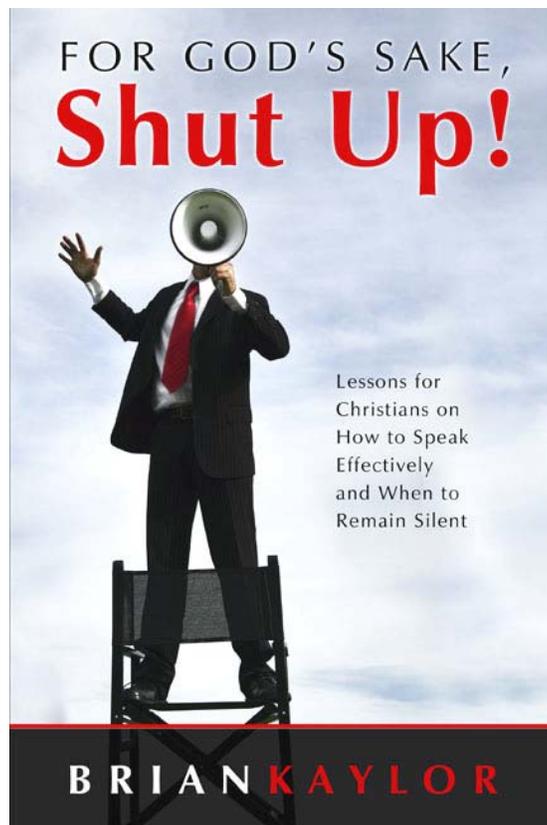


Discussion Guide for:

**For God's Sake, Shut Up!
Lessons for Christians on How to Speak
Effectively and When to Remain Silent**

by Brian Kaylor



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Chapter 1

In the midst of a heated election cycle in the Fall of 2010, comedian Jon Stewart took his pleas for civility and dialogue from his New York City studio to the heart of American democracy—the National Mall (the green space with monuments in D.C., not the big shopping complex in Minneapolis). Although Stewart had killed Crossfire, there was clearly more work to do. His “Rally to Restore Sanity” sought to calm people down and urge people to disagree without being mean-spirited. Helping get the message across, Stewart’s compatriot Stephen Colbert satirically embodied the attitude Stewart hoped to undermine as Colbert held a “competing” rally at the same time and place called the “March to Keep Fear Alive.” Most of the event was a concert with John Legend, The Roots, Tony Bennett, Kid Rock, Sheryl Crow, and a ‘Sanity’ versus ‘Fear’ showdown with Stewart bringing Yusuf Islam (a stage name that actually makes more sense than his earlier one of ‘Cat Stevens’) to sing “Peace Train” and Colbert bringing Ozzie Osbourne to sing “Crazy Train” (fortunately, no bats were harmed in the making of the rally—but just barely!). Others who joined the event included Sam Waterston (“chung CHUNG”), The Mythbusters, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. Surprising even Stewart and Colbert, a couple hundred thousand people showed up and the D.C. Metro system saw a record number of riders (as one who attended the event, I can honestly say that the metro trains on the way to the “Rally to Restore Sanity” were ironically insane!). At the end of the event, Stewart took to the podium to deliver a serious, heart-felt plea for sanity in American politics, media, and society. Here is part of what he said as he criticized the “24-hour political pundit perpetual panic conflictinator”:

If we amplify everything, we hear nothing. There are terrorists and racists and Stalinists and theocrats, but those are titles that must be earned. You must have the resume. Not being able to distinguish between real racists and Tea Partiers or real bigots and Juan Williams and Rick Sanchez is an insult, not only to those people but to the racists themselves who have put in the exhausting effort it takes to hate—just as the inability to distinguish terrorists from Muslims makes us less safe not more. ... If we overact to everything we actually get sicker—and perhaps eczema.

One again, the court jester was needed to speak the truth. Learning to listen is how we avoid some of the pitfalls of amplifying everything, failing to see people as they truly are, and overacting to everything.

Discussion Items:

1. How much of a role do you think the cable news shows have in impacting the tone of American culture and politics?
2. Do you believe Christians should go on secular news stations to debate each other? Or, is that a good way to present biblical ideas if the opposing sides are at least civil?
3. Communication scholars argue that miscommunication is the fault of both the speaker and the listener, not just the speaker. Discuss ways you can be a more effective listener (and practice by listening to the answers of others!).
4. Think of a time when you finally started to listen to someone and realized you had misjudged them. Share with the group.
5. In light of Stewart’s “Rally to Restore Sanity,” discuss ways that Christians can help change the tone of public discussions about sensitive issues to keep them civil and reasonable?

Chapter 2

Every year it seems public officials get in legal trouble for either posting the Ten Commandments in courthouses or having sectarian prayers at city council meetings. Despite the fact that these actions are nearly guaranteed to get the groups on the losing side of a legal battle, Christians keep voting to take these unconstitutional actions. Despite their good-hearted intentions, such actions only do more harm than good. The legal fights always result in a polarizing and painful public debate in the community (much like a visit from Sarah Palin's tour bus). Additionally, losing the legal battles can cripple the cash-strapped communities for years to come. For instance, Haskell County in Oklahoma was sued after placing a Ten Commandments idol (oops, I mean monument) on county property in 2004. Ironically, the monument misspelled "adultery" in the stone monument (so I'm not sure if that technically made it ok in that county). In 2010, the county's leaders settled the lawsuit by agreeing to remove the monument and pay nearly \$200,000 in legal fees. So all their battle got them was a big bill and a hole in the lawn of the county courthouse. For the next decade, the county will be paying off the bill with money that could have instead helped the twenty percent of the people in the county who live below the poverty line. Similarly, Pulaski and McCreary Counties in Kentucky spent eleven years embroiled in legal battles surrounding their copies of the Ten Commandments they posted in their courthouses (they apparently don't love God as much as the people in Haskell County, because in Kentucky they only put up framed paper printouts of the Ten Commandments instead of large stone versions). As of 2011—after losing their fight that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court—the two counties owe more than \$450,000 in legal fees. The two poor counties struggle enough even without the bill as 19 percent of Pulaski County and 32 percent of McCreary County live below the poverty line. Although the desire to have people follow the Ten Commandments is admirable, the way they chose to promote this cause actually did immense harm to the communities.

Discussion Items:

1. Consider the quotation from Gandhi on page 17. What examples can you think of that you've seen personally that lend credence to his remark?
2. Since losing the courthouse battle, Roy Moore has lost two races for governor and now is running for president in 2012 (I'm not making this up!). He also makes a living on the speaking circuit—often even taking his 5-ton monument with him. If Moore was invited to speak at your church, how would/should you react?
3. Think of a time when you saw Christians choosing the wrong battle, even though they had good intentions. Share with the group.
4. Sometimes, it is worth standing up for a cause even when the publicity will not be favorable. How do we decide between the cases where we should stand up and those when we should pick another battle?
5. Think about people in your community who are not Christians. What do you think their response would be to your community deciding to post the Ten Commandments in public schools?

Chapter 3

Brent Beasley, who is currently the pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas, wrote a column a few years ago in which he called on Christians to not vote for political candidates who lie (which would give us very few options). He argued:

Christians have become known for taking strong stands on certain political issues in political campaigns. I'm starting to wonder if perhaps we should take a break from advocating specific issues and focus instead on taking a strong stand on the methods by which politicians campaign. In other words, instead of focusing only on the ends, maybe we should take a look at the means. What if all of us who claim to be followers of Jesus ... said something like this: "We're not going to put up with sleazy campaigning. We don't care if we do agree with you on certain issues; we're not going to stand for telling half-truths and lies about other people. We're not going to support you if you engage in character assassination. We're not going to allow you to fuel division with misleading 'us and them' rhetoric. We will not vote for you if you treat your opponent like dirt." What impact would it have on campaigns if candidates knew that in order to get the "Christian vote" they would be held accountable, not just for their positions on issues, but for how they conduct their campaign and treated their opponent?... Jesus had a lot more to say about how we treat other people than he did about the hot-button moral issues of the day that many Christians seem to be solely focused on. For Jesus, the ends never justify the means.

(read the full column here:

<http://www.ethicsdaily.com/zero-tolerance-for-political-attack-ads-cms-8101>)

There are lots of books written about the supposedly "Christian" positions in politics (which paint Jesus as everything from the second coming of Ronald Reagan to FDR incarnate). But rarely is there discussion about the how of campaigning. If Christians vote for a candidate that lies, then that seems to condone and even encourage more lying in politics and society in general. Even so-called "white lies" (or in politics, "red lies" and "blue lies") can completely undermine our public witness.

Discussion Items

1. More than any other chapter in the book, this one shouldn't have been needed. Why do we find so many Christian leaders lying?
2. Sadly we have all told lies (like George Washington—although that story about the cherry tree is itself a lie). Think of the worst time someone lied to you and the worst time you lied to someone else. Without necessarily sharing details of the lies, share how these cases made you feel.
3. On page 32, George Orwell is quoted about the idea of telling the truth as a revolution act. Is there an area where you believe you need to stand up and tell the truth?
4. Is it ever okay to lie? If so (like when Rahab saved the spies in Jericho), how do we decide? (Bonus question for guys: your significant other is having a bad hair and asks how she looks. What do you say?)
5. What do you think of Pastor Beasley's proposal? Are you willing to vote against—or at least not vote for—a candidate you agree with on policies if they act in a completely unchristian manner?

Chapter 4

Following the shooting of U.S. Representative Gabby Giffords of Arizona in January of 2011, there were a lot of people who talked about the need to tone down our nation's political discourse. Giffords had narrowly won reelection just months earlier in a campaign that saw a national political figure put a crosshair on her district to signify that she was being targeted for defeat and that saw her opponent hold a "Get on Target for Victory in November" campaign event where people shot M16s rifles (funny how Americans view shooting guns at our campaigns events to be patriotic but when it happens in other countries we think it's a sign of despotism). The shooter was not politically motivated but rather a mentally-unstable person—exactly the kind of person who might not understand violent metaphors used. Although both sides have since gone back to hateful rhetoric, there were a few days of reason. For instance, Bob Schieffer of CBS argued:

Dangerous, inflammatory words are used with no thought of consequence. All's fair if it makes the point. Worse, some make great profit just fanning the flames. ... Those with sick and twisted minds hear us, too.

Similarly, Fox News head Roger Ailes stated:

I told all of our guys, shut up, tone it down, make your argument intellectually. You don't have to do it with bombast. I hope the other side does that.

(Of course, I liked that remark since he said "shut up.") U.S. Representative Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri, who is also a United Methodist minister, summed up the situation with biblical allusions:

We are in a dark place in this country right now. ... The hostility is here. People want to deny it, it is real. Members of Congress either need to turn down the volume, begin to try to exercise some high level of civility, or this darkness will never be overcome with light.

Yet, even more than political leaders it is Christian leaders who need to be leading the way in turning down the volume and bringing in light to overcome the darkness. But we can only do that if we think before we speak instead of shooting from the hip (oh, oops, bad choice of words!).

Discussion Items:

1. What bothers you more: Falwell's comment at the start of this chapter or the Newsweek example from the introduction? What is the difference between the two cases (i.e., Christian versus secular source, opinion versus erroneous news report).
2. The ancient rhetoricians believed that one couldn't be a good speaker unless one was also a good person. Share an example of someone—other than Hitler (that wouldn't be thinking since he's mentioned as the example in the book)—who seems trained in speaking but is not a good person and therefore cannot be considered a role model for speaking.
3. What's the least appropriate or most potentially harmful church sign you've seen? Share why the sign bothered you.
4. Think of a time when you said something that resulted in negative consequences you hadn't planned on but should have known were likely to occur. Share ways we can work to avoid these negative consequences in the future.
5. How can Christians work to tone down the heated, violent rhetoric we often hear in our society?

Chapter 5

A few years ago a group of Southern Baptists attempted to make environmental concerns a higher priority for Southern Baptists. Led by younger Southern Baptists (who were thus doubly 'green behind the ears') who feared that their denomination wasn't taking seriously enough the biblical mandate to care for creation, they urged greater attention to environmental issues and advocacy. Leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention responded by attacking the effort and passing a resolution at the SBC annual meeting that attacked environmental efforts as "threatening to become a wedge issue to divide the evangelical community and further distract its members from the priority of the Great Commission." Do you see what they did there? They basically said, 'oh, we can't worry about environmental efforts because the Great Commission is more important.' This is an example of what logical fallacy? (doo daa doo daa doo daa doooo, doo daa doo daa DOO dadoo doo doo doo doo). If you guessed "false dichotomy" from page 51, you're right (and if you didn't guess that, you're wrong). We are not faced with an either/or option when it comes to the environment and the Great Commission but rather a both/and possibility. After all, the same time the SBC passed the resolution on the environment they also passed one on the need to protect marriage. But how can we possibly take time to work on that "wedge issue" which will only "further distract" us "from the priority of the Great Commission"! See, using their (il)logic, nothing else could be justified. So, they have not actually come up with a good argument there against environmental efforts. Just because it's not as important as the Great Commission doesn't mean we shouldn't still work on it.

Discussion Items:

1. Think of an example of a Christian leader using an argument with a "straw man" logical fallacy. Share what the problem with the argument was.
2. Think of an example of a Christian leader using an argument with a hasty generalization logical fallacy. Share what the problem with the argument was.
3. Think of an example of a Christian leader using an argument with an *ad populum* logical fallacy. Share what the problem with the argument was.
4. Think of an example of a Christian leader using an argument with the false dichotomy logical fallacy. Share what the problem with the argument was.
5. Is there another type of logical fallacy you've learned about elsewhere that you think is important for people to be aware of? Explain what it is and share an example.

Chapter 6

In 2010, then-South Carolina Lt. Governor Andre Bauer gave a speech attacking programs like food stamps and free school lunches. A speech that likely would have been noticed only by the few in the audience quickly became a national topic because of an inappropriate metaphor Bauer used. Comparing poor people to stray animals, Bauer argued:

My grandmother was not a highly educated woman, but she told me as a small child to quit feeding stray animals. ... You know why? Because they breed! You're facilitating the problem if you give an animal or a person ample food supply. ... They will reproduce, especially ones that don't think too much further than that. And so what you've got to do is you've got to curtail that type of behavior. They don't know any better.

Let's ignore the fact that he's basing his policy on the advice from someone he called "not a highly educated woman" (that might make the next Thanksgiving with grandma a little awkward!) and focus on the bigger problem—what this metaphor suggests about the poor. He is dehumanizing the people he is speaking about and, worse, using a metaphor where the suggested action would be to round them up and euthanize them since that is what happens to strays (I mean, send them to a farm upstate). This metaphor tells us a lot about Bauer's mindset—one that is set not on helping people but instead of punishing them. As long as he operates with this metaphorical mindset, he will not be working to improve the lives of "the least of these." Bauer later tried to correct the problem by arguing that he is "not against animals." I do not think that was the concern people had about him! Fortunately, Bauer lost his run for South Carolina governor later that year. (Note: for a funny take on Bauer's remarks, check out Stephen Colbert's segment in which he satirically criticizes Bauer for not living up to his Christian beliefs with these remarks: <http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/262595/january-26-2010/andre-bauer-is-not-against-animals>).

Discussion Items:

1. Why do you think we so often resort to metaphors that compare those we disagree with to animals? What are more appropriate types of metaphors to draw from?
2. Why do you think we so often resort to metaphors that paint those we disagree with as being outside the Body of Christ? What are more appropriate types of metaphors to draw from?
3. What do you think of Brian McLaren's claim on page 55 that the metaphor "kingdom of God" no longer communicates to people? If he's correct, what should we use instead?
4. Think of an inappropriate metaphor you've heard a Christian use to describe another Christian. Share the example and what makes the metaphor inappropriate.
5. Compare/contrast Bauer's metaphor to the Bible's teachings about the poor.

Chapter 7

A few years ago, a couple of Christian activists entered a church in the middle of Sunday morning worship and started shouting Scripture verses (and they weren't even Pentecostals!). Their political message was designed to target one of the members of the congregation—an abortion doctor—but it resulted in disrupting the communion service for everyone there. Somehow I don't think that the Christian calling is to disrupt Christian church services. God is pleased when people come together for worship and communion, so how must God feel when someone disrupts that? If unbelievers were present that day, they were likely turned off from church and perhaps even God. Even if someone has a good point to make, it can be made in bad counter-productive ways. Being a jerk isn't going to help win people over to one's cause. As the The Byrds sang back in the 1960s, "To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn) There is a season (Turn, Turn Turn) And a time to every purpose, under Heaven." Although the idea doesn't seem that original (probably because, as someone wise said, there's nothing new under the sun), they have a good point. There is a time—and a place—for everything. And that means the opposite is also true—there is an inappropriate time—and place—for everything. Our challenge is to understand the difference.

Discussion Items

1. Have you experienced a moment like the story of those on the airplane or those on the bus where you were uncomfortable with poor timed or placed Christian rhetoric? How did it make you feel and what was your response?
2. Think of a time when a Christian or group of Christians had a good message but used the wrong location to express it. What was the problem with their chosen venue and what should they have done differently?
3. Think of a time when a Christian or group of Christians had a good message but used the wrong time to express it. What was the problem with their chosen timing and what should they have done differently?
4. Just because people don't like what we have to say does not mean it was not the right time or place to say it. How do we decide the difference between rightly delivering an unpopular message and delivering a message in a wrong manner?
5. Instead of interrupting a church service, what should the pro-life activists have done to register their complaints with a church that had an abortion doctor as a member?

Chapter 8

Shortly after this book was published, I participated in a public debate with “Brother Jed.” He initially asked me to debate on whether or not “confrontational evangelism” was biblical. I explained that I recognized that people used the mode of street preaching in the Bible but that it was acceptable then because all mass communication went that way (that and carrier pigeons, of course). Yet, since times have changed so have the modes of communication. I’m not sure I won over any new converts that day, but my focus was not on “Brother Jed” or his compatriots. Rather, I was trying to communicate to the couple hundred University of Missouri students who showed up that there were Christians who were loving and compassionate since that is how our Lord and Savior was. The debate was featured in several campus and city newspapers; it was even filmed by a crew from the Discovery Channel but the program got cancelled (guess we weren’t exotic enough). However, my favorite description came in the smallest of all the publications, the CAFNR Corner Post. Here is how the author described the debaters:

Smock jolted into action reading haltingly from prepared notes, waving his arms and stabbing pointed fingers in the air. “Preaching the word of God, in public places is a biblical mandate,” he said. “We are hostile toward sin. And God is hostile toward sinners.”

Kaylor’s response was opposite in every way. Slowly, clearly and with open gestures he rebutted. “There are different ways of preaching the Gospel, and that’s the critical error [Smock] is making.”

“When we are talking about something as important as spirituality and a relationship with God, it’s not just rhetorical suicide, it’s spiritual suicide if you are driving people away from God,” he said.

Although I don’t always practice what I preach, I was glad the author picked up on the differences in style and how that related to the differences in our messages.

Discussion Items:

1. Although substance is more important than style, the way we communicate is also important. Discuss how we can tell when someone is just style but no substance.
2. Which of the aspects of verbal communication do you struggle with the most? How can you work to improve it?
3. Which of the aspects of nonverbal communication do you struggle with the most? How can you work to improve it?
4. Think of a great preacher you’ve heard. What aspects of their speaking style made effective?
5. Think of a poor preacher you’ve heard. What aspects of their speaking style made them ineffective?

Chapter 9

One of the most inspiring and convicting Christian writers for me is Clarence Jordan (pronounced Jer-den). Although he received his Ph.D. in New Testament Greek, he decided not to pastor or teach but instead create a Christian farming community to live out his faith (apparently it wasn't all Greek to him). He founded Koinonia Farms in Georgia where whites and blacks lived together, shared their possessions with one another, and worked the farm together. This was particularly revolutionary when he started the farm in 1942—two decades before the Civil Rights movement started open doors for racial minorities. The KKK opposed the Farm—even taking violent actions like shooting at the Farm, blowing up buildings, and burning crosses (such an oddly counter-productive message for a group of people who claimed to be good, white Christians). In addition to farming and writing about the Christian faith, Jordan translated nearly all of the New Testament in the *Cotton Patch Gospel*, which situates Jesus as preaching in Georgia and other parts of the South in the middle of the 1900s. This modern take brings the Scriptures back alive and helps us to understand the stories that often are too familiar to us. Called the “prophet in blue jeans,” his simple way of living is as inspiring and convicting as his writings. One individual who came to live at Koinonia and was completely transformed by the experience was Millard Fuller, who then founded Habitat for Humanity (and thus proving that he had finally nailed down his faith). One time, a rich woman decided to join Koinonia Farms and Jordan told her to sell it all so she wouldn't wonder if people loved her for her money or for who she was. He added that if she didn't bring the money with her, it would also keep the group from feeling financially okay and thus wander from their purpose. If she brought it, he warned, “We'd quit growing peanuts and start discussing theology.”

Discussion Items:

1. Reflect on the life and ministry of Billy Graham. If you attended a Graham event, share what it was like. If Graham's ministry impacted you in some other way, share that with the group.
2. Discuss ways we can work to keep our focus correct during a lifetime of ministry.
3. Discuss ways we can keep positive even as things go poorly or others attack us.
4. Share with the group a time when you personally saw an example of a Christian—like the one mentioned on page 77—didn't do a good job of “walking the walk.” How can we work to avoid making a similar mistake?
5. Discuss the faith and life of Jordan. What practical steps can we take from his ministry of “walking the walk” to improve our own faith walk?

Chapter 10

It seems that the day after a president is inaugurated, the campaign for the next presidential election begins (soon we're going to be like the Olympic selection committee as we go through campaigns for elections ten years from now). With each cycle, politicians of both parties work to misuse our faith for political gains. The Bible is too often treated like a political tool to help politicians find political salvation in the ballot box. In perhaps one of the most brazen efforts to co-opt the Christian faith for political gain, Texas Governor Rick Perry led a prayer rally in Reliant Stadium in Houston—which is where the Houston Texans play football (well, if you count what they do as playing football since they're the only NFL to never qualify for a single post-season game). Although Perry was flirting with running for president at the time, he claimed the event was not political but merely spiritual. Yet, Jesus told us to pray in our closets and not in a big showy way like the hypocrites (I'm not calling Perry a "hypocrite," I'm just quoting Jesus—but feel free to interpret as led by the Spirit!). Thus, the prayer rally didn't seem to fit with a higher calling but rather Perry's desire to for a higher office. Just days after hosting the event, Perry announced he would in fact run for president—and admitted he had decided definitely to do so nearly two months earlier. Thus, all the Christians who came to the event were merely props for Perry's big media blitz for his campaign kickoff week. Sadly, this should have been obvious given Perry's publicized efforts to lay the groundwork for a presidential run and the political agendas and activities of other key leaders of the event. Even more sadly, this won't be the last time a politician uses prayer to advance their political careers nor will it be the last time Christians fall for it.

Discussion Items:

1. Do you think a presidential candidate taking a stand like the fictitious Arnold Vinick on page 83 would do very well?
2. Discuss the case of German Christian leaders offering support for the Nazis. How could this happen? How do we avoid making a similar error in our allegiances?
3. Some Christians argue that churches in America should learn from the case of German churches by removing American flags from sanctuaries and not singing patriotic hymns. What do you think? Are such expressions okay or do they cross the line when our allegiance is to Christ's kingdom?
4. How political should pastors or church leaders be? What are the lines that they shouldn't cross so that they don't hurt their ministries?
5. Many commentators—and some Perry advisors I've spoken with—believe the prayer rally helped his presidential campaign. How do we as Christians prevent ourselves from being used like that in the future?

Chapter 11

At some point, we will be criticized. The important question is not how, by whom, if it was deserved, or if it was too mean, but instead how we take it? Some people—to their discredit—don't take criticism well (if I say who, they probably won't take it very well). One example is Mac Brunson, the pastor of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville, Florida (a rough calling). An anonymous blogger started criticizing Brunson's leadership. The postings clearly came from a disgruntled member of the church. But rather than ignore it or even try to learn from it, the leadership of this supercenter church sought to find and punish the blogger. A police officer who was a member of the church opened an investigation to find out who the person was—even subpoenaing Google and Comcast (coming soon to TBN—CSI: Megachurch). Once identifying the blogger, the office informed church leadership and they responded by filing a trespass warning against the blogger and his wife (I'm seriously not making this up). The blogger later sued the sheriff's office for violating his First Amendment rights, and the sheriff's office eventually settled by giving him \$50,000 and agreeing to improve its conflict-of-interest code and train its detectives on First Amendment issues. By reacting so strongly against the blogger, the church actually brought more attention to his complaints—such as about Brunson's \$300,000 salary and other perks (better start practicing on getting through the eye of a needle)—and added credibility to the concerns.

Discussion Items:

1. Think of a time when someone criticized you and you didn't like it, but later realized they had a good point. Share with the group how you could have learned from this incident sooner.
2. Think of a time when you criticized someone and they reacted poorly. Was there something you could have done to help the criticism be received better?
3. Think of a time when you criticized someone but shouldn't have. How can we discern when to remain silent in such cases?
4. Think of a time when you should have criticize someone, but didn't. Why did you hold your tongue? How can we discern when to speak up in such cases?
5. What could the leadership of First Baptist Church of Jacksonville done to handle the criticism of an anonymous blogger in a more helpful and appropriate manner?

Chapter 12

In 2008, several religious groups—including the American Friends Service Committee, Mennonite Central Committee, Quaker United Nations Office, Religions for Peace, and World Council of Churches—hosted a dinner and dialogue with controversial Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Some Christians criticized the effort, saying that having Ahmadinejad at dinner was giving him honor (thus we should follow the example of Jesus and only have dinner with respectable, perfect people). But leaders of the effort responded well by explaining the importance of dialoguing with others. Mennonite Central Committee Executive Director Arli Klassen explained about the effort to dialogue with Ahmadinejad:

It doesn't mean that we agree or support everything or anything that the person does, but it does mean that we recognize their humanity, and that God has created us all, and that we need to find ways to live together.

What an idea! If talking some could help us kill each other less, then for God's sake, let's talk! As MCC's Klassen explained:

As Christians, we take Jesus' Sermon on the Mount very seriously and say 'Love your enemies and do good to those who persecute you.' ... Right now the U.S. and Iran are defining each other as enemies and so, as Christians, we are trying to promote dialogue, understanding and bridge-building, rather than leading to war.

Although not all dialogue efforts will be successful—especially if you're dealing with a man who seems to want war (putting the die back in dialogue)—we should still engage in it. It is also important to note that dialogue doesn't mean just be warm and fuzzy, but rather being open and honest. The Christian leaders who met with Ahmadinejad challenged his nation's poor record on religious liberty and human rights.

Discussion Items:

1. On pages 99-100, a pastor is quoted comparing churches to country clubs. What are the problems with this comparison? What are better examples he could have used?
2. Discuss the differences between invitational communication and more traditional persuasion. What are practical ways of being more invitational in our approach?
3. Think of a time you took a disagreement personally and reacted with an inappropriate tone. What are things you could do next time to avoid reacting that way?
4. What are ways to make dialogue more productive and helpful? Share examples of positive and/or negative dialogue experiences.
5. Imagine you are invited to a dialogue with Ahmadinejad or similar figure. Would you attend, why or why not? What would you say/do, and why?

Chapter 13

I'm glad you read this book (you did actually read it, right?), but unfortunately Pat Robertson did not. Since the book came out, he has continued to open his mouth and insert his unloving foot (which tastes about as good as his 'age-dying shake'—seriously, he sells a protein shake). Perhaps his worst moment came in January 2010 after an earthquake on my birthday hit Haiti. On the day after the earthquake, as people were still struggling to find loved ones buried in the rubble, Robertson claimed the Haitian people brought the disaster on themselves because “they got together and swore a pact to the Devil” in order to gain freedom from the French (in 1804) and thus “have been cursed.” So, in Robertson's world, the Haitians brought this disaster on themselves because they made a pact with the devil over two hundred years ago (seems like God is a little slow in punishing them!). Of course, it is important to note that many people discount the devil interpretation in the Haitian folklore story about the pact—basically, Robertson took the interpretation of the white slave-owners as their slaves revolted for their freedom (because it seems like a good idea to get our theology from slave-owners!). But more importantly, Robertson's comments do not match the words of Jesus in Luke 13:1-5 (maybe Robertson should spend less time reading Haitian folklore and more time reading the Bible!). What the people of Haiti needed—and still need—were our prayers and our donations. Unfortunately, the unchristian comments of Robertson overshadowed the true Christian response. There are many Christian relief organizations working overtime to quickly bring help to those who were suffering.

Discussion Items:

1. Why does Paul say 1 Corinthians 13 that everything—even good things—are meaningless without love? Why is love so important?
2. Why are many Christians tempted to assign God's motives to natural disasters? Where does this idea come from?
3. What is it about the issue of homosexuality—which was not even mentioned by Jesus—that makes many Christians so hateful? How do we overcome that attitude?
4. Think of a hateful comment you've heard a Christian make. What was the problem with the remark and how could they have handled the situation better?
5. Despite Robertson's response to Haiti, many Christians actually did a great job showing love to the Haitian people. How can we work to get those stories out more so that people like Robertson don't overshadow them?