A SHORT BIBLE STUDY

Speaking with Grace and Discernment

Living It Out · Book 4



Words that honor God and respect people

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Trinfinity Enterprises

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

Introduction

What I say can encourage a person, deepen a wound, or make an already difficult situation worse. Scripture takes that responsibility seriously. It also calls me to discernment. I want to speak truthfully without making contempt sound like conviction, and I want to show kindness without pretending that right and wrong no longer matter.

Writing the nonpartisan Fact Check Series taught me how words either clear things up or start fires. Too often Christians use careless words that push away the very people we want to reach. I wrote this book for believers who want their speech to honor God and show respect. Learning when to speak, how to say it and when to stay quiet changes every relationship.

1 The responsibility of a small part

> *With it we bless the God and Father, and with it we curse men who have been made according to* ***the*** *likeness of God.*
>
> **James 3:9 (SLB)**

> *Out of the same mouth come forth blessing and cursing. These things ought not, my brothers, to be so.*
>
> **James 3:10 (SLB)**

James 3:2-12 (SLB) compares the tongue with a bit directing a horse, a rudder guiding a ship, and a small fire spreading through a forest. The images show how something small can have a large effect.

My words may last in another person's memory long after I have stopped thinking about the conversation.

The passage also exposes a contradiction. With the same tongue we bless the Lord and curse people made in God's likeness. James does not shrug that off as normal. He says, "These things ought not, my brothers, to be so." Worship should affect the way I speak when the gathering is over.

Proverbs 18:21 (SLB) says, "Death and life are in the hand of the tongue." I understand that as a serious statement about the effect of speech. I do not use it to teach that saying particular words gives me control over events. Words can mislead, shame, comfort, and encourage. That is plenty of responsibility already. I do not need to add a power the verse never gives.

I want to notice the habits that develop around my speech. Sarcasm can become a way of avoiding an honest conversation. Complaining can become the language of a household. Praise can become flattery when I want something. The first step toward change is being willing to recognize the pattern instead of explaining every example away.

In guitar work, a tiny adjustment to a truss rod or a nut slot changes how the whole instrument plays. James 3 says the tongue is like a small bit in a horse's mouth or a small rudder on a ship. Early in my marriage I learned the hard way that one careless remark can undo a lot of patient trust. Guarding a small part protects everything else we are building.

2 Seeing the person before the label

> ***doing*** *nothing according to selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility considering one another* ***as*** *surpassing yourselves.*
>
> **Philippians 2:3 (SLB)**

I need to consider how little I may know about another person's circumstances. Clothing, income, appearance, or a brief encounter cannot tell the whole story. I can form a confident opinion while missing the very information that would change it.

Romans 2:1 (SLB) warns the person who condemns another while practicing the same things. That passage turns the spotlight back on the one doing the talking. It should make me slow to use someone else's failure to prove I am better. I need the same truth and mercy I am willing to discuss in somebody else's life.

Philippians 2:3 (SLB) calls for "humility considering one another as surpassing yourselves." That does not require me to agree with everything someone says or to deny what is plainly wrong. It does require me to stop treating a person as though disagreeing with me takes away their dignity.

Before repeating a claim, I can ask whether I actually know it is true. Before assigning a motive, I can ask whether I have heard the other person. Before speaking about a difficulty to everybody except the person involved, I can consider whether I am seeking help or spreading a grievance. These habits will not

solve every conflict, but they can prevent needless damage.

When I was a boy, Pastor Jimmy Carter did not see just a neighborhood kid who mowed his lawn. He saw a boy who needed someone to care about his soul. Years later, recovery taught me that everyone carries burdens you cannot see. When we treat each person as someone made in God's image, our tone changes. People listen when they know you see them as a neighbor, not a target.

3 Correction without condemnation

> *Hypocrite! First cast out the beam from your eye, and then you will see clearly to cast out the splinter from the eye of your brother.*
>
> **Matthew 7:5 (SLB)**

Matthew 7:1-5 (SLB) should be read as a whole. Jesus warns against hypocritical judgment and directs a person to cast out the beam from his own eye before helping with the splinter in his brother's eye. The passage does not end with a command to stop caring about the splinter. It calls for humility and clear sight.

That distinction matters. I should not appoint myself the final judge of another person's heart. I can still recognize harmful conduct, refuse dishonesty, or speak to a fellow believer about sin. The purpose should be truth and restoration rather than humiliation.

Correction is more likely to be useful when I name the actual action instead of attacking the whole person. I can describe what happened, explain the concern, and listen to the response. An accusation about someone's entire character often closes the conversation before it begins.

I also need to accept correction myself. If I insist on speaking into other people's lives while rejecting every concern about my own, I am practicing the very hypocrisy Jesus warns against. When I am willing to be corrected too, my care for others carries more weight.

Running technical training programs and serving as a lay pastor taught me that how you correct someone matters as much as being right. After my own failure came to light in 2020, I learned to separate a person's mistake from his worth before God (Galatians 6:1). Gentle correction invites growth. Harsh words make people put their armor on.

4 A different pattern of speech

Encouragement should be specific enough to mean something. Thank someone for a particular act of care. Recognize effort. Tell a family member that their contribution matters. A sincere sentence can help a person see that their work and presence have been noticed.

An apology should be equally clear. I need to name what I said, acknowledge the harm, and avoid making the injured person responsible for my words. I can explain what was going on, but that should not take

away my responsibility. If I spread something false, part of the repair may involve correcting it with the people who heard it.

There are also times to wait. Anger can make a quick response feel necessary when a short pause would make a truthful response more likely. I can take time to pray and think without using silence as a weapon. The purpose of the pause is to return with care, not to avoid the matter indefinitely.

I want the way I talk to match the faith I say I have. That will require attention, repentance, and help from God. The people closest to me should not hear one kind of speech in public and another at home. They should see a growing willingness to speak truth with grace.

In about 40 years of field and office work, I have heard plenty of rough talk and cutting people down treated as normal. Following Christ means refusing to match the tone of the room. When I wrote the Fact Check Series, I used the same rule: stick to verified facts, drop the name-calling, and let plain truth speak (Ephesians 4:29).

Speaking with Grace and Discernment

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What I say can build someone up or tear them down. This book looks at the power of a small part of the body, seeing the person before the label, correcting without condemning, and learning a different pattern of speech.

With it we bless the God and Father, and with it we curse men who have been made according to the likeness of God.

James 3:9 (SLB)

Book 4 of 10 in the collection Living It Out

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