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# [Week 11] War of Words - First Things First Manuscript

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Welcome to the beginning of the last of 3 sections of this AM seminar. When I was last here…

Since then our brothers Mark Ben and Nahashon have taken us through…

**PRAY**

As we enter the home stretch of this seminar on *War of Words*, you may be thinking, “Okay, I understand God's call regarding my words. I know I have not spoken redemptively. My words have been driven by my own desires. And I can see the fruit of my sin and I see my failure all over. But I don't know what to do.”

Well, today's class is for you. It's about turning. We want to look at God's way of repentance. As you and I turn from the old way of talking, it is important to get first things first, by starting with our heart. Repentance in scripture is a radical change in one's heart that leads to a radical change in one's life. When God called Israel to repent in **Joel 2:13**, he says, “Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord, your God.” Tearing one's garments was a symbol of remorse in the Old Testament culture. So God was essentially saying I want more than symbolic acts of repentance. I want hearts that are truly changed. And so we start off by seeing that **the foundation of repentance is a heart that embraces the gospel** (next section in your handout)

God shows us our sin and failure, not as an act of condemnation, but as an act of redeeming love. (If you are taking notes, that might be a good thing to write down.) As a father, he disciplines his children for the purpose of making us holy. His intent is never to crush, destroy or forsake. We know from **Hebrews 12:1-13** that though discipline can be painful, its purpose is to produce in us a harvest of righteousness and peace.

So don't give in to despair, don't let the enemy trick you into thinking that it is too late or that you'll never get it right. Don't let your sense of failure cause you to turn **from** the Lord in guilt and shame. Turn **to** him and see in his face, the loving acceptance of a father, who forces you to see yourself as you really are **because** he loves you deeply and fully.

Perhaps your eyes have been opened through this AM seminar and you have seen things about your communication that you had not seen before, and it has broken you. If so, come to the Lord in your brokenness. Seek his forgiveness and help. If God has convicted you, this can be either a moment of turning or a moment of hardening. Be encouraged and repent! You are loved!

True repentance begins with a heart that rests in the work of Christ and the **many promises** that flow out of his victory over sin. For those taking notes, I'll be highlighting **seven** of these gospel promises for our encouragement. Sin produces guilt, shame, and fear, but only the Lord's perfect love drives it all away. We know from **2 Peter 1:3-4** that in his great and precious promises, you and I find everything we need, to do what he has called us to do.

The first gospel promise we need to embrace is the promise of **forgiveness**. God's promise of forgiveness is full and complete. He says that he will remember our sins no more, but rather will separate us from those sins as far as the east is from the west! What an awesome promise! I do not have to carry my sins around like a huge gunia full of regret that bruises my spiritual shoulders and breaks the back of my faith. Jesus took the weight of my sin on himself so that I would not have to carry it any longer.

What freedom is found here! It makes no sense for a believer to live imprisoned by fear, in the darkness of guilt and shame. Jesus has paid the debt! So though I come stained and dirty, I can come to Christ full of faith and hope and receive the forgiveness that is mine as a child of God.

The second promise of the gospel is **deliverance**. Christ came not only to forgive our sins but to deliver us from them. It's in your handouts but we won't take the time to read **Romans 6:1-14**, where we see that on the cross Christ broke the power of sin’s mastery over you and me. I do not have to give in any longer to sins of the tongue. Things **can** be different. I **can** speak in a new way. Christ's victory not only delivers us from the penalty of sin, it is even now, through various means of grace, delivering us from the power of sin.

Thirdly, in the gospel I find not only forgiveness and deliverance but also **strength.** What does the Lord promise Paul in **2 Corinthians 12:9**? Someone please read (or quote it if you know it off head). “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Yes, we fall short of God's standard. In ourselves, we can do no good thing. But the Lord has not left us there. He comes in his power and fills us with his Spirit so that we can speak in a way that benefits others and glorifies him. Someone else please read **Ephesians 1:18-20** (I realize it starts in the middle of a sentence.) Here we learn that the same power that raised Christ from the dead is living within us. Think about that for a moment! So we no longer have to succumb to weakness. We can speak out of the strength that is ours in Christ.

Another precious promise of the gospel (number 4) is **restoration**. It is so easy to look back on our lives and see the wreckage of lost opportunity. It is so tempting to wish we could take words back and say what is right this time. It is so easy to question why God took so long to show us how far our words have fallen short.

Here the Lord's promise of restoration is so sweet. **Joel 2:25-26** says, “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten…. (and goes on to say) You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God.” God is a Restorer. The years have not been wasted. In his sovereign love, God has been bringing us to this point of insight and conviction at just the right moment. His timing is always right. The process has been tailor-made to accomplish what he promised – a harvest of righteousness. And wonderfully, God promises to restore what has been lost in the process, so that we, his people, will not be put to shame.

In the gospel, we also find the promise of **reconciliation**. That's #5. The heart of the gospel is the coming of the Prince of Peace. In him we find reconciliation not only with God, but with one another. In **Ephesians 2:14-18** we see that He is the only One who can destroy the walls that separate people. He alone is able to put love in hearts where hate once reigned. He makes thoughtless, self-absorbed people tender and compassionate. Out of the coal of human sin and failure, he produces the jewel of godliness. Could someone please read **John 17:22-23.** Here we see that He came so that his church would be a community of unity and love. Because he came, there is hope that where relationships have been damaged or even destroyed, real healing and reconciliation can take place. Our Saviour is the Prince of Peace!

Sixth, the gospel brings the promise of **wisdom**. James talks about this almost matter-of-factly in **James 1:5** where he says: “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God.” How simple, yet how encouraging! You may be thinking, I know I need to change my communication, but I don't know where to start or what to do! What you need is wisdom, and not only does God give wisdom, but he gives it generously and without finding fault. We have no reason to despair over our own ignorance when “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Christ according to **Colossians 2:3**. His invitation is simple: Come, ask, and I will give!”

Finally the gospel promises us **mercy** and **grace**, which are two sides of the same coin. Mercy - not receiving what we deserve. Grace - receiving what we don't deserve. The writer of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus was tempted like we are in every point, so he understands and sympathizes with our weaknesses. Could someone please read **Hebrews 4:14-16.** We can come to him and find mercy and grace to help us in our time of need. In the hardest of situations, in the most trying of relationships, we never stand alone with only our personal abilities to help us. We are in Christ, and in him we can do what would otherwise be impossible.

I cannot love my enemies. I cannot do good to those who mistreat me. I cannot be patient in the face of provocation. I cannot honour when I'm dishonoured. I cannot leave vengeance to the Lord. I cannot find delight in self-sacrificing service. I cannot speak softly in the face of another's anger. I am not naturally kind, compassionate, gentle or forgiving. The standard is too high and the calling is too great for me to fulfill. But that is why Jesus came. In him we really do find **everything** we need!

The point we've been making here is that the gospel – the good news of Jesus – is the soil in which real repentance grows. Its promises make me willing to face my sin and give me the strength to turn from it. Real hope for real change is found in Christ! Repentance is built on that foundation.

The next question is, What does true repentance look like? How would a real change of heart be revealed in your communication? This leads us to consider the steps of true repentance, the kind of heart change that leads to life change. In your handouts you'll see we have 4 steps, each starting with the letter ‘C’: Consider, Confession, Commitment and Change.

**The First Step of Repentance: Consider**

The first step in the repentance process is to consider our tendency to be spiritually blind. We see others’ sin and failure much more clearly than we do our own. We all too readily make excuses and shift the blame, leaving ourselves with a distorted picture of who we are and what we have done.

The remedy is quite simple according to James. Could someone please read **James 1:22-25**. We need to look intently in the mirror of God's Word to see ourselves as we really are, and to see where change needs to take place. As we look into God's mirror we need to ask, What does God want to show me that I haven't yet seen about my life of talk?

As we read Scripture, we find practical biblical principles of communication that define what it means to **speak redemptively**. No longer will our words leave a trail of discouragement, destruction and division. Rather, they will be words of love, truth, grace, hope, faith, forgiveness, and peace, producing a harvest of righteousness.

To illustrate our desperate need to **consider** the hearts that control our words, hear this story of a married couple, Ben and Martha. One of Ben's consistent struggles with Martha was the frequency and intensity of her anger toward their three children. They decided to pursue counseling, where Ben was encouraged, not just to complain about Martha's anger, but to commit himself to speaking the truth to Martha.

One day, during a review with their biblical counsellor, Ben was summarising the events of the week. “Oh, by the way,” he said, “I took your advice and confronted Martha about her anger. I told her that she needed to examine how destructive it is and the way it interferes with what God wants to do in the lives of our kids.” In listening to Ben, the counsellor had two conflicting reactions. The first was that what Ben communicated sounded right and good. The second reaction came from watching Martha as Ben talked. She was not buying his summary at all. In fact, she was clearly angry at how good the summary made Ben look!

So the counsellor said, “Martha, you seem upset by what Ben has said. Why don't you tell me what you're thinking?” Martha described the scene this way. “I had decided to make us all a good home-cooked meal for a change. It's been so hard with a five-year-old and three-year-old twin boys. The afternoon was rough. The boys seemed like they had plotted to do anything they could to keep me from getting a decent meal on the table. I did manage to make dinner, but by the time we sat down to eat, I was totally frazzled. As usual the meal began with one of the twins, spilling his drink all over everything. Well, I lost it. I not only yelled at him but at the other two for thinking it was so funny.

“At this point I looked up at Ben and I could tell he was really fuming. At first he just sat there glaring at me. Then he began to speak, right in front of the kids. He said, ‘When are you ever going to learn? Are you so full of yourself and your little problems that you can't see what's happening? Are you totally blind to what you have become? You are the single most destructive thing in our children's lives. I wonder if they will ever recover from what you have done to them. Sometimes I wonder if it would have been better if they had never met you! And I've given up any hope of you changing! Sure, you say you're sorry, but you turn right around and do it all over again. You need to get your act together or get away from the kids! You've never heard **me** lash out in anger against them like you do. I just wish that you could look at yourself and see what I see!’ I looked around the table and saw all three of our boys listening intently as Ben tore me apart.” 😣

Now, there's much that could be said about this family's struggles, but for our purposes here, let's focus on Ben in his role as God's spokesman. As husband, father and believer, he has been called by God to be an ambassador. He has been called to be a watchman. He has been called to encourage perseverance and to be an agent of rescue and restoration.

Martha was in the midst of a very significant spiritual struggle. She was blind to herself and God's presence and power. Clearly, she needed help, and clearly Ben had been positioned to be God's helper in Martha's life. Yet, when Ben looked at Martha, this is not what he saw. He saw someone who was messing up his otherwise orderly life.

He saw someone he wanted to be free from rather than a loved one in need of rescue. What Ben said was neither helpful nor productive. His words did not produce a harvest of righteousness. They only made Martha more defensive. Instead of opening her spiritual eyes, Ben's words only aggravated her blindness.

You could argue, in a loose sense, that what Ben said is true, Martha's anger **is** harmful to the children. She **is** blind to what she's doing. She **does** confess, but there is no lasting repentance. Yet the truth of Ben's words is so distorted by his own sinful attitudes that what he says ceases to be the truth. Instead, we hear the angry opinion of a man, who is just as blind as Martha. Ben neglected to put first things first. He didn't take time to deal with his own heart attitudes, so his words didn't offer solutions and comfort. Instead they became another part of the problem.

Imagine the difference if Ben hadn't blurted out his words at the table that night, Imagine if he had waited, taking time to grapple with the war in his own heart. Imagine if he had confessed his anger against Martha and began to focus on what God wanted to accomplish. Imagine if he had seen the moment as **God's** moment of redemption and restoration. What a difference there would have been if he had spoken truth with patience, gentleness, humility and love!

As a result of Ben’s approach in this story, Martha isn't looking back with thankfulness for the way God used Ben in her life. She isn't testifying to his loving frankness. Instead she is angry with Ben for the things he said. She is outraged at how and where he said them. There is no redemptive change taking place. The problem has just added another layer of complication.

So, friends, the call is to consider. Take time to look at yourself in the mirror of God's Word. Have you spoken to others without first examining your own heart? Have your words brought hope, help and comfort to those struggling with sin? Or has your communication only added layers of difficulty to the pile that’s already there? Take time to consider the gentle voice of the Redeemer as he speaks to you through his Word.

**The Second Step of Repentance: Confession**

Real repentance always involves confession. We accept responsibility before God and man for what we have said and done. Confession means humbly accepting what God has said about us – that we are sinners by nature and our sin is expressed in our thoughts, words and actions. We cannot confess sins of communication without confessing the sinful attitudes that have shaped our words. This is where the story of Ben and Martha can help us. What heart attitudes lay beneath Ben's words to Martha? Remember, Martha wasn't the only one in the midst of a spiritual battle; Ben was as well. Remember also that the war of words always reveals a deeper war. Ben and Martha were both up against an enemy who would like to divide and destroy their whole family. He was encouraging several attitudes in Ben's heart. Let's consider them together and see if we need to confess these attitudes as well:

1. **Doubt.** Martha's anger was the occasion for much doubt in Ben. First, he wondered if he had been “totally out of God's will” when he married Martha. Had he been so captivated by her physical beauty that he failed to take time to get to know her? He also doubted God. He said, “I just don't understand why God would let me marry such a person. Nothing has shaken my belief in God's wisdom more than my marriage.”
2. **Fear**. Ben expressed it this way: “I look at our children and wonder what kind of monsters they will grow up to be. I can see them someday talking with a counselor about how awful their home was. It feels like every room I go into, there is Martha and she is upset about something. Most of the time I try not to think about where all of this is leading.”
3. **Anger**. Ben thinks to himself, “I don't want much. I just want a home with a little bit of order and love. Is that too much to ask? I'm doing my part. All I'm asking is that Martha do hers.”
4. **Vengeance**. It seemed to Ben as if Martha could sin day after day and nothing would happen. “Why does God let this go on?” Ben wondered. “Why doesn't he do something? I would like Martha to hurt just once the way she hurts the children and me.”
5. **Self-righteousness**. “I just don't understand Martha’s anger. I guess we're just different. I've never felt the anger and that Martha feels, let alone expressed it! I would never think of saying the cruel things she says to the boys. Sometimes, I wonder if she is even a Christian. If she is, I can't relate to her brand of Christianity!”
6. **Selfishness**. “A man needs a place to retreat. I've got nowhere. When I clock out from work, I want the tough part of my day to be over. I don't want a home more stressful than my work. I shouldn't have to be on the job 24 hours a day. When do I get time off?
7. **Hopelessness**. Ben felt trapped and completely powerless to effect change. He said, “The way I see it, I can't change Martha yet I'm forced by God to stay with her. If I stay, I lose because my life gets swallowed up in her anger. If I leave, I lose because I'll face God's judgment. I pray about this every day, but God just doesn't seem to be listening. I go to church and I see all of those happy families sitting together and I get sick to my stomach. I'm trapped and I don't know what to do!”

It's tempting here to respond to each of Ben's attitudes, but let's not lose sight of the main point we are considering: There is no way that Ben will speak redemptively – no way he will function as God's ambassador and watchman – without first dealing with the war going on in his own heart, the war that his words reveal. Ben saw the war going on in Martha, and he recognised how it shaped her communication. Yet he failed to recognise the same war within himself and the way that war shaped his words to Martha.

Ben not only missed an opportunity to be part of what God was doing in Martha's life, but his behaviour made things worse. Martha grew more and more defensive, more and more unwilling to listen to Ben. She focused more and more on Ben's sin and not on her own. Ben hadn't been used of God to lift her blindness; he had been the tool of the enemy to intensify it. Why? Because he had failed to deal with first things first and face his own heart issues. Thus he was unprepared to “speak the truth in love.”

**The Third Step of Repentance: Commitment**

We all tend to share Ben's struggle. We are prone to speak without proper heart preparation. And so we need to commit ourselves to start first with our own hearts. **James 1:19-21** says that we should be slow to speak. **Proverbs 15:28** says that the heart of a righteous man weighs his answer. But we are inclined to rehearse the sins of others rather than to examine our own hearts. When we give in to these tendencies, we become part of the problem rather than instruments of change. Nowhere is there a clearer call to heart preparation than in the words of Paul to the Colossian church. Could someone please **READ Colossians 3:12-17**.

This passage is one of the Bible's most direct calls to what we might call personal ministry. Paul calls us to do things with one another that are often assigned to the realm of professional, formal ministry. God calls each of us to be teachers. He calls each of us to be admonishers. He calls all of us to sing the truth to one another. (That's the sermon I preached from v.16 back in January.) We have to take advantage of the unique opportunities God gives us to be part of what he, as Redeemer, is doing. But as striking as this call is to personal ministry, most of the passage is not about what we have been called to do. Most of it is about **preparing** for it, about the posture of heart that makes ministry possible.

All of us have some degree of influence. All of us are trying to make sense out of life and sharing our interpretations with others. This world of influence and “ministry” is unavoidable. The giving and receiving of counsel is the stuff of human relationships. The question is this: Are we **committed** to this ministry, and to doing it God's way? Are we willing to function as his ambassadors? Are we preparing ourselves so that he can make his appeal through us?

In verse 12, as Paul describes the heart preparedness needed for personal ministry, he uses a common metaphor we do not want to miss. Paul says that we should “clothe” ourselves with certain attitudes. He's essentially saying, “If you are going to minister to one another, you'd better get dressed for the job! So let’s see the heart clothing that God provides so that you and I can speak redemptively:

1. **Compassion:** Compassion is not only a deep awareness of another's need; it is a desire to do something to relieve it. We are the children of One who **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** describes as “the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.” It makes no sense to receive such amazing compassion and respond to others harshly and unsympathetically.
2. **Kindness**. To be kind is to be generous, tender, and warm-hearted. It means to speak and act in a way that is understanding and considerate. Yet isn't it true that too often in marriage, parenting, and the church, times of admonishment lack tenderness? Ask yourself, when you confront, exhort, admonish, or teach, does a warm and considerate spirit characterize these times?
3. **Humility**. Often, times of personal ministry lack a “standing-alongside” spirit. Let’s remember that we are fundamentally like those to whom we minister. If I am a parent, for example, there is no sin my child would commit that hasn't been present in my life in some way. We **do** stand right next to those we serve as people in moment-by-moment need of the forgiving, delivering, and enabling grace of the Lord. Humility simply means that we bring a biblically accurate self-assessment to the Lord's work. This will lead us to speak out of a humble sense of a shared need for Christ. (**Hebrews 2:10-18**).
4. **Gentleness**. Gentleness treats others with tenderness, speaking in a way that is soft and mild. **Proverbs 15:1** tells us that harsh words create problems rather than solve them. Gentleness means that I don't damage the very person I am seeking to help. Gentleness doesn't mean compromising the truth. Rather, it means keeping the truth from being compromised by harshness and insensitivity.
5. **Patience**. One of the hardest things God calls us to in our relationship with him and with others is to wait. We do not like to wait for the harvest. We want to plant seeds in the morning and harvest mature fruit in the afternoon. But God's work of change, in us and in others, is a process. We want change to be an event. So we speak in haste and apply human pressure in the forms of guilt and ultimatums. As a result, we complicate problems, and whatever solutions we enjoy prove to be temporary and cosmetic. Patience is being willing to wait even when that means enduring difficulty. And patience means not only waiting, but waiting **calmly**. Impatience is revealed by the anger that grows with each passing minute. Patience waits without giving in to impulsive words or actions.
6. **Forbearance.** Forbearance is patience under pressure. The hardest time to exercise patience is when we are being provoked. Forbearance means refraining from retaliation, holding back in the face of provocation. Peter in **1 Peter 2:23** says this of Christ: “When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” What an example! Notice that Christ's forbearance grew in the soil of an active trust in the justice of the Father.
7. **Forgiveness.** When I have been sinned against, I must renounce my feelings of anger and bitterness and my desire for vengeance. This prepares me to forgive when the person confesses the sin and asks for forgiveness. In this face-to-face encounter, I free the person from the fault and from any need for payment. As sinners, we dare not receive the forgiveness of others while we ourselves struggle to forgive. (See the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18).
8. **Love.** This is the ultimate quality, the virtue that holds all the others together. It is the fundamental ingredient of redemption, and it must be the fundamental character of our ministry to one another. Love means the willingness to sacrifice personal position, possessions, desires, and needs for the good of another. It is a willingness to wait, work, suffer, and give for the benefit of another. Love means being willing to lay down my life for another.
9. **Peace.** This is not an absence of conflict or strife, but a position of heart that shapes ministry. The peace to which we are called is the peace **of Christ.** This is what must rule our hearts rather than the situational and relational “what-ifs” that so often control us.

Often when parents discover that their teenager has lied to them, gone somewhere forbidden or skipped school, they let their minds run wild, conceiving every possible worst case scenario. (What else are they doing that I don't know about? Are there drugs involved? What other lies have they been telling me? How often have they missed school?) Rather than recognizing that the uncovering of their child’s sin is the result of God's presence and love, their words are shaped by fear, come across as accusations, and do not lead to the change needed. The mistake was to let communication flow from the fear of circumstances rather than the peace of Christ. Peace is an inner rest, contentment, security, and hope that stems from an active trust in the presence, power, rule, and grace of Christ. It is a habit of daily rest in Christ. It comes from looking at life from the vantage point of who God is and what he is doing as Lord and Redeemer.

1. **Thankfulness.** We live in an age of rights and entitlement. An age of “I deserve…<abc>. But if we remember what the gospel says about who we are and what we really deserve, it should not be difficult to live and speak out of a thankful heart! Thankfulness is a spirit of gratitude for gifts and graces that we could not achieve or earn. It reflects on awareness of the incredible mercy I continue to receive from the Lord's hand. I'm called to speak out of this kind of heart.

These character qualities are the “clothing” we are to put on as God's instruments of redemption. There are two things to say about this list.

First, we must humbly confess that we fall far short of the standard held out here. It simply is not humanly achievable! We must cry out for the mercy and strength of God, who is at work within us even as we pray.

Second, it is vital to understand what Paul is actually telling us to “wear.” He is saying, “Put on Christ!” This is what this list is about – Christ. Paul is saying, “Take on the character of Christ as you speak to one another. Incarnate Christ in your personal ministry to others in the same way that he incarnated the Father during his earthly ministry. Bring the glory of Christ with you as you minister. He is your only hope of change. Confront one another, not just with human words, human wisdom and human arguments. Confront one another with the presence and glory of Christ. Reinforce the reality that he is here and active. Be a window to his glory!”

This means letting go of any hope that **we** can produce change. You and I **don't** produce change in others; it is always the result of God's power and grace at work. So we let go of human demands. We don't try to impress people with how much we know or how much we've experienced. We don't try to force change by manipulation. We don't seek to get results with a loud voice or inflammatory words. We won't bribe or make under-handed deals. We won't seek to get responses by guilt, condemnation, or judgment. We don't trust in our airtight arguments. We recognize that if these things could bring about lasting change to the human heart, Christ would never have come to suffer and die. The most important encounter in personal ministry is not people's encounter with us, but their encounter with Him. We are simply called to set up that encounter.

So we prepare ourselves for personal ministry by clothing ourselves with Christ and coming armed with the truths of Scripture. When these things are in place, we are ready to speak redemptively.

**The Final Step of Repentance: Change**

There's a simple repentance principle that must be remembered: **Change has not taken place, until change has taken place.** 🙂 Repentance is a change of heart that leads to a radical change in your life, in its relationships and daily situations. Since it is out of the heart that the mouth speaks, heart change will always lead to communication change. A heart submitted to Christ will produce Christ-like talk. Repentance is not only about saying no to ungodliness, but also about living self-controlled upright, and godly lives. We learn from **Ephesians 4:22-24** that repentance always involves “put off” and “put on.”

So what causes a person to pursue the character of Christ? What makes us long to be conformed to his image? Many struggling husbands and wives have a firm grasp on what the Scriptures teach about marriage, but have serious marital problems because they lack the character of Christ. Their biblical knowledge doesn't serve them well, because their hearts aren't conformed to Christ. In fact, in many of these relationships, biblical knowledge is used as a weapon in the marital war. Have you ever asked yourself why Christ-like attitudes are missing in people who profess to be believers and are active in their local church?

Peter addresses this issue in his second letter. Someone please **READ 2 Peter 1:3-9**. Peter tells us that there will be people who know the Lord but whose lives are “ineffective and unproductive.” Their lives do not produce the harvest of good fruit that you would expect in the life of a believer. What has gone wrong? Well, Peter says that these people are missing the essential qualities of character (of Christ-likeness) that produce a good harvest (that is faith, goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love). This leaves us with yet another question: Why would a believer not diligently pursue these things? Peter answers, “If anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.”

Peter says that when you and I forget who we are, when we forget the magnitude of our sin and the glories of God's forgiveness, we will quit pursuing all that we have found in Christ. When you forget your sin and his forgiveness, you lose sight of the fact that apart from him, no good thing dwells in you. You begin to think of yourself as not being so bad, maybe even pretty good, on the whole. Your sins of talk start to look insignificant. You don't look at yourself, as Paul did near the end of his ministry, as the “worst” of sinners, as he says in **1 Timothy 1:15**. You lose your sense of gospel identity, and in so doing, any urgency for pursuing Christ.

At the beginning of this passage, Peter says two significant things about our identity as children of God. First, he wants us to know that our greatest problem is not evil without, but evil within. Christ came to save us, not just from the temptations of this fallen world, but from ourselves! He came so that we could “participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.” We needed rescue, not only from the corruption of the world, but from the evil desires **of our own hearts** that make us susceptible to (and part of) this corruption. We needed to be saved from ourselves! The way that seemed right to us was death. We were enslaved to the cravings of the sinful nature. Our condition was so desperate, in fact, that Scripture says that no good thing could be found in us!

It would seem that many believers lose sight of this, and this may include you or me this morning. We are prone to see ourselves as basically good and this perception radically affects our pursuit of Christ, as well as the way we respond to the sin of others. (See Luke 18:9-14, which is Christ’s parable of the Pharisee in the tax collector.)

It also powerfully affects how we view our problems of the tongue. The tongue that James calls a “world of evil” simply does not seem that bad. However, people who understand the gospel not only rejoice in the deliverance from evil desires they have already experienced, but they sense their ongoing need for deliverance so that they can continue to live for him and not for themselves. They are not satisfied just with being saved; they long to stand before God, holy and blameless, to the praise of his glory. When this gospel identity grips your heart, you will not minimize your failures in communication. You will hunger to speak in a way that is honouring to Christ. Peter's second Point, balances out the message.

The gospel is not just about the magnitude of our sin, but about the overwhelming provisions of grace found in Christ. Peter says that we have been given “everything we need for life and godliness.” Godliness means taking on the character of the Lord in my everyday life and relationships. Peter says, “Don't you know that the poverty of your sin has been overwhelmed by the glorious riches of his grace?” You have **everything** you need to live as God desires!

This is what produces a heart for Christ. I embrace the magnitude of my need, but also the lavishness of his provision. I want everything Christ has to offer me. I am not satisfied with a little faith or a little goodness. I am not content with occasional moments of love. I do not want to keep struggling with self-control. I am not content with gossiping only a couple of times this month. I do not relax because I don’t lash out in anger as much as I used to. I am not comfortable with the fact that I still tend to speak out of a selfish, bitter, or self-righteous heart. No, I hunger for more of what has been supplied to me in Christ!

This is the soil in which effective personal ministry grows. From here, you and I can speak out of a sense of our own need and a deep appreciation for the work of Christ. We will not see ourselves as essentially different from the person we are ministering to. We will recognize that God is not only working on them, but he is also working on us.

This is the way a repentant heart will be reflected in your talk. Your talk **can** be different! Your words **can** benefit others! Your communication **can** be God’s tool of redemption and change. So turn to him in repentance. Take time to consider. Be humble in confession. Make concrete new commitments. Apply those commitments to your daily life and relationships and watch the Lord bless you with a harvest of good fruit.

**Getting Personal: Taking Time to Examine Your Heart**

Consider the psalmist’s prayer in **READ Psalm 139:23-24.** Take this moment as a God-given opportunity to discover any “offensive ways” in your communication. Ask God to show you the heart behind your words. Ask him to reveal where you have spoken out of fear, anger, doubt, vengeance, or selfishness. Ask God to show you how your words stand in the way of what he is doing. Ask what new attitudes need to fill your heart and direct your words. Seek God's forgiveness for blaming circumstances. (For example, “I wouldn't be upset if I didn't have so much to do today!”) Or for blaming others. (“He drives me crazy!”) Or even blaming God (“If only I had known this earlier, I could have… <fill in the blank>”. Bask in the promises of forgiveness and deliverance that are found in the gospel!

Finally, commit yourself to a life of repentance. Be ready daily to go through the repentance cycle: What is it? (It’s the outline in your handouts. The 4 C’s)...

(1) **Consider.** What things in your communication does God want you to see?

(2) **Confess.** Where is God calling you to accept responsibility for your words and their consequences? What do you need to confess before God and others?

(3) **Commit.** What new heart attitudes is God calling you to take on? What new ways of speaking is he calling you to?

(4) **Change.** How do these new attitudes and actions need to be expressed in your daily life? Where must you now speak in a brand new way? Remember, God has **already** given you everything you need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3).

Let us **PRAY**.