelve friends consecutively. B said, “Twelve is a lot! Don’t get too full of yourself. If you have the ability, bring more people in the future.” What was originally a joyful atmosphere of thanksgiving immediately turned cold. Essentially, B’s intention was to praise and encourage. She wanted Sister E to know that she should not rely on herself to get things done and also hoped she would continue to work hard to preach the gospel. There is nothing wrong with this intention. However, she is used to speaking from a negative perspective which causes people to feel uncomfortable and does not convey her true intention. At that moment, I immediately said, “Sister B means to say that you have worked hard during this period of time. We can achieve these results because the Lord Jesus worked with us and not because of your own ability thus if we continue to rely on the Lord to work hard next time, there will be even more people who will come to attend the evangelistic meeting.” Both of them nodded vigorously and everyone started discussing about the evangelistic meeting enthusiastically once again. This negative perspective is another kind of “excess” which causes positive words to become negative.

We must speak ‘what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers’ (Eph 4:29). Words of praise are positive words which edify but excess is as bad as deficiency thus even when we show appreciation for others, we must speak sincerely, specifically, appropriately and to an appropriate extent.
**Tube Puppets**

**Whatcha Need:**
- Paper towel tubes
- Miscellaneous items to decorate puppets (e.g., buttons, ribbons, cotton balls)
- Construction paper, wallpaper, or fabric scraps
- Glue
- Brown or white strips of paper approximately 3” x 4”
- Marking pens
- Yarn

**Encourage the children to create their own Bible characters. Use the puppets to tell and retell the Bible stories**

**Whatcha Do:**

1. Use construction paper, wallpaper, fabric scraps, and other collage materials to decorate the paper towel tubes.
2. Use a strip of brown or white paper at the top of the tube to make the puppet’s face. Add the facial features with a marking pen.
3. Glue yarn to the top for hair.
4. Use cotton balls to make sheep. Try using foil for the king’s crown.

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