



Session Eleven: When God is Muzzled

How to respond when you're not allowed to share your faith...

This letter was posted on an online parenting site ([My son's grandmother imposing her religion on him](#)). A frustrated mother wrote, "How do you deal with religious fanatics in the family who force and coerce your child



to become a member of their religion?" The target of her wrath was her mother who went behind her back to have her child baptized. The mother was adamant: "I will help [my child] learn about the religions that he's curious

about, and if he chooses a religion, then I will support him and help him to join...it's my choice how he's raised and no one else's opinion. I want her to respect my decision to let him choose."

This exasperated mother concluded, "Clearly she will impose her beliefs regardless of my wishes as my baby's mother. She will find a way to circumvent my rightful authority as his parent and guardian. How do I put a stop to her meddling once and for all?"

As a Christian, you might be tempted to dismiss the mother's complaint and side with the grandmother. But there are those statements that leap off the page of her letter: "...a religious mother who has gone behind my back..." "...it's my choice how he's raised..." "...I want her to respect my opinion..." and, "...my rightful authority as a parent..."



Two values are in conflict: a grandmother who wants her grandson to get faith roots and a mother who wants to raise her child without outside interference. Maybe you're one of those grandparents whose adult children say they don't want you to pass your faith on to your grandkids. If so, you're one of a growing number in the U.S. As the next generations become increasingly secular, there is a mounting animus toward their parents indoctrinating their kids with their religion.

Sadly, there's been a dramatic rise in estrangement between grandparents and their adult children when it comes to grandkids.



([Conflicts That Can Lead to Grandparent Estrangement](#)). About 5 million U.S. grandparents have been barred from contact with their grandkids. 67% involve conflict between daughters-in-law and their mothers-in-law. Surely, severing a relationship between grandparents and their grandkids is tragic. It's

often tantamount to child abuse for children and elder abuse for grandparents.

So, here's the question: how do we respond when we are told that faith discussions are off limits, whether in family gatherings or alone with our grandkids? What would Jesus do if he were in the same place? What might he say to us? Open your imagination and pretend that Jesus is ministering to you right now (because he surely is). Though we don't know exactly what Jesus would say, the gospels give us a pretty good indicator. Here goes.



1. Jesus would say, "I applaud your desire to share the Gospel."

I can see Jesus looking intently into your tear-filled eyes, and beyond to your broken heart. Do you feel his hand as he places it on your shoulder? Now listen to his gentle words: "When I was on this earth, I had no other desire than to seek and save those who are lost." [Lk. 19:10] Before I went back to heaven, I told my disciples to go into all the world to evangelize and disciple the nations." [Mt. 28:18-20] He would tell you how pleased he is that you have taken his Great Commission seriously, and are compelled to share his Gospel with those you love most in this world—especially your grandchildren.

If you've read his gospels, you may remember the time disciples tried to keep a group of children from getting a front row seat to his teaching. Jesus might remind you how he rebuked his followers with the words,



"Let the little children come to me, and don't hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." [Mt. 19:14] He could also tell you that, 1400 years before he came into the world as a baby, he spoke these words through Moses: "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk

about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." [Deut. 6:6&7]

Jesus would applaud you because this is exactly what you want to do with your grandkids. He might also remind you that a thousand years before he walked this earth, King David wrote, "...future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to generations not yet born..." [Ps. 22:30&31] Not just parents would do this, but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, and others who love the next generations. Jesus might even show you 2 Timothy 1:5 where St. Paul wrote to young Timothy, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded now lives in you also."



Through the ages, Jesus has made wonderful use of grandparents as his best missionaries to reach children. How could he not be pleased that you feel an urgency to pass on your faith legacy to them? Take heart in that. Don't let the enemy of your soul fill you with doubts or despair when others shut you out. They only serve to make Jesus hold you tighter.

2. Jesus would say, "You're experiencing the normal Christian life."

If your faith is rejected, if it causes friction in your family, or if the sharing of it is forbidden, you are more on the same page with Jesus than you thought. Jesus understands how you feel when your own family rejects your Faith, ostracizes you for it, or muzzles your sharing of it. He



might chuckle, "My own family thought I was nuts." He would surely refer you to the third chapter of Mark's gospel. It was bad enough that the religious biggies had come down from Jerusalem to declare he was demon possessed. But Mark 3:21 said of his family, "...they went to

take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind!'" Imagine that! His own family thought he had gone bonkers. Maybe some of your family think the same about you. When the crowd told him that his mother and brothers had come to take him home, he replied, "Who are my mother and brothers?" Then he looked at the people standing around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." [Mk. 3:33-34]

Jesus forever redefines family for his followers. It wasn't that he abandoned his blood family. On the cross, he called out to his friend John to take Mary into his home and care for her in her old age. But he said that our mutual faith is thicker than blood. Those who belong to Jesus are more your family than your own blood relatives who don't know him. Don't try to find your primary identity or comfort in the family you were born into (or adopted into) but in the family of God you were born again (and adopted) into. You belong to Jesus first, and not your birth family. They may reject you, wall you off, or abandon you, and call you out, but Jesus never will!



Jesus might look at you and say, "Didn't I warn you this would happen?" He would probably refer you to the words he said to those original followers in the tenth chapter of Matthew's gospel. They are not easy to swallow, and Jesus knows that. In fact, he said them to illustrate what it meant to take up his cross and follow him,

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be members of his own household. Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

—Matthew 10:34-37

Jesus would look at you and say, “What you are experiencing, I experienced. And so have millions of my followers down through the



centuries since I prophesied those words. I didn’t like it when my family turned on me. When my own disciples betrayed, denied, doubted, and abandoned me in my greatest hour of need, it wounded me as much as the scourging, thorns, nails, and

javelin. I know, better than you know yourself, the pain you are experiencing. But it goes with the cross. And you can’t go with me unless you are willing to carry it daily. That’s part and parcel of the normal Christian life.

3. Jesus would say, “The more your family hurts you, the closer you should get to me.”

Jesus would say, “I get you.” He existentially knows what you are going through. He might say to you, “It’s in our shared affliction that our hearts grow closer together.” He would remind you of St. Paul’s passionate desire to know him. In Philippians 3:10 the Apostle shared what he was willing to undergo to know Christ better: “...I want to share in the fellowship of his suffering...” Jesus would say it is in carrying the cross that we get to know him best.

Cross bearing is a difficult thing to embrace. We might all wish we could carry a Styrofoam cross with Velcro straps instead of nails—light, easy, and painless. Maybe it could have little air vents with circulating cold air. There’s nothing like a climate-controlled cross! And frequent breaks where we could lay down our cross for coffee and donuts. But crosses were Roman death machines designed to exact excruciating pain. When the condemned picked up their cross, they were saying goodbye to family, friends, possessions, and life itself. They were never coming home again.



Perhaps, if you could hear him whispering to you in your discouragement, “I know it’s your natural instinct to wish for a life free from pain, trouble, and adversity. If you remember, I begged my heavenly Father in Gethsemane to give me a pass on dying on the cross. Yet, our fellowship in that suffering is what caused me to say, ‘Not my will, but yours be done.’” And, Jesus whispers to you, “Welcome anything



that makes you conscious of your need for me. If your prayer is birthed out of desperation, then anything that makes you desperate for me is a blessing." Jesus would surely agree with something Puritan pastor William Gurnall wrote: "The hungry person needs no help to teach him how to beg."

Jesus might end by saying, "I may not heal you, but I will always hold you. The more intense the pain, the tighter my embrace. Your fellowship with me will far more than make up for whatever you lose from others."

4. Jesus would say, "I love them way more than you do."

We really do have a conceit that we are all that stands between our loved ones and hell. Again, Jesus would commend us for wanting to lead our lost loved ones to eternal life. But he might also ask us a couple of questions: "Do you think I don't love them more than you do?" "If your family takes you out of the game, do you think I don't have at my disposal all the means necessary to bring your grandkids to salvation?" There might be an uncomfortable silence. But you know what he's getting at.



Maybe, he would put a comforting hand on your shoulder and say, "Relax. I've got this under control." He knows how you are feeling. Remember, he came to his own and they didn't receive him. [Jn. 1:11]



In the beginning, he was followed by huge crowds. But after he gave a particularly difficult teaching, we read, "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him." [Jn. 6:66] When he went to Nazareth, he got nowhere because he was a prophet without honor in his own hometown. We read in Matthew 3:58, "And he did not do many miracles there because of their own unbelief." Later, when he sent his disciples out two by two to do house to house evangelism, he said, "If anyone will not welcome

you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.” [Mt. 12:14]

Jesus would say, “A lot of folks refused to listen to me. They weren’t any more interested in listening to my disciples—back then or now. But I never got uptight, angry or frustrated. I said it in John 6:44, and I’ll repeat it to you, ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me.’” Jesus would tell us that our only job is to share the Gospel. God’s job is to do the saving. And, if we aren’t allowed to share our faith with family or grandkids, as happened to Jesus and his disciples, we just have to move on and trust God to take care of the situation. He loves our grandkids infinitely more than we do, and the weapons at his disposal are infinitely more powerful than ours.

5. Jesus would say, “They can’t take away your most powerful tools of evangelism.”

Can you see him winking at you and whispering rather conspiratorially, “They can muzzle you in their presence or silence your faith voice with their children, but they can’t keep you quiet in your prayer closet. Your prayers on behalf of those you love most will do far more good than all your gospel sharing.” Jesus would remind you that he left this earth after a mere

three years of only mildly successful evangelistic efforts. By most counts, he was a spectacular failure. He started with thousands of followers, and, by the time he went back to heaven, there were only 120 in an upper room of a nondescript house on a Jerusalem backstreet. But in the 2,000 years since, he has been nonstop interceding with his heavenly Father. During these 21 centuries, billions of people have come into the kingdom of heaven because of his prayers that have unleashed the Holy Spirit. He would tell you that prayer is more powerful than anything else in bringing the lost to Jesus.

He would also tell you that they can muzzle your voice but not your life. Christianity is caught more than it is taught. Jesus might remind you of what he said to his disciples at



that Passover dinner: “By this will everyone know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” [Jn. 13:35] They can stop you from talking about Jesus to them or your grandkids, but they can’t stop you from loving them. No power on earth can stop or silence love. So live out the Jesus love that is already in you. Jesus would say, “If you want to reach your family, 1) love me passionately; 2) love your spouse passionately; 3) love your adult children passionately; 4) love your grandkids passionately; 5) and love doggedly those who don’t love you. Let the Jesus in you shine through you. As St. Francis of Assisi famously said, “Preach the gospel at all times and when necessary use words.”

6. Jesus would say, “Respect God-ordained boundaries.”

Do you remember how we started this session? A mother was frustrated



that her child’s grandmother went behind her back and had the little boy baptized. Surprisingly, Jesus would agree with that mother’s complaint. He would pull no punches with interfering grandparents: “When my Father, the Holy Spirit, and I

put our creation plan in action, the family was the centerpiece for human society. We set up all governments, from family to church to civil with clear hierarchies and boundaries. We did it for your good.” He would remind you, from the Genesis account, that fathers and mothers were charged with raising children. And when those children were ready to be married, they were to leave their mothers and fathers and start their own families. Jesus clearly meant for mothers and fathers to be the coaches in their children’s lives. There is not a single verse that authorizes grandparents to circumvent their adult children’s authority and responsibility when it comes to their grandkids

Jesus might remind us of the Fifth Commandment, specifically for children: “Honor your mother and father that it might go well with you in the land.” [Ex. 20:12] St. Paul later says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” [Eph. 6:1] Notice, he doesn’t mention grandparents. We aren’t the coaches of our adult children or our grandchildren. We are the cheerleaders.



Nowhere are we told in Scripture that we must share the Gospel with our grandkids. We are, however, told that we must honor and respect those in authority over them. St. Paul warns us in Romans 13:2, "Whoever resists authority opposes the ordinance of God."



Grandparents who disrespect their adult children teach their grandchildren to disrespect their parents. In the same way, grandparents who disobey their adult children's wishes teach their grandkids to disobey their parents.

It's never easy to submit to authority, especially when our adult children used to be under our rule. It's even harder when our adult children are not bringing up their children in the Christian faith and even forbid us to share that faith with them. But God knew that when he planted our grandchildren in their mothers' wombs. He has a plan, and we must trust him to carry it out in his way and in his time. Jesus would remind us of his prayer to his Father, "Not my will, but yours be done."

Dear one, when you are tempted to fight against or disobey your adult children's wishes, remember the words of Proverbs 21:1. "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, like the rivers of water; He turns it wherever he wishes." That even goes for the kings and queens in the home. Jesus would put up a hand of caution and say, "So, don't run ahead of my heavenly Father. He will work in your adult son or daughter's heart just as changes the course of mighty rivers."

7. Jesus would say, "You may have to resolve some longstanding conflicts."

No one called folks to tear down the walls that divided them from each other more than Jesus. He said, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift." [Mt. 5:23&24] This is staggering. Jesus is saying that resolving conflicts is more important than worship. Frankly, there can be no pure worship when we are harboring bitterness. In another place, he said that we have to confront someone who's sinned against us, deal with it and then forgive them. [Lk. 17:3&4]

Sadly, there are more unresolved conflicts and papered-over bitterness in families than almost anywhere else. Leo Tolstoy captured that in the opening line of his novel, Anna Karenina: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." At the finish

of the movie *Hope Floats*, actress Sandra Bullock muses, "Adulthood is spending your whole adulthood getting over your childhood."

When we ask why our adult children have closed the doors to our sharing our faith with their kids, we might want to reflect on why? And even ask our adult children to sit down with us and talk about it. If we will humbly listen, without getting defensive, they might share some things that have closed their hearts to us, and caused them to put lock and key on our grandchildren's hearts.



At Legacy Imperative, we have been shocked to discover that not all adult children are anti-religious. Many are, in fact, protecting their children from the religion they experienced when growing up in their childhood home. They don't want their parents to do to their children what was done to them when they were growing up. Ouch! It is never easy to get a report card on our parenting. If we get defensive or argumentative, it will soon be game over. If, indeed, there is truth to what they say, we should be ready to confess and ask forgiveness the way Jesus tells us to resolve conflicts.

Our kids might not immediately trust us to share our faith with their children, but we can begin to earn *their* trust again. We will also get an opportunity to live out the Gospel and show that the Resurrected Jesus is indeed alive in us. Again, this may not be the reason your adult children have muzzled you in sharing your faith, but you should prayerfully ask God to show you if there are deeper



issues that can be fixed through honest and gracious dialogue.



Above all, remember, Jesus is with you. Let him walk with you through this season in your life. And, if you aren't given the opportunity to share Jesus with your kids, he would say to you, "Look up. The fields are still white for harvest. Get out there and share my gospel with those folks."

A talk given by Dr. Robert Petterson, Founder and President of Legacy Imperative [legacyimperative.org] in his "Sharing Jesus in a 'Woke' Culture" series at Covenant Church of Naples, FL.