

# “Godly Talk”

Ephesians 4:25-5:2 & James 3:2b-6a

Pastor James York

August 29, 2021

**Prayer for Understanding** Lord of our lives, we know You are always present to us. Help us to be present to You as we prepare to hear Your Word as revealed in the Scriptures. Keep us alert that we might hear and hearing, respond. Amen

How one talks to others, and oneself, determines the future of the world. Pastor Joyce Meyer wrote an entire book about the transformational power of words entitled, “Change your Words, Change your Life.” The gospel writer John witnessed the power of words to forgive, heal, reconcile, unite, redeem, and resurrect. John begins his gospel by giving Jesus the title of *The Word*. *The Word* created the cosmos. *The Word* is life and light. *The Word* shines in the darkness. The darkness will never overcome *The Word* for *The Word* will enlighten everyone. *The Word* became flesh in Jesus, living among us revealing the glory of God. *The Word* is grace and truth. Through *The Word*, everyone receives grace upon grace.

James wrote about the power of words. **James 3:2b-6a NLT** “For if we could control our tongues, we would be perfect and could also control ourselves in every other way. We can make a large horse go wherever we want by means of a small bit in its mouth. And a small rudder makes a huge ship turn wherever the pilot chooses to go, even though the winds are strong. In the same way, the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire.”

The ability to talk is a wonderful gift God gives us that is capable of transforming the world into the likeness of heaven. However, our talk also does tremendous destruction. The Apostle Paul writes to us about Godly talk. **Ephesians 4:25-5:2 NLT** “So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil. If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, God has identified you as God’s own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are God’s dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. God loved us and offered Jesus as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.”

The Message translates, **Ephesians 4:29** “Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.” as “Say only what helps, each word a gift, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.” Your words have the ability to transform your life, and everyone you talk to with God’s grace. Your words have the ability to shape people into the likeness of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul begins by instructing us to speak the truth. **Stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body.** Even a single white lie often spirals into a myriad of lies that hurts others and makes us miserable. Sometimes we crave winning the debate, so we bend a few facts and embellish a story. Rationalization, the end justifies the means, a lie, any lie, no matter how white or small is a spark that may burn down lives including our own. Lies divide. Lies fuel fear, hate, and violence. The truth unites and fuels peace and love. Imagine the world when all people truly believe the truth that they are a gifted, beloved child of God who belongs to God’s family and everyone is a gifted, beloved child of God who belongs to God’s family, our siblings. Jesus urges us to abide in God’s word, so we come to know the truth and the truth will set us free.

**Do not sin by letting anger control you. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil.** Anger can be a motivational force that facilitates good, healthy change and anger can be destructive. A faithful disciple has righteous anger directed at a specific injustice, harmful behavior or life diminishing action. The Apostle Paul emphasizes control of one’s anger. Have you ever said something when angry that you later regretted speaking? That would be an example of uncontrolled anger. Controlled anger differentiates between the person, or group, and the actions. Love the person, be angry with unloving actions. If you have ever

regretted something you said when angry it probably was because your anger moved from pinpointing the unloving behavior and describing how it hurt you, and or others, to anger for the person. When one loses control and moves from the unloving behavior to the person often insults, labels and name calling are spoken. Controlled anger focused on unloving behavior can transform people like a rudder moving a ship. Uncontrolled anger that attacks people escalates destruction like a spark burns down the forest. Some of us struggle to control our anger for our self. Being angry with oneself, identifying an unloving behavior and speaking to oneself the loving behavior one is striving to live often yields a desired change. Beating our self up, calling our self names is destructive and a sin for we are failing to love our self. Hate for self is destructive. Love coupled with controlled anger for self is transformative.

History is full of movements that created a more loving world fueled by controlled anger. Being angry with the unloving behavior and not the people facilitates reconciliation after a change to loving behavior is established. Abraham Lincoln loved the people of the North and South and was angry with slavery. Study the life of Nelson Mandela and the abundance of transformative words he spoke, and you will likely notice his controlled anger. His anger for unloving behavior while loving those who did the unloving behavior is inspiring. Scripture describes how Jesus was angry with unloving behavior and loves everyone.

Godly talk is not silent in the face of unloving behavior. Godly talk harnesses anger to focus on the unloving actions, clearly identifies the unloving action, articulates the loving behavior we are striving for and facilitates bringing heaven to earth.

**Do not use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.** The original Greek for foul language was “putrid,” as in rotting fish. What sort of talk is worthy of that sort of description? Initially one may think that this is identifying profanity or obscenity. When one reads on, we discover the Apostle Paul had something different in mind. Get rid of all bitterness, wrath, rage, harsh words, wrangling, cutting, backbiting and slander, as well as all types of malice and unloving behavior.

It is quite a list. “Bitterness” is a type of talk that keeps calling back to mind experiences of hurt or pain, most of which are better left alone. Avoid groveling in victimhood. Do not have pity parties. Let go. Let come grace. Some people struggle for years feeling bitter for the way their parents or their spouse or their children failed them. Or one might bitterly scold themselves for some missed opportunity. Prolonged bitter talk causes terrible emotional harm to the speaker.

Wranglings in the Greek literally means “raucous outbursts.” The image that comes into my mind for wranglings is a tiny snowball growing into an avalanche of destructive snow boulders. When one is hurt it is healthy to name the hurtful action and describe how it hurt you directly with the person who hurt you. If you do not process the hurt it distorts your perception picking up all sorts of additional hurts, most of which are probably not intended. When you, or someone else, has a raucous outburst over a trivial issue often it is the result of a hurt that grew from the rolling words of one’s mind. One can do this to their self as well. Letting one’s thoughts churn around a negative thought until a raucous outburst happens, sometimes resulting in a breakdown, emotional distress or an addiction.

Slander is gossip. Any talk about another that is not true is gossip. Any talk about another that makes assumptions as to their intentions is gossip. Scottish Bible scholar William Barclay describes slander as the following, “There are reputations murdered over the teacups every day.” Gossiping over china teacups is a British image. You can substitute any beverage holder. There is a part of us that likes to make assumptions, to speculate, to pass on unverified news. We have whole new dimensions for doing this today through social media. The speed with which a slanderous remark can make the rounds these days is breathtaking. And some of those “urban legends” never seem to die. If the Apostle Paul were here today, I think he would include in gossip forwarding, or liking, any news or social post without first verifying that the information is true.

Malice is hateful feelings that yields hateful speech. Hate speech produces fear, hate, and divides. Malice perpetuated sometimes results in violence and murder.

The antithesis of all this is found in another list in Ephesians: **be kind and gentle to each other, tenderhearted, sensitive, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are God’s dear children. Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ.**

Godly talk is loving, positive, upbuilding, compassionate, life giving and joyful. Strive to make your words a grateful response to the grace you savor from God. Perhaps this sermon, and the Apostle Paul’s instruction, can all be summed up with a sentence Be kind so that your words may give grace to those who hear. One way that I have experienced kind words that give grace is through a wonderful workcamp tradition, “Care Cards”. Care Cards are

positive, encouraging notes of affirmation that are written to others. Strive to speak, or write, a positive, encouraging, affirming word to others and yourself, every day. Daily compliment others.

Listen again to the Godly talk of the Apostle Paul. **Ephesians 4:25-5:2 MSG** “**What this adds up to, then, is this: no more lies, no more pretense. Tell your neighbor the truth. In Christ’s body we are all connected to each other, after all. When you lie to others, you end up lying to yourself. Go ahead and be angry. You do well to be angry—but don’t use your anger as fuel for revenge. And don’t stay angry. Don’t go to bed angry. Don’t give the Devil that kind of foothold in your life. Did you use to make ends meet by stealing? Well, no more! Get an honest job so that you can help others who can’t work. Watch the way you talk. Let nothing foul or dirty come out of your mouth. Say only what helps, each word a gift, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. Don’t grieve God. Don’t break God’s heart. God’s Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for God. Don’t take such a gift for granted. Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave you. Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with God and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. God’s love was not cautious but extravagant. God didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of God to us. Love like that.**” Use your words to grow in love. Amen