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LETTER TO MY FAMILY

April, 2016

Dear brothers and sisters,

Let me tell you a story about my wife and me driving in the states.

When my wife and I arrived in the United States, we realized that we must learn how to drive in order to survive. I had been driving in various places in Southeast Asia for years. With such experience it was not a problem for me at all. However, at that time my wife did not even know how to ride a bicycle, so how could she live independently in the states? She had no choice but learn to drive. Soon after our arrival in the states a friend advised me that temperamental men should not teach their wives how to drive to prevent quarrels from flaring up and straining the relationship. Later on, I learned that for a time after the wife gets her license, the husband is taking the same risk when driven by her— as far as I know not many walk away unscathed.

Maybe I had a bad experience with my wife's driving early on, or I had too good an opinion of myself as a driver. Anyway I was agitated every time she drove me— thinking that a crisis was looming. As a result, I couldn't help being a backseat driver in a car driven by her. Of course, I wasn't really sitting in the back seat (wish I could but I didn't as I was afraid of offending her). I sat next to the driver. That made it worse and I almost had a heart attack. As a result, I couldn't keep my mouth shut, "Watch out! It's yellow now.....there's no car in the right lane, so why are you still driving in the fast lane?Hit the brakes! Didn't you see the car in front of us slowing down? Hey, you're tailgating the car in front of us; don't you know to keep a safe distance?..... Wow, don't you pay attention to the speedometer? You're speeding! You are asking for a speeding ticket.....The car is drifting left,.....the car is drifting right. You're driving on the yellow line. Quickly make the turn – why didn't you use the turn signal? Wow, you scared me – your driving is a threat to public safety!" These heartfelt "words of wisdom" were constantly at her ear when she was sitting in the driver's seat next to me. In tears she begged me multiple times to stop being an irritating backseat driver ---giving her much pressure and potentially causing accidents. Her objections were overruled. For the sake of mankind's safety, for the sake of our family's long term wellbeing, for her own sake, how could I not speak my mind? Moreover, I was afraid that she would not listen to me and end up making the same mistake leading to disastrous results, so after giving her "reminders" and "admonitions", I started to repeat my advice pleading with her and nagging her relentlessly. Honestly, every word I said was true, and for her own good. I had no ulterior motives. If her husband did not tell her, who would? Every time my wife begged me to shut my mouth, I would tell her forcefully (knowing I had reason on my side) that what I did was for her own good. She said I was a male chauvinist, belittling women's driving skills. She also said that I was a bad driving instructor because my constant nagging in her ear drove her nuts. How could I expect her to get what I said? She also confronted me with the fact that when she drove alone she came and went without incident, proving that she was a good driver. Why worry? You be the judge – who is right, she or I?

(Sigh) I believe only men who are husbands understand my painstaking efforts and frustrations. Men think they are much better drivers than women, don't they? Well, with their superior driving abilities, who else would they help but their own family? Moreover, husbands and wives are bound together whatever their circumstances. How could I not intervene when our safety is at stake? How could I hold my tongue? I must admit, though, we men have an inexplicable habit: when we are driven by our friends, we are totally relaxed. We laugh and joke and even sing in the car. However, once we are in a car driven by our wives, we become very nervous and turn pale. We feel the urge to instruct and correct ruthlessly, relentlessly, and pugnaciously, so that the lady who is driving feels she is completely useless – and yet we still won't stop. Regardless, men's noble intentions in being a backseat driver is something women will never understand. As time goes by, men start to feel that their wives are stubborn, deaf to good advice and beyond help. Holding his tongue makes the husband frustrated and speaking his mind hurts his wife. It's a no-win situation.

Last weekend, my wife and I went out. The street in front of our driveway has two lanes. At the intersection, the left-hand lane is a left turn lane. At that time, we were traveling in the left lane, and I wanted to go through the intersection so I instinctively started to change lanes. Just as I was about to turn into the right lane, my wife suddenly grabbed the steering wheel so that the car could not pull out to the right lane. To my surprise I discovered that, unbeknownst to me, there was a car to my right very close to mine; it was in my blind spot so I could not see it from my rearview mirror. I did do a quick check before pulling out, but I guess I did it too casually and didn't notice the car next to mine. It was a very close call all due to my carelessness. Had my wife not intervened, I would have gotten into an accident for sure. When we were safely out of danger, my heart was pounding and I was in a cold sweat. Ashamed, I didn't know what to say. To my surprise, my wife did not berate me or subject me to a prolonged session of "how to drive safely". Understandingly she patted my hand and said gently, "When you are tired, pay more attention to your driving!" I blushed and thanked her but I felt terrible – knowing that if she had driven like this, I would have.....

Deep into the night, the more I thought about it, the guiltier I felt. I sincerely apologized to my wife for all the grief I gave her as a backseat driver. She said, "When a person knows he has done wrong, he already feels bad. A gentle reminder is more than enough. Be forgiving. Why add to his guilt?" Since then I learned my lesson and stopped being an obnoxious backseat driver.

Now I understand, the best way to give advice may not be direct condemnation, never-ending criticism, and certainly not through hurtful words. Everybody makes mistakes. When we accuse others, think about ourselves. We see the speck in the other person's eye; then what about the plank in our own eye? Often times I think about Proverbs 25:11 "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver." A word fitly spoken is much more beneficial to the person hearing it than being a backseat driver, don't you agree? What people need is a word of advice at the appropriate time, given with sympathetic understanding –and the benefit to the person hearing it would last a long time.

Serving together with you in the Lord,

Pastor Calvin Tran