

The First Reflection
Caroline Childrey
First Baptist Church, Raleigh,
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Has anyone here ever met the Childrey family? I have. Communication in a household with five people can be quite difficult. There are lots of moving parts, lots of personality and lots of love. My personality can be very energetic, outgoing, and loud. Now, what may seem silly was probably the most common argument in our house growing up *all* those years ago. It would go something like this: “Did you take my favorite shirt with the ruffles?”.... “No”.... “Yes you did, I saw you wear it at school yesterday!” Blah blah blah. A scream, shove, and parent intervention later we have now had another “30-minute episode,” as my dad likes to say about something not important. Being teenage girls, we go back to our business of ignoring each other shortly after.

People who know me very well know that I am a very opinionated person. This can either be a good or bad thing, but people also know that I am confident if I say something. I do not like to beat around the bush; I tell it to someone straight up and, I prefer to confront a problem and or situation head-on.

Most people view energy and aggression as confrontation. But I use confrontation to foster open communication in my relationships. Confrontation is the only way I can be at peace with a conflict. I need to know how the other person is feeling in order to know how we can resolve and look to the future.

My “confrontation” is the way that I prefer to communicate with people. This past spring I was the student chair of planning the Queen of Hearts Dance at Broughton. This is a long-time tradition at the school,

and, me being the last kid in my family, I wanted it to be the best one yet since it would be the first school-wide dance in two years. Going into this project I already knew what was expected and what needed to happen from watching it happen for so many years.

A new parent who had never truly experienced the Queen of Hearts assembly or dance had come in with multiple ideas about how to decorate and plan. It had not been talked about with me beforehand. I, having an opinion and wanting what's best for the group, had a conversation with this mom and expressed critical feedback about her plans. In this particular situation, it would have been awkward to be aggressive with her but, at the same time, I couldn't just say nothing. We then compromised on the ways that parents and students would benefit. Both sides were valid. Both sides were equal. But they were not the same and they needed to be dealt with. I'll be honest, I was kind of upset with this mom. But I had to be professional and agree in the ways at which this delicate situation would not become unnecessary drama. Honestly, I feel like we can all agree that nobody's personal feelings need to be hurt over a high school dance.

Confrontation is how I needed to go about telling this parent the traditional way that the event had been done in the past. Respectfully, politely, and considerately make a statement for myself and stand up for what I believed to be the best possible dance everyone could enjoy.

Aggression can be easy. Easy is the route most people will take nowadays. Passionate confrontation about something can seem aggressive if we do not train ourselves in thinking and acting the correct way.

The scripture reading from James this morning says “let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God’s righteousness.”

Being “quick to listen” is waiting patiently before expressing your opinion. This can be difficult. Being “slow to speak” is when we control our words and not blurt out everything that comes to mind right away. The tongue is metaphorically called a fire and the evil of human nature. Training ourselves to be better listeners is important for clear and open communication.

I strive to be intentional with communication. It is such an important asset to humanity and without it we wouldn't be able to have such genuine relationships. To be intentional means that you care. I see God in this imperfect world through the way that we care deeply about a person, a statement, an event.

Coping with these things can be hard. To manage this has been years of progress for me. But I allow myself to listen to God and to open my heart to how I want to choose to live in his image. Jesus gave us many lessons to live by, and how to interact with one another. How to *communicate* with one another. We should always strive to think like Jesus and walk in His footsteps.

I intentionally confront people, not to stir conflict, but to resolve it through open communication. To be assertive or aggressive is easy but not effective unless it's channeled into the right places with the right intentions.

The Second Reflection
Owen Fulk
First Baptist Church, Raleigh
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Words carry power.

This semester in youth, we focused on love. We discussed the different translations of love from the Greek as well as different love languages — how we give and receive love. I feel a close connection to the love language of “words of affirmation.” Words are just so direct; I don’t have to guess what this action means or what this gift signifies about our relationship. Often, the note in a gift means more than the gift for me. That’s why sappy, end-of-year rituals mean so much to me.

After Trey kindly harassed me for not coming, I finally showed up at a Senior Night. For those of you who don’t know, Senior Night at FBC consists of the youth group coming in, the seniors sitting in a circle, and one-by-one people get to come up behind a senior, give them a hug or lay on hands and tell them something. That first Senior Night was powerful, and I have been to each one since.

In another setting — Technical Theater at my school — we do a similar exercise. After a year of rehearsals and shows, we get to write notes to each other, called “I Appreciate Lists.” We get to note what we appreciated about each other through the year. Then, our teacher organizes them and adds a note herself on the bottom. These lists are powerful and wonderful to look back on.

So, we need to be intentional about how we use them.

Those rituals have taught me that words carry power, so we have to be careful how we use them.

Senior Night inspires seniors moving on to the next chapter of life. My “I Appreciate Lists” lift me up on a bad day. Ordaining deacons and greeting new believers comforts and encourages tomorrow’s leaders. So, I try to make the most of these chances to give and inspire others with just the power of words.

What we do is more impactful when we deviate from the group.

Powerful words require care and intentionality. I need to give focus and effort, especially when differing from the people around me, to say what I mean. That’s the focus and effort I need to work on the most.

I have a special connection to Peter’s denial story. Peter — headstrong, self-confident, would never betray God — is caught, not once, but three times denying his relationship with Jesus. Thrust into a crowd for the first time in many years without Jesus, he isn’t strong enough to stand up to the crowd. And I’m not either.

I am a people pleaser. Unlike Peter, and maybe unlike Caroline Childrey, I avoid confrontation and conflict. I hate disappointing people. So, pretty naturally, when someone in the group says something in conversation, I smile and nod. When the conversation turns over to an opinion I disagree with, I just listen. I might not join in attacking a view or a person, but I usually won’t defend either. My silence speaks volumes. I’m a lot like Peter right after Jesus’ death.

Throughout my life, I have been answering the question, “How do I make everyone happy around me and how can I be of service to my neighbor?” While still important questions, I can’t forget to also ask, “How can I do right by me? How can I do right by God?”

My faith has to come from me. It requires intentions. That's what matters.

I've had to realize this a couple times recently, but I'm about to head to college, to move out. Now, most of my friends in high school already don't go to church, but now I'm about to move away from my family too, which has taken me to a great church family since I was born. In my life journey, I can't depend on fellow believers surrounding me.

Sure, I can keep going to church every Sunday, but at the end of the day, my faith is my own, and my faith has to come from me.

I realized this personal aspect of faith when Trey left. I joined the church and was baptized right before he shifted to his role of associate minister. I was at a faith high, surrounded by other people believing in God. Part of my reasoning at the time of my baptism was that, well my faith isn't perfect (it never will be), and I believe in a God, and these people around me all testify to Jesus, so here we go. Spending eighteen months without a full youth minister in such a transitional time in my life made me realize that those reasons aren't good enough. I need a personal relationship with Jesus if I'm going to make it out with my faith intact.

Be intentional in your words. Don't just blindly follow others. Be intentional in your faith.

Today is Pentecost, and Peter has grown. Peter had forsaken Jesus three times, reinstated Jesus three times with fellow disciples, and finally defended Jesus in front of a contrary crowd suggesting that they're just drunk.

"But it's only nine o'clock in the morning". Peter not only stands up to the crowd, he defends his faith – a core part of himself.

So yes, take strength in the people around you. This youth group has been my strength for a long time, and I'm grateful. Words of affirmation will brighten the stress and hassle of a day. However, I've learned that my independent choices and intentions make a bigger impact than saying yes and nodding along, and that words are powerful tools in today's world.

My words, my actions, and my faith shouldn't come from the people around me. What I say, what I do, and what I believe needs to come from me.

The Third Reflection
Ella Sasser
First Baptist Church, Raleigh
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We live in a world where it feels like everyone shares every single thing on their minds. Texting and social media, especially, allow us to pour every thought out of our brains almost as quickly as we can have it. In some ways, this is positive, granting us convenient connection with others. But, at the same time, this rapid expulsion of ideas and opinions from one person and immediate intake of it by twenty other people can be incredibly overwhelming. The overwhelmed feeling is only augmented by the conflict that seems to always ensue. In a perfect world, no one would ever disagree. But, the reality is that we all have differing opinions — an important aspect of what makes each of us an individual. We are passionate about our opinions, meaning that when opinions clash, it can feel personally offensive, hurtful, or even infuriating, creating friction.

I see this happen everywhere I go, including at church. Actually, I think it's even easier for disagreements to arise at church because of how deeply we care about our faith, this place, these people, and what

the church stands for. We want it to be represented in the best possible way out of a strong love for it.

There are decisions that are made in the church that we absolutely should speak up about even when it could cause disagreement. Contributing ideas to plan for the future of the church, determining how we want to become involved in the community, what we want our mission to be, or how we want to further our faith as a group: these are all opinions that should be shared to create a strong church foundation for us all to be comfortable on. These decisions invite friendly disagreement so that the result is one that satisfies the church body as a whole.

With this, I think about the Dream Team, who have been holding discussions for the entire church to voice their visions of what the future should look like at FBC. Each discussion encourages people of various age groups, Sunday School classes, and with different beliefs to share thoughts. The goal of the discussions isn't to disagree, but as everyone speaks up for their beliefs, disagreement is inevitable. I think the caveat here in speaking up is to not let disagreement become conflict so that rather than causing division, it helps to build the best future for FBC possible by using a variety of ideas.

On the other hand, there are issues in the church that aren't worth the disagreement nor the conflict they cause. Maybe they are still important to us, but they aren't more important than the mission and unity of the church or the God that we follow. I'm sure you can think of a few.

This sounds trivial, because it is, but I'll share it anyway. One of my greatest talents is basketball; specifically church basketball. I'm completely kidding — I scored single digits for the entire season, which is somehow still an improvement from past years. I love it though; it's a fun thing to be able to share with the other girls in the youth group.

Sometimes, though, the unmatched intensity of competition in church league basketball leads to some unsportsmanlike comments or mild grudges against other teams. Aside from this being wrong of us in the first place, conflict like this isn't conducive in any way to the biggest reason we play together — to have fun and build relationships with one another. It's just not worth allowing disagreements with the refs to overshadow the great parts about playing together.

I think that the one of most powerful ways to amplify your voice is to choose silence on issues like this.

We each have a right to our opinions and a right to express them, but, sometimes we don't *need* to express them. Using our voices to add fuel to a fire of unnecessary conflict is harmful to the church and the church family. It pulls our focus from the real reason that we gather — to worship God together — and puts it instead on things that won't matter in the long run, the things that fail to foster a supportive, united church community.

Ecclesiastes talks about “a time to be silent and a time to speak.” It's pretty straightforward that there is a time for each. I think the phrase “pick your battles” is extremely relevant here. Unnecessary conflict overpowers what is meaningful and special about church: the space and time for God, the relationships with people, the comfort that we feel when we're together. If we choose to cling to every insignificant disagreement we have, we turn a space and a group meant to be focused on God into one focused negatively on each other.

On the other hand, if we intentionally choose silence on the issues that don't ultimately matter — the issues that tear down relationships within a church family instead of strengthening them — we create a more cooperative, more supportive church family. In that silence, the issues that hold true meaning, such as how we choose to share and

represent God's love or what we imagine the future of the church to be, are amplified rather than lost in the commotion.

I'm not saying we should never use our voices. Rather, I would encourage using our judgment to determine when we need to be heard and when we do not. Church should be a comfortable place for all of us to grow in our faiths not a place for ostracizing and attempting to win arguments. Meaningless conflict stands in the way of why we gather- to focus on and worship God, and to connect with and support our church family. When does using your voice do more harm than it will do good?