**How to use your faith to “Respond vs React”**

We’ve forgotten how to disagree with each other. Having a difference of opinion doesn’t make us enemies. It doesn’t mean we hate each other. And it doesn’t mean we can’t be friends. Yet anger tends to bubble to the surface and burst as soon as someone reveals opinions that differ from ourselves, or even the majority. When terms like intolerant, bigot, and close-minded are tossed around… add to that the boycott parties on Twitter every time someone gets angry at a company for their charitable contributions or disagrees with the owner's beliefs. The truth is, Christianity isn't politically correct. Are we short-changing God's Word to feed the itching ears of our social media audiences? Do we stick to noncontroversial topics, so we don't have to take a stand?

Or worse, do we change our viewpoints depending on who we are around? Is some sin **OK** if we’re with our close friends but not **OK** when we’re in public? How many times do I silently applaud those willing to face the criticism and backlash from the opposing view while I sit comfortably behind my iPhone screen, safe from controversy? We cry out for open discussion until someone's opinion differs from our own. Then we form a wall around our heart with a big, handwritten sign saying, "You're Not Allowed." So how do we break this cycle and pursue godly relationships that empower and encourage each other?

As Christians, we are to use our faith in our lives. For in 2 Corinthians 5:7 we are instructed to “Walk by faith, not by sight.”

For example: when we examine platinum, it is known to be a noble metal and doesn’t react with other metals. If you place platinum and gold in the same bowl, they don’t suddenly change into a new compound. In a sense, you can say that platinum is self-controlled. Iron Pyrite, otherwise known as “Fool's Gold,” is such a metal. It is always unstable and can cause spontaneous combustion. People are often either like platinum or like iron pyrite. They are either calm and even-tempered or they have a short fuse

and quick temper.

Looking in a mirror, which one are you?

“A Fool’s Gold Friend” where you leave others walking on eggshells around you.

**or**

“A Platinum Faith Friend" allowing others to be vulnerable and/or transparent without fear of retribution.

So let us remember Romans 5:8 where God commandeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us… responding to our greater need and not reacting impulsively to our immediate situation. Therefore, with God as our example let’s use our faith to respond instead of reacting.

**Going deeper**

## **Reactions Can Save Us**

That said, reactions are not all negative. In fact, reactions can save lives. Like if you slam on your brakes to prevent a car accident, perform the Heimlich maneuver on a person who is choking, or lurch for your child before she topples down a flight of stairs. Some of our reactions are instinctive and simply unguarded. Some are the result of practice and training, like administering CPR but while some reactions can save us, they can also destroy us.

## **Reactions Can Hurt Us**

How many times have you regretted something you’ve said? Have you ever lashed out when someone hurt your feelings? Whether it’s in a business setting, a discussion amongst friends, or even at church, reacting in a negative manner can have disastrous consequences. In today’s society, there’s an enormous dependence on digital communication. This communication is both a blessing and a curse. It allows us to share our opinions quickly from the safety of a computer screen.

When we practice the spiritual discipline of self-control (a fruit of the Spirit), we respond to situations instead of acting upon our first instincts. We allow time to pray, seek wise counsel, and communicate more effectively. Where we can't control the actions of others, we can control how we respond to the situation.

## **Three Ways to Practice Responsiveness**

**1. Train yourself to take a deep breath before speaking.**

Give yourself the time and space to think before answering a question or responding to someone. When we fly off the handle, we miss the opportunity to look at our options carefully and to think through various outcomes. James 1:19 instructs us to be quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to become angry because there is power in our words and anger doesn’t produce righteousness.

**2. Write down your thoughts and walk away from them.**

Hitting the send button on an email too early can send a shockwave of panic through your belly. Sometimes writing out a response in a Word document or a journal can help you think through what you want to say. Then you can go back through the message and make sure you’re conveying the message you want to send instead a message full of emotions that you may regret.

**3. Repeat the phrase, “You might be right.”**

In an email newsletter from Jon Acuff, he explained why saying that phrase can help you end an argument, or even prevent one from happening in the first place. There is nothing more disarming in the heat of an argument than to admit that the other person might be right. Instantly, you’ve humbled yourself and given the other person a chance to save face. I Peter 5:6-7 says to humble yourself before God so that He will lift you up in His time.

We're so obsessed with being right that we force our way to the top of the proverbial mountain, beat our chests, and yell, "I'm the king of the hill!" Then we look around and realize our mountain is a foot off the ground, and no one is listening.

We are called to love each other and to love each other means we're willing to be wrong. Willing to show grace. Willing to put the other person's needs in front of our interests. The Bible says not to be quickly provoked in our spirits, for anger resides in the lap of fools (see Ecclesiastes 7:9). Practicing the aspect of faith that is self-controlled means instead of reacting in anger, we respond in love. By doing so, we can truly show the life-changing love of Christ through our actions and strengthen the relationships that matter so much to us.

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.* ***Luke 10:27***