

FIRST PERSON: Ready to make a true difference? Here are 10 steps we all can do

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The young woman's words continue playing over and over in my mind. "We don't want quick fixes; we want something real."

Sharing about how youth, teens, college students and young professionals are attempting to find their place in the world, she kept emphasizing the need for authenticity and allowing them to be part of the conversation.

Oh, and she also noted, "There are plenty of opinions. We don't need one more of those."

Ironically, it's on the opinion page here in The Baptist Paper that I'm agreeing with her assessment. We really don't need any more opinions, including mine, but I hope you'll stick with me to see if we can make a difference.

It seems we constantly must wade through layers and layers of opinions before we can find those glimmering diamonds known as facts. So, I'd like to offer a challenge to all of us, and I need your help to evaluate the difference it could make.

Are you up for the challenge?

Let's take the next six weeks to fast from negative comments, disparaging remarks and mean-spirited conversations. I'm not saying we should shift to a toxic level of positivity and ignore concerns in our families, communities and the world.

What I am saying is we can focus even more on the concerns around us by removing the time and energy spent complaining

about it rather than working toward solutions.

We also have more of an opportunity to make a difference when we can communicate clearly with all involved – both those who agree and disagree.

Communicating clearly and calmly, in my opinion, involves speaking truthfully and accurately with grace and love toward others. Showing respect and refusing to exaggerate details will lead to fruitful discussions, unlike the results of tossing out vague labels and inciting fear.

So, how do we do this?

First, make the call to give it a try. Commit to the effort both personally and prayerfully. Ask the Lord to convict you each time you think or say something disparaging toward another person or are tempted to sensationalize a situation to make it more compelling or scary.

Second, keep yourself in check. As soon as you realize you've slipped, confess to the Lord, ask for forgiveness and start afresh. I'm so grateful we serve a Lord who loves us despite ourselves and is always waiting for us to turn back to Him when we step out of His will.

Third, take some time to think about – and maybe even list out – your concerns. What keeps you up at night? What upsets you when the topic is raised? What seems to stay at the top of your worry list (even though Scripture teaches us not to worry)?

Fourth, review your list of concerns and determine why they concern you. Think through them carefully and diligently, formulating clear answers to why they are concerns. Describe the “why” without throwing stones. Find the fact-based words to explain it.

Fifth, look for opportunities to present your fact-based

explanations and concerns. It could be one-on-one conversations or in a small group setting.

Sixth, when presenting your concerns, practice remaining calm, sharing only facts, distilling your reasons down to manageable nuggets and engaging others.

Seventh, allow the other person to respond and be patient and respectful in the process. Also, be sure to truly listen to what is being said and sincerely attempt to understand.

Eighth, acknowledge when you aren't sure about something or need to do more research, and dig deeper to learn more about what isn't clear. Ask the Lord to show you what you are missing and need to see.

Ninth, do your best to stick to credible sources. Determine to sift out those sources who consistently use descriptive labels rather than straight-up facts. After all, many times words and concepts are defined differently by different groups of people, so it's important to stick to the bare facts.

Tenth, keep 1 Peter 3:15 in mind: "... in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

Let's touch base soon on how the experiment is going.