

With words we shape our lives - and those of others

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(Photo: Torin Halsey/Times Record News, AP)

Many years ago I hosted a small group of junior high girls for a weekly Bible study in my home. At the get-acquainted meeting we had a snack and did a creative art project, and I got to know the girls individually and eavesdrop on their conversations. I decided our first memory verse would be Ephesians 4:29, "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

When they returned the next week, each girl had the verse memorized, and we reflected on the meaning of the passage and the value of having such a verse in the Bible. I hope those young girls, who are now grown, some married and raising children of their own, have been more successful at adhering to the wise counsel of this verse than I. It has been a challenge to forget several occasions when I have blurted out my opinion carelessly and later been haunted by the damage of my words, at times even thinking I was just going to have to leave town to escape the fallout from my thoughtless comments. And recalling careless, hurtful words that others have said to me through the years can still bring tears to my eyes.

What we say is important. Those of us who are *entrusted* with the privilege of a platform to be heard by others should be sober-minded as our formerly private thoughts become *known*. I remind myself I have just one *perspective* on an issue, and some people reading my words will hold views that are the polar opposite of mine. When I have concluded each article, I should ask myself whether my words will provoke or will they build others up. With that in mind ...

Finally the slugfest of the 2016 presidential election is behind us, and I hope we can remember what civility and mutual respect were like back in the day. When I became a member of the editorial board, a friend quoted Mark Twain to me, "*If you don't read the newspaper, you are uninformed. If you read the newspaper, you are mis-informed.*" Surely we have reached the tipping point! Candidates, reporters, politicians, Hollywood elites and viewers have all used mean-spirited words, from the local to the national level. Journalists, whose credentials have unquestionably established their competence, have forgotten that their role is to report and defend the truth and have instead stirred up fires of hatred and fear. Have all boundaries been abandoned in this election cycle? Those in media have done anything but "build others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" and as a result, their credibility has slipped over the past year.

After his candidate lost the election, Warren Buffett had some remarkable words:

"Things will be just fine because America has the 'secret sauce'. ... It doesn't work perfectly all the time but you just look at where we go, milestone after milestone. Never bet against America." Right after the election he called for unity in the wake of Trump's victory. He told CNN, "*I support any president of the United States. It's very important that the American people coalesce behind the president. That doesn't mean they can't criticize him or they can't disagree with what he's doing maybe, but we need a country unified. He deserves everybody's respect.*" Buffett's optimistic views of America and our future were spoken to counter the damage that has been inflicted during very contentious campaigns and to calm those who have submitted to a spirit of fear.

It is time for the mainstream media, politicians and citizens of the United States to stop delegitimizing the Trump presidency. This is not a Republican or a Democrat issue but an American issue. As Buffett said, "*He has the most important job in the world.*" To complicate Donald Trump's job by distracting him needlessly and prejudicially from the difficult tasks he faces as our president is un-American.

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