To everything there is a season Series: study 3

A time to speak (Eccl. 3:7/Mt. 12:33-37)

## BEFORE THE LESSON

As children of God, we are called to speak in such a way that brings glory to God and blessing to our family, friends, neighbors, workmates and anyone we encounter as we walk through each day. God has issued a truly high calling to us as his children to make all our words count for something toward his good purposes in the world. Matthew 12:36 says that we will “have to give an account for every empty word we have spoken.” The Bible places a high premium on how and when we as followers of Jesus are called to speak.

## STARTING THE LESSON

In this lesson we will explore ways to improve our communication with other people following biblical guidelines. The Bible has much to say about using our words to build others up through words of thanksgiving, encouragement, kindness, and forgiveness rather than to destroy relationships through words of deceit, slander, jealousy, and anger. Our words are a reflection of our inner life. It is paramount that we spend time in meditation on the Word of God in the presence of the Spirit of God to have the humility to communicate the grace of God. As David prays in Psalms 19:14: “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” This is a daily struggle for all of us. James says (Jas. 3:8): “…no one can tame the tongue…” And it is only as we pursue our relationship with Jesus and “keep in step with the Holy Spirit” (Gal.5:25) that we will develop self-control in regards to our speech as a fruit of the Spirit.

**TIPS TO SHARE WITH LEADERS**

As you prepare for this lesson, spend time in prayer for each member of the group asking the Lord to give you insight and discernment into this passage so as to comfort and challenge your group to live in a way that pleases the Lord.

Strive to create an atmosphere of openness by sharing personal stories of how the Lord is working in your own life, and by affirming group members when they share personal stories from their own lives.

Finally, remember that you do not need to use every question or text provided in this study – take some time before your group meets to consider which texts and questions to focus on and which to pass over.

## starter question

* What would you consider a high point in your week? What was a low point? What did you learn from these experiences? What was the Lord teaching you?
* Think of a time in the last week where you “said too much” in a conversation. How did it make you feel? How did it make those listening to you feel?
* Why do you think people like to gossip? What benefit do you gain from gossiping? What are the potential downfalls from this type of communication? How can you protect yourself from the temptation to gossip?

## Opening PrAyer

Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that you would clear our minds of the distractions of this day and help us to focus on your love for us and your purposes for our lives and in this world. Help us to hear and be in step with the leading of your Holy Spirit now and in the week to come. Thank you for sending your Son Jesus to restore our relationship with you and give us the blessed hope of eternal life in Your Kingdom. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

## Discussion questions

Ecclesiastes 3:7 (NIV)

**7** … a time to be silent and a time to speak,

Matthew 12:33-37 (NIV)

**33** “Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit.

**34** You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

**35** A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.

**36** But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.

**37** For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.”

Colossians 4:5-6 (NIV)

**5** Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.

**6** Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Ephesians 5:4 (NIV)

**4** Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

### Question 1

* How do we know when is the right time to speak and when is the right time to be quiet and listen? How does the phrase “Seek first to understand, then to be understood” help us in making that decision?

I think there is a human tendency to want to be heard first and to share our thoughts before we forget them. You see this all the time in debates and news talk shows where people are constantly interrupting one another. James 1:19 says that we should be “quick to hear” and Ephesians 4:29 says that we should “Let no unwholesome word proceed from our mouth” but only speak when we will bless the listener and build them up. The challenge in spiritual growth is to discern when to speak and when to listen. We should start with listening so that the person with whom we are in conversation feels loved, heard, and understood.

### Question 2

* How do our private thoughts influence what words and phrases we use in conversations with other people? Would you consider yourself a “think first” and “speak later” person or do you feel the need to speak your thoughts immediately with others?

Jesus says in Matthew 12:35 that “a good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him…” This is why we are consistently encouraged in the Scriptures to develop a healthy thought life because “out of the mouth comes that which fills the heart”(Luke 6:45). In Philippians 4:8 Paul says, “Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—**think** about such things.” If our thoughts are in the right place, when we converse with others we will be looking for opportunities to show the love of Jesus through kind and compassionate words.

### Question 3

James 1:19-20 (NIV)

**19** My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

**20** because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

Proverbs 10:19 (NASB)

When there are many words transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise.

Proverbs 15:1-4 (NIV)

**1** A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

**2** The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.

**3** The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.

**4** The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.

Ephesians 4:29-32 (NIV)

**29** Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

**30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

**31** Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.

**32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

* Jesus proclaims that we will have to give an account for every “empty” or “careless” word we speak. Jesus places a premium on ***every*** word we speak. How can we develop filters to sift out the “careless” or “empty” words before they are spoken?

It is a healthy exercise to review each day and ask yourself, “Did I make the most of every word I spoke?” There are many times when we talk negatively about other people when they are not present which amounts to slander or gossip. Or other times when we are facetious or insincere in our speech and miss opportunities to bless people or worse yet harm those who are listening to us. It is important to be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit when we converse with others and ask God for discernment on how we can bless others and build them up. This turning to God before we speak can act as a “filter” to guard against flippant or insensitive comments. As the Psalmist cries out to the Lord, “Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips…” (Psalm 141:3)

### Question 4

* Paul encourages us in Col. 4:5-6 that we should be wise in the way we interact with unbelievers. He states that our conversation should be “full of grace.” Why is this so important as we share the love of Jesus with others? What perception does the watching world have of Christians sharing their faith or evangelizing? Is it positive or negative?

*Our posture in any relationship as believers is humility, kindness, and grace. This is especially so with unbelievers. In Philippians 2:1-5, Paul says that we should have this same attitude that Jesus had, which was self-sacrifice and humility in which He gave up His life so that others might find a relationship with the Father through the salvation and forgiveness that Jesus offers. So often the world feels judgment from believers, but our calling is to love everyone as Jesus did. Jesus came to “seek and to save those who are lost” (Luke 19:10 ). John says in John 3:17 that “…God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.”*

### Question 5

* Do you find yourself “making the most of every opportunity” in your conversations with others to spread the love of Jesus? How do you process “missed opportunities” and learn from them?

We can all share experiences where we wished we would have shared our faith or initiated a spiritual conversation with someone. There is always opportunity to pray for people and God is in control and is overseeing the salvation of the world. We should just relax and look for other opportunities to bless people with the love of Jesus. Sometimes it can be just a simple act of kindness or an invitation to pray for someone about a pressing need.

### Question 6

* In Ephesians 5:4, Paul encourages us to refrain from “coarse jesting.” We have all been in conversations when we said something inappropriate and tried soften the effect on the hearer by saying “I was just kidding.” How can “joking around” be detrimental to good communication? Is it ever appropriate to lighten the conversation with humor? When is trying make someone laugh a good thing?

Excessive levity can communicate insincerity to the hearer. There is a “time to laugh” in relationships with others but the most productive humor is when we laugh at ourselves for doing something silly and not laughing at someone else to make them feel silly.

### Question 7

* In Proverbs 15:1, it states “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

How can we apply the wisdom of this verse to de-escalate a heated argument?

Jesus calls his followers to be peacemakers. In Matthew 5:9, He says “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons and daughters of God”. As we interact with others, we should look for ways to promote mutual understanding and a posture of gentleness plays a key role in accomplishing this goal. Paul gives instruction to believers in Galatians 6:1-2: “Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him **gently.**” Even when there is a cause for correction or confrontation in our relationship with others, it should be done with humility and gentleness as fellow sinners.

### Question 8

* What is the purpose of godly communication according to Ephesians 4:29? How does compassion, kindness, and forgiveness influence the way we communicate with other people?

*The apostle Paul puts forth the purpose of godly communication in Ephesians 4:29 as speaking “…only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. “*

*It is very other-centered and we should always be looking for ways to use words of kindness, compassion, and forgiveness to promote the welfare of those with whom we are speaking. Oftentimes, bitterness and unforgiveness result in anger, slander, gossip, and negativity toward others. This is why it is paramount that we “put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, bearing with one another and forgiving each other. Just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you…” (Col. 3:12-14)*

### Question 9

* What is the most powerful encouragement you ever received from someone? How did it change your life?

*Words can have a life-changing impact on someone’s life. A teacher inspiring a student with a vision for their life which the student could not see on their own. As Proverbs 18:21 says, “The tongue has the power of life and death…”. As a wayward teenager, a youth group leader shared with me the love of God and the hope of the gospel. At the time, I was very depressed and “stuck” in a life of rebellion and peer-pleasing. These words of grace and forgiveness changed my life forever!*

### Question 10

* Proverbs 10:19 says “…he who restrains his lips is wise…” and James 1:19,20 says we should be “…quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger…” What are some practical steps we could take to help us develop the discipline of good listening?

We should develop the habit of asking open-ended questions to others so that we can better understand their lives and situations. We should resist the temptation to “win an argument” or to entertain with something interesting that has happened to us. We should first take an interest in our hearer and find out how they think.

## Prayer ministry

* Begin your prayer time by inviting the Holy Spirit to come and lead and guide your group through prophetic words, pictures, or encouragement from the Scriptures. Allow a period of silence and encourage your group members to have a receptive posture by kneeling or opening up their hands to the Lord. If you have new people in the group who are unfamiliar with the Vineyard Prayer Model, take some time to introduce them to the value we place on making time to listen and hear from the Lord in prayer.
* After several minutes have passed, ask if anyone has heard from the Lord regarding how to direct our prayer time. If there are very specific prophetic words that apply to people in the group you can choose to pray as a group for those people who want prayer. Sometimes it is wise to break up into groups of two or three which gives more people the opportunity to pray. At other times it may be wise to separate into groups along gender lines. You can mix it up from week to week as the Lord leads and with input from the other group members.

**Note:** This study was prepared as an act of service by Jim Vagnier.