

How You Say What You Say

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] We're talking about encouragement in this class. Last week we talked about wisdom.! We started off this series by saying that encouragement is primarily based on the gospel.

! But that isn't to say that the only kind of encouragement that we can do is explicitly gospel words. God has made us image bearers and that means that we can reflect in our words his wisdom. And we have access to God's wisdom because we have access to God himself. And so God's wisdom touches every part of our life.

That means our encouragement can touch every part of everyone's life. No areas left out because God has given us wisdom to talk about every area.

Money, marriage, children, family, work, every area. His wisdom reaches and touches all parts of our life and so our encouragement can too.

[1:11] Well, today we want to start talking about how we say what we say. So that's the title for today's lesson, how we say what we say.

Maybe you've heard of that drill sergeant who was told by his superior to tell one of his soldiers that his wife died in the most gentle way possible.

So the sergeant, drill sergeant, burst into the barracks and he said, Smith, shine your shoes. Brown, clean the windows. Jones, your excuse from KP, your wife died.

Bah! I don't know. Someone, you know, Wilson, report for guard duty. Well, did the soldier find out that his wife died? Yes.

Yes. He found out the information he needed. Did he find out in the best way? Obviously not. Do we ever say things in a way that is not helpful?

[2:18] We speak the truth in less than a wholesome way. I think we all have found ourselves saying things that might be true, but it wasn't wholesome.

It wasn't helpful. Ephesians 4 says, Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.

Unwholesome talk is rotten talk. It's not just bad words. It's just words that don't do any good, that actually over time or immediately do harm.

Now, what we say can be unwholesome. It can be unhelpful, unhealthy. But also how we say what we say can be unhealthy and unwholesome.

So the drill sergeant, he said something that was completely true. That Smith, your wife died. It was true. But the way he said it, it was a completely unhelpful, unwholesome, bad way of saying it.

[3:31] And that's why we need to talk about this morning how we say what we say. Because it's not enough to have the right words.

Behind those words have to be a heart that is ready to love and to serve our brother or our sister in encouragement. Now, how we say something can be just as important as what we say.

Don't you agree? Sometimes we say to our wife, I love you. And we can say it in a flippant way. We can even say it in a sarcastic way.

We can say it all sorts of ways that actually convey that, well, actually, I might be saying I love you. But right now, I'm not loving you.

It didn't do her any good. And so today we want to talk about how we say what we say. And we have five principles. Five principles. The first is the longest.

[4:31] And the next four are much more brief. They're all helpful, though. First, always remember the gospel of grace and repentance. As you are going to speak, as you are going to encourage in whatever way your brother and sister, whether it's explicit gospel sort of encouragement or it's some sort of wisdom or it's some sort of correction.

Remember the gospel of grace and repentance. So remember that the goal of encouragement is not for a person to be immediately uplifted emotionally.

Sometimes that's going to happen. The goal of encouragement is to bring our brother and sister or an unbeliever into Christ likeness.

So whatever we say, if that's the goal, whatever we say, we have to remember the gospel of grace and repentance as we speak to them.

Listen to what Paul says in Colossians chapter four, verse six. Let your conversation, let your speech be always full of grace.

[5:46] Let your conversation be always full of grace. So what you speak should be full of grace. So how can we think about that? Well, grace has in the Bible a deadly enemy.

It's called legalism. It's called self-righteousness. It's called five helpful tips to fix your problem. It's called do it yourself.

It's called be self-reliant, self-sufficient religion. Grace is the deadly enemy of anyone who would make up rules that we like and we follow.

And then we judge other people by them. The gospel of grace says that it's only in Jesus Christ that we can be right with God, that we are sinners and that we need forgiveness and mercy.

And apart from him, we can do nothing. That puts us in a place of great humility, doesn't it? As we speak. And that does put us in a place of great hope at the same time.

[6:51] Because in Christ, God has provided everything that a sinner needs to be right with him and to live a godly life. Now, if we don't remember that grace for ourselves and for that other person, then we're really never going to be able to encourage our brother or sister.

I didn't say we wouldn't try. And I didn't say that we wouldn't be talking to them, maybe trying to encourage them, opening up our mouths and talking.

But if our words aren't full of grace, then they can become unwholesome, unhealthy words. So before we speak to someone about an area of life that they need to repent, that they need to grow in, that we want to encourage them, we need to remember this.

So let's have an example. Let's say we are getting ready to talk to one of our brothers and sisters about an area they need to change, an area where they need to repent, where they need life change.

Let's say they haven't been coming to church. You've seen this in their life. You've seen that they haven't been here for a while. Now, should the very first thing or should the first thing out of your mouth be, do not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing?

[8:20] Hebrews 10. Maybe someone says, yeah, that's what they need. They need to hear that. They need that biblical command. They need to fall in line with that. And my answer is, yeah, ultimately.

At some point, they need to hear that. But is that really the first thing they need to hear? Well, I'm going to say no.

And the reason is, is because as you go to them, you have no idea why they haven't been coming. You have no idea what they're facing.

What about if that person was in the middle of crushing depression? They haven't even been able to get out of bed to help their kids get ready for school, let alone get themselves up and ready and go to church.

You see, when we're remembering the gospel of grace, we remember that we need mercy. And that Jesus takes the time to understand us.

[9:29] He's not an unsympathetic high priest who hasn't been faced with all the things that we face. We remember that God understands our weakness. And we have that high priest who can sympathize with us.

And so when we are remembering those things that I need mercy, I need patience. There are times when I am crushed and I am burdened and I am struggling.

Then we are not going to pounce on someone and hammer home rules without first mercifully seeking to understand what that person is going through.

So grace has the first word. And so what do we say to our friend who's been absent to encourage them? Well, because we have been so loved, we also love them.

We can begin by showing that we care for them. That we are taking the time to understand them. That we ask questions and find out what they're going through.

[10:35] And maybe it is depression. Maybe it's a physical ailment. Maybe it's laziness and our cold heart. But we won't know how to tailor our encouragement.

Until we find out exactly what that person is going through. And so we don't jump in with tips and rules. We take time to listen. We take time to understand. Because Jesus takes the time to understand us.

But even more than that, we immerse our words in the gospel of grace. We immerse them in grace. Our speech is to be full of grace. So think of it like this.

You have a washcloth. That washcloth is your speech. And you have a bowl of water. And that bowl of water is the gospel of grace. And so what you do is you dip your washcloth into the bowl until the washcloth is full of water.

And now when you take that washcloth out and you squeeze it, what comes out is grace. So in the same way, our speech is to be full of grace.

[11:40] And so when we come into contact with a person, what comes out is words of grace. So God has loved us.

He's met our needs. We remember that we are sinners. That we ourselves cry out, oh God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

And when we are remembering that, that how God has loved us and met those needs and he's had mercy on us, then we are able to talk about grace that gives a person a power to obey, power to live the Christian life.

You see, there is a place for that command. And don't give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. It's in the middle of the gospel. That command comes in the middle of Hebrews chapter 10.

Hebrews 10 is all about how Christ's death once for all did away with our sins. Once for all, he sacrificed himself. Hebrews 10 is about how Jesus died and therefore we are forgiven forever.

[12:56] We don't have to keep going back to the sacrifice because the one sacrifice was made. And now we have access to God through Christ's body. We come through the veil, which is his body.

And so now sinners can be washed. They can be cleansed. They can be forgiven. They have access to God and all that that means. And it's through Jesus Christ. And then the author to the Hebrews says, let's encourage one another.

Let's not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. He pours on the gospel. And then out of the gospel, out of that hope and encouragement, out of making much of Jesus, out of making much of God's grace and forgiving sinners like us, he gives the command.

Now go. Let's not give up. Let's be where we need to be. Let's encourage our brothers and sisters. You see, the encouragement to keep going, the encouragement to not give up meeting together. It doesn't come just from the command. It comes from the gospel. And the gospel and the command are connected. You don't have one with the other. And so we want to remember that as we are encouraging.

[14:09] We're not going in there straight with a command. We're going to immerse the command and all the every the exhortation and everything that we're going to say in the gospel of grace.

They belong together. So that's our first point. That's our longest point. Remember the gospel of grace and repentance. Now, the others are much more brief.

Second, be specific. Be specific. God is in the small things.

He creates little things. He creates and pays attention to sparrows. When a sparrow falls, he pays attention to that. And he pays attention to ants on the sidewalk.

So go to the ant, O you slugger. Consider his ways and be wise. So God is interested in small things and details. And we should be too.

[15:05] Now, when we're talking to a person, we need to be paying attention to the details of that person's situation, of what they're saying. Far too often, we think we have it's good enough to have a general idea of what needs to be said.

And so we say something in general, and it's generally true, but it doesn't do a whole lot of good. It's sort of like a person going to the doctor and they have lung cancer.

And the doctor says, well, make sure that you're drinking lots of water. Well, that's a helpful thing. Drinking water is going to improve your health generally. But will it really help that person in the area that they need it specifically?

Water is going to help a person's overall health. But what they really need is surgery. They need something very specific. And so that's our second principle is be specific.

Take the time. This is going to be the constant thing. Take the time to listen and find out exactly what that person needs. And then you're able to deal with them in the most helpful way.

[16:21] Third, be humble. Be humble. One reason we have such a hard time being specific is that we think we already know what the problem is all about already.

And so we don't take the time to get to the details because we already have the answers.

Husbands, you ever do that to your wife? You have the answers and they don't even have the question yet?

Or wife? Do you ever do that to your husband? Proverbs 17, 27. Whoever restrains his words is wise. Whoever restrains his words has knowledge.

And he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding. So what does that look like in real life?

What does that look like? Well, let me give you an example.

Let's say you are in a Bible study. And I'm in a similar Bible study. And I come to you after church.

[17:26] And I say, well, how did the Bible study go last night? You say, well, to be honest, I found it to be a real struggle. I was having a hard time.

It was hard, wasn't it? This is what I'm saying. It was really hard, wasn't it? Still, we need to keep going, don't we? Let's not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. I find preparing ahead of time, getting those questions and doing them ahead of time, that really helps me understand and appreciate what's going on when I go to Bible study.

Have you tried that? Well, not much recently. Well, do you pray beforehand? Do you pray before you start working on this?

Because I found that helpful. I also like to look at commentaries. It's really good to be looking at commentaries and getting my brain wrapped around what's being said. And have you listened to that sermon that I gave you, how to study the Bible?

It's full of great tips about how you study, how to do that. Maybe you should go back and listen to that. That would really help you out in this Bible study. Actually, my wife just left me.

[18:36] And then, bam. All my wise advice, good common sense, things that were true, it was completely worthless. Why?

Because I wasn't being humble. I thought I knew the problem, and I didn't. And I spoke instead of listening.

So how do you say what you say? You be humble. And sometimes that will mean listening instead of speaking. So here's our fourth principle.

Man, we're moving right along. Deal with important issues. Deal with important issues. Be specific, yes. But don't be afraid to deal with the big, hard things.

So let's go back to our example. So you've just said to me, my wife has just moved out. What do you say?

[19:42] Well, our initial reaction is going to be like, whoa, that is too much for me. That's above my pay scale. I don't get paid to handle this. I'm, okay, that's terrible.

I got to go. See ya. Obviously, that's how we feel a lot of times. But is that the best way of handling it?

Probably not. But haven't we all done that before? Out of fear? Out of, like, I don't know what to do? I just bail on the situation?

Well, we need to remember that when that happens to us, God is in the small things, but God is also in the big things. He meets us in these areas where it is, it's bad.

It's terrible. It's hard. It's big. So instead of saying, whoa, I'm getting out of here. Nice to see you.

[20:44] Goodbye. What do we do? So let's rewind our situation. You've said, my wife just left me. Well, that's awful.

Yeah. I don't know. She's coming back. I don't know what to do. I don't know what I'm going to do about it. Do you want to talk about it? Well, I don't know.

I don't know what I'm going to do. I'm just in shock. Well, maybe this afternoon I'll call you, right?

This right here isn't the most private place to talk, so I'll call you this afternoon.

And in the meantime, do you need me to have someone come over and take care of the kids? No, that's okay. We'll talk later.

That's the end of it. What happened there? Well, I dealt with the situation head on. I didn't run from it. I didn't go into shock.

[21:50] I didn't freak out. A man with a cool spirit is a man of understanding. And then I offered concrete help.

Along with concern, I offered some concrete help. I showed a willingness to listen to them and understand their problem. And I took that problem seriously.

Will that encourage them? Yeah, I think it will. When you deal head on with your brother or sister or with a lost person with their problems and you take it seriously, that is going to encourage them.

And so along with the other things, let's not run away from the big things. God's word is sufficient.

And this goes back to what we've talked about in Ephesians 4.

God has given us his spirit. He's given us a spirit of wisdom and understanding and power. Now, we can rely on him when we are faced with that.

[22:53] God is sovereign. He's put us into that situation. And yeah, it's hard. And yeah, it's big. But he's bigger. And so we can trust him to be able to handle it.

And we can rely on him as we seek to love our brother and sister in that big thing. Now, here's our fifth principle. There's a time for silence.

There's a time for silence. The greatest encouragers aren't the greatest talkers. They're the greatest listeners. Isn't it funny?

The title of this chapter is How We Say What We Say. But a lot of what we ended up talking about was how not to talk. How to listen instead.

And the reason we did that was because encouragement is, by its nature, an other-person-centered activity.

[23:57] It's an other-centered person activity. At the heart of encouragement is a love and a respect for another person that puts their concerns above our own.

That imitates Jesus Christ in the way that he was able to focus in on the person he was talking to. When things were the busiest.

He was able, he had that ability and that power to look and talk to that person that was in front of him, even when there was crowds all around him. And that's what encouragement is about.

It's about looking at a person, understanding them, speaking to them and questioning them to find out what they need most.

And that means that you will listen. And if there's, you can't talk and listen at the same time. And so that means there's going to be a time for silence.

[25:00] A time for you just to be quiet. To ask the question and to listen. Now, the other thing, the other reason there's a time for keeping silent is simply that sometimes we need to have the humility to see that we just don't know what to say yet.

We just don't know what to say yet. Maybe we're not ready to speak. You know, I said, you know, we're empowered by the Spirit.

But I don't think that's a promise that every single time we go into a situation, we're going to have this instant divine inspiration to know exactly what to say.

Because haven't you ever been there? You're just flabbergasted. You don't know what to say. And so what do you do? Well, you be quiet.

The temptation in those situations is going to be to say something. And the reason it's such a strong temptation is because I think most of our speech, a lot of our speech, is just self-justifying.

[26:08] We want to make ourselves look smart. We want to get our own way. We use our speech in order to impress other people. And so if you've got to do that to impress them, you always have to be talking.

And if they've laid this bomb on you, well, you're going to look really smart if you're able to diffuse it immediately, coming up with an answer. But humility and love will realize that it's not about us.

It's not about them thinking I'm a smart, wise, good counselor. It's about actually loving them. And in the meantime, we need to trust that God is able to handle the situation.

Another reason that we feel like we have to talk immediately is because we think, if I don't strike while the iron is hot, I'm going to lose all opportunity. If I don't say something right now, you know, who knows what's going to happen?

If my words don't get in there, it's going to get so bad, we'll never be able to save the situation. Do you know what I'm saying? Do you ever feel like that? It seems like it's now or never.

[27:18] And really, a lot of times, that's just not trusting God. That He is in control. That He will either give us the words to speak at that time, or He will sovereignly rule over the situation so that nothing is lost in the meantime.

That when we come back later, it will be okay. When we've come back and we've had time to think, we've had time to pray, we've had time to talk to our brothers and sisters and get wisdom from them, that it will be okay.

That God is in control. And so, that's the fifth principle of how to say what we say. Sometimes the best thing to say is nothing at all.

Nothing at all. A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold and the studying of silver. So, don't rush it. Remember the gospel. Be specific. Be humble. Deal with the important issues. And remember, there's a time to be silent. We have a few minutes.

[28:31] Are there any questions or comments? Jim? I got to think about what the Lord told Moses when He spoke to him in the bush work. Moses is concerned by his speech. And the Lord told him, He said, I'll tell you what to say.

He told him, He gave him the words to say. Yes. I got to think about that. In other situations, like you said, what do you say? I mean, you know, special when somebody drops something on you, he was unexpected.

I got to think about that. That's what the Lord told Moses. and said, it's just as true as was that day. It's still true today. Amen. Any other comments?

All right. Let's end with a word of prayer, then we'll be dismissed. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are the God of all comfort, that you comfort us so that we could encourage and comfort others.

And I pray that we would drink deep with the gospel this morning, that we would see the sufficiency of Jesus and be filled up with Him, that we would have words of encouragement to say.

[29:40] I pray that you would give us wisdom this week as we face situations where we're called to speak. I pray that you would give us hope in those hours, in those times.

Thank you that you are involved in our life, that you know our sitting down, our lying down, our standing up, our going east and west. You are with us always.

Help us to take comfort and joy in your wonderful grace to us. In Jesus' name, amen. We're dismissed.

Thank you.