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# [Week 13] War of Words - Choosing Your Words Manuscript

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Today we come to the final installment of this AM Seminar, *War of Words,* and as you can see on the back of your handout, today’s class is entitled *Choosing Your Words.*

Now perhaps you're wondering, *What does it mean that we need to choose our words? Should we rehearse ahead of time all the specific things we will say? That seems a little unrealistic.* If that’s what you are thinking, you are right. Choosing your words does **not** mean writing a script for every conversation. Rather, it means being redemptively intentional. If my purpose (or intention) is to function as God's representative, then I need to take time to consider what that means practically in **this** circumstance with **this** person. Much of the damage we do with our talk occurs because we have not prepared in this way.

Ephesians 4 is a simple practical guide for what it means to choose our words wisely. It can guide our discussion of the words that will encourage God's work in others. What **are** the words we must choose?

**Choosing Words of Truth**

We begin, point #1 in your handouts, by **choosing words of truth**. As Paul reminds the Ephesian Christians of their call to daily ministry, he calls them to “speak the truth in love.” We often miss the point of what Paul is saying here. Typically we see it as a call for two people to be lovingly honest with each other. Certainly this is very important, but it is not what this passage is teaching. Let's look at the content of this command. **READ** **Ephesians 4:14-15**.

Notice that Paul is not focusing on the danger of **dishonesty**, but the danger of **falsehood**. He wants the church in Ephesus to have the functional stability that only the truth of God can give. Paul recognizes that the enemy is a schemer who works to unsettle God's people with the conflicting, ever-changing winds of falsehood. His call here is not for a formal theology class, but for the doctrines of Scripture to shape the way we think about everyday events. His concern is that we would be mature enough to choose words of truth, and that we would be more zealous to communicate biblical truth than our own perspectives and opinions.

God has given us his truth so that it would make sense out of life for us. He knew that we would never properly understand life on our own. He also knew that in this fallen world, there would be a din of voices, all vying for our hearts, all considering the same set of facts, yet each giving them a very different meaning. God's Word was given to cut through all the confusion and exegete life for us. It is vital that we speak biblical truth to one another daily. As we do, we will mature in Christ.

If this is our commitment, there are several questions we need to ask ourselves regularly.

1. **What truths of scripture (whether doctrines or themes, commands, principles, perspectives, metaphors, etc.) interpret and explain this situation?** This first question is important, because we have seen in an earlier class that we do not respond to life based on the facts of a given situation, but on our interpretation of those facts. Therefore, we must be careful to interpret things biblically and help others do the same.
2. **What does God want to show this person about himself, his love and grace, his will, and his truth?** If God is in each situation as an ever-present, helping Redeemer, then the situation reveals things about him. The problem in any situation is not that God is absent or inactive but that we tend to be blind to his presence and work. We are often like the servant of Elijah who was terrified as the enemy surrounded them. Don’t you love the way Elisha spoke to his fear? He said “Those who are with us, are more than those who are with them.” Then he prayed, “O LORD, open his eyes so he may see.” When the servant looked again, he saw the hills full of celestial horses and chariots of fire. You can read more about that in 2 Kings 6:8-23.

People often say, “I don't understand why God isn't working in my life. Why doesn't he answer my prayers? Why doesn't he help me?” These questions reflect blindness to the Lord's presence and work. We need to help others see the Lord and their situation with biblical eyes. And we need to do this in humility, with an awareness of our own spiritual blindness and similar need.

1. **What does God want to show this person about himself?** Situations of life not only reveal the Lord, but they reveal much about us as well. God uses these moments so that we would not be tricked by the deceitfulness of sin, but would see ourselves with biblical clarity. The truth of biblical self-evaluation is a painful gift we all need. It is the kind of “wound” that a faithful friend will give (Proverbs 27:6). To help people see themselves clearly, we need to hold up the mirror of God's word before them. What **we** think of them is unimportant; what Scripture reveals about them is true and essential. We want to be used by God to knock down a few more bricks off their wall of self-deception, recognizing that this is a process and not a one-time event. We can be thankful for the opportunity to make a little more progress.
2. **What does God want to show this person about others?** Our view of others is also distorted by sin. We need to help people bring biblical clarity to the way they think about other people.
3. **What is God calling this person to do?** We want to lead people to joyfully do his will in their specific situations. What is God's agenda for this person? What is he calling him or her to think, desire, and do?
4. **How can I best help this person to understand these things?** When we think practically, we think methodologically. Finger-pointing lectures are counterproductive. So is the recitation of biblical platitudes unexplained and unapplied. Most “if I were you” talk is counterproductive. What we want to do first is to incarnate the wonderful love of the Lord that we represent. We want people to see **him**, to rest in him and follow him.

Next, we want to build a bridge of understanding between the truths of scripture and the realities of the particular situation. How can we best build that bridge? What questions can we ask? What passages of scripture would be helpful? What stories can we tell? What examples would give understanding? What do we know about this person that would help us make wise choices here? (Jesus was a master at this. So even just taking time to read through the narratives of Jesus' interactions with others is very helpful.) We want to choose words of truth, but this means being more than honest, it means being distinctively biblical in the way we respond to others.

**Choosing Words of Love**

Next, we are to choose words of love. Paul qualifies his call to speak words of truth by reminding us that this truth must be spoken in love. No qualifier could be more important. Truth that is not spoken in love ceases to be truth because it becomes distorted by human impatience, bitterness, and anger.

Being committed to speaking the truth in love means being committed to keeping truth untainted by the passions and desires of the sinful nature. It means being committed to be part of what the Spirit is seeking to do in another person's life. I am more committed to his work than to my own desires. I am willing to die to self so that in my speaking I may live for him. There are no more practical directions for choosing words of love than Paul’s definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13. Could someone please **READ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.**

The call to this standard is found all over the New Testament. Before his death, Jesus' final words to his disciples were a “new command” to love one another as he had loved them (John 13:34-35). This love would identify them as his disciples. It can also be found in Romans 12:9-21 in the call to sincere love in the face of evil. We see it in Ephesians 4:2 as Paul calls us to “be completely, humble, and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” This standard is held up for us in Philippians 2:1-4, where we are told to do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility, consider others better than yourselves,” and in Colossians 3:12-13, where Paul says, “Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another…”

Listen to the talk that goes on in your home. How much of it is impatient and unkind? How often are words spoken out of selfishness and personal desire? How easily do outbursts of anger occur? How often do we bring up past wrongs? How do we fail to communicate hope? How do we fail to protect? How often do our words carry threats that we have “had it” and are about to quit? Stop and listen, and you will see how much we need to hold our talk to this standard of love, and how often the truth we profess to speak has been distorted by our sin.

It is time for many of us to confess that we have not known the way of love. Our words have hindered, not helped, what the Lord is seeking to do. We have been controlled by the passions and desires of the sinful nature and failed to represent Christ's character. We need to cry out for grace to speak loving words as his ambassadors.

**Choosing Words of Restraint**

Number three, choosing words of restraint. One of the most significant yet neglected biblical character qualities is self-control. So much of our trouble with talk has to do with our failure in this area. Words are spoken that should never have been uttered. They're spoken at the wrong time, in the wrong place, or with emotions that are raging out of control. Words are spoken when silence would have been a more godly, loving choice. They are more driven by personal desire and demand than the purposes of God or the needs of others. The problem? A lack of self-control, the internal restraint system that reflects the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul says it this way: “You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you” (that's Romans 8:9). Self-control is a fruit of his work. We no longer need to be led around by the cravings of the sinful nature. This surely includes our talk!

As a practical act of faith in the Spirit's work within us, we need to be committed not only to words of truth and love, but also to words of restraint. Such words flow from the self-control that the Spirit has given us. Paul has important things to say in Ephesians 4 about words of restraint. Someone please **READ Ephesians 4:25-27**.

Paul is saying, “When you speak, exercise, the self-control that belongs to you as a child of God. Don't give in to the pull of the sinful nature's passions and desires. You have been made new in Christ. Here is a place to live out that newness. Speak words of restraint in the face of provocation.” According to Paul, what does this restraint look like?

1. First, **words of restraint are honest**. Paul says it plainly, “Put off falsehood and speak truthfully.” This is the only way of love. Whenever I am dishonest, I am loving myself more than God or others. Dishonesty occurs when we look out for ourselves first. I want your respect or acceptance, so I trim the truth to hide my faults. I want your trust and confidence, so I am dishonest about my failings. I find confrontation distasteful, so I avoid issues that lead to conflict. There are things I want from you, so I tweak the details to my advantage. I do not want the embarrassment of confessing wrong to you, so I cast past events in a light that is favourable to me. I do not want you to know that I failed you, so I concoct some acceptable excuse. Truth is the casualty when I love myself more than I love you.

We need to recognize how powerful our desires are for self-protection, for ease and comfort, for vindication, for acceptance and approval, for love. How much we want to be the centre of attention, to live free of conflict, and to have our desires and dreams fulfilled!

But speaking the truth means exercising self-control over this powerful draw to self-love. It means that I will not sacrifice personal truth for personal ease. I will not buy what I want with the currency of falsehood. Instead, I will exercise the gift of self-control over the desires of my sinful nature, placing myself in God's capable hands, speaking honest words, no matter what the consequences may be. Words of restraint are self-controlled in honesty.

Of course such relational honesty must also meet the demands of love that we considered earlier. Often, what we call “honest” words are far from restrained words of love. Instead, they are vengeful weapons in an ever-escalating destructive war of words. They never build up because they are meant to tear down. They are hurled at someone viewed as the enemy. Their goal is never to help, but to win the relational war. This kind of “honesty” could not be further from what Paul calls us to here.

1. Secondly, **words of restraint are not controlled by anger**. There is no place where Paul's confidence in Christ’s indwelling power is more obvious than here. He actually believes that we can exercise restraint in moments of anger! In the place where the Devil is often given a huge foothold, Paul believes that his wicked work can be thwarted, and the Lord's work can be done. Paul assumes that it is possible to be angry without sin. Not all anger is sinful, But Paul's counsel is this: “In these moments of powerful emotion, when you feel as if you've lost all control, exercise the internal restraint you have been given as a child of God.”

How tempting it is to give in to thoughts of helplessness, forgetting the indwelling presence of the Spirit! Consider the Christian mother who is in a screaming match with her teenage son when the phone rings. She turns from what appeared to be an out of control verbal barrage and answers the phone with a smiling “Hel-lo-o.” She has chosen, for selfish reasons, to exercise the self-control that had been possible all along. She had also chosen, before the phone rang, to give in to the passions and desires of the sinful nature, in her argument with her son. We are confronted here with the power Christ has given us to speak as he has called us to speak. Cling to him! The restraint we need is found in him; it is not a technique acquired in a communication course.

Paul alludes to two typical but opposite anger reactions that call for self-control. First, some of us are tempted to **blow up** when we are angry, venting raging emotions and letting words fly without any control. Again and again, those who fall in this category need to learn to say to themselves: “No! Stop! Wait. Pray. Think. Speak,” thus exercising the self-control we have been given in Christ.

The opposite tendency is to **clam up** or go quiet. Some of us find flight much more natural and comfortable than fight. You may tend to hold on to your anger. You tend to stew and replay the videotape of a hurtful scene over and over in your mind, getting more angry and bitter with each repetition. Some of you are very skilled at punishing others with your silence. You too have given way to the passions and desires of this sinful nature. You, too, have failed to exercise the self-control that is yours in Christ. You need to resist the urge to run away. You need to stay on the scene, you need to speak loving words of truth to your neighbour. You likewise need to say: “No! Stop! Wait. Pray. Think. Speak,” before you give in to the temptation to run away.

To you, Paul would say, “Don't ever let the sun set on your anger.” When we allow negative emotions to grow and grow, we give the Devil an opportunity to do his work. What is the Devil's work? It is deception, division, and destruction. He lurks, waiting to seize any opportunity to turn our anger into something more destructive and deadly. He works to change our anger into a grudge, into poisonous bitterness, into a stubborn refusal to forgive, and into ugly thoughts of vengeance. He nurtures these seeds into thorns of broken relationships, defensiveness, cynicism, and doubt. So, Paul says, “Be aware of the work of the Devil before you speak your first word. Settle matters quickly. Don't give him any ground on which to stand. Do everything you can to thwart his work.”

Does the way we handle our anger give room for the Devil? What is our tendency? Is it to **blow up** or to **clam up**? What changes do we need to make in the way we deal with anger? What kinds of things make us angry? What do they reveal about the true treasures of our hearts? Has a “created thing” become more important than the Creator (as in Romans 1:25)?

Praise God for the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit (see Ephesians 3:14-20)! Because of him, we can exercise control over things that once controlled us.

**Choosing Words of Grace**

Next, **choosing words of grace**. Perhaps this is the highest goal for talk within the body of Christ – that our words would be conduits of the life-giving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here we really do focus on being part of what God is doing in the lives of others. Here we die to the hopes, dreams, and desires of self so that his purposes may reign. Here we view our relationships from the vantage point of ambassadors. What does this mean? It means recognizing that our relationships do not belong to us. People do not exist for our happiness and contentment; rather, God has appointed us to faithfully communicate his powerful love for them.

Let's look at Paul's words as he calls us to walk in a way that gives grace. Someone please **READ Ephesians 4:29-30**. Paul emphasises five elements of talk that is full of grace.

1. **Be unshakably committed to wholesome talk**. When Paul says, “Let no unwholesome talk come from your mouth,” he is not just talking about cursing, swearing, or vulgar four-letter words. In fact, to think of this passage this way grossly minimizes its intent. Paul has something much more redemptively revolutionary in mind. For Paul unwholesome talk is **me-centred** talk that has no higher purpose than my own wants, dreams, desires, and demands. Unwholesome words flow from a heart that is controlled by present, personal, earthly desire. They are spoken because they please me and accomplish my goals. They are an attempt to get me what I want, without reference to the lordship of Christ or my call to speak as his ambassador.

Each of us needs to face how powerful the war of desire is in our hearts – how easy it is to have our words shaped by no higher purpose than our own pleasure. We need to recognize how often we speak as if we were totally unaware of the Lord, his work, and his call to be instruments of grace.

What, then, is wholesome talk? It is **other-oriented** communication that is rooted in the existence, love, mercy, grace, and calling of the Lord. It submits to his plan, speaks up to his standard, and uses words unselfishly. It finds meaning and joy in being used by God as he works in others.

Wholesome talk is also other-oriented in the way it has the needs of others as its focus. Words are specifically spoken for the benefit of those who listen. Wholesome talk flows from a heart that loves God above all else and one's neighbour as oneself. We will never talk this way if our hearts are filled with our own desires, goals, demands, and needs.

Only when we entrust ourselves into the Lord's sovereign care are we free to speak this way. In our own selfishness, doubt, and fear, we want to take control with our talk, making sure we get the things our hearts are set upon. (We say things like “I've just got to have this job.” or “She has to know how much she hurt me!” or “I'll teach him to respect me if it's the last thing I do!” or “If I don't win this argument things will only get worse.” and so on.) Wholesome talk submits both to the call of God and the need of our neighbour.

1. Number two, **Consider the person to whom you are talking.** We see that in the phrase, “...only what is helpful for building others up.” Paul is saying something revolutionary here. You should only speak things that consider how our listeners need to be built up.

To whom are we speaking? Is it a man, woman, boy, or girl? Is it someone our own age, younger, or older? Is it a long time friend, a casual acquaintance, or a virtual stranger? Is it a family member, a distant relative, or a neighbour? Is the person a believer, a seeker, or lost? What is his or her knowledge and experience of the truths of Scripture? How receptive is this person to my ministry? How do the answers to these questions guide me in what to say?

1. Number three, **consider the problem you are being called to address**. We see that in the phrase “...for building others up according to their needs.” To consider the problem means to ask, What is the need of the moment? What gift of grace is needed? How can I speak as an instrument of that grace?

Is there some specific sin that needs to be lovingly confronted? Is a work of peacemaking needed because there is disunity and division? Is there spiritual blindness? A loss of hope? Are there pockets of doubt about God? Is there the confusion of many counselors and conflicting advice? Is there fear, anxiety, and dread? Is there anger, malice, bitterness and vengeance? Is there a lack of biblical knowledge, wisdom and insight? Are there patterns of direct rebellion against God? Is there selfishness, pride, or self-righteousness that needs to be faced? Is there an unwillingness to accept responsibility? Is there a need for thanksgiving, praise, and worship?

Having the right agenda makes a critical difference in communication. So often parents, for example, enter the rooms of their children with a **punitive** rather than a **ministry** agenda. They do little more than point out wrong (usually infected with their own anger and hurt) and announce punishment. They neglect to ask the essential question, that is, what does God want to do in the heart of my child through me? Attention to this principle alone would result in radical changes in our relationships!

1. Number four, **consider the process**. We see this in the words. “...that it may give grace to those who listen.” Paul says in Colossians 4:6, “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” God's goal for communication is grace; that is, that our words would be of specific spiritual benefit to those who hear. This is not just a “don't do” passage, but more powerfully a “do” passage. God does not want us to stand sheepishly by, in fear that we would say the wrong thing. No, we are called to exercise the courage of faith, to think and speak decisively as agents of the King who rules every relationship and every situation. We must always keep the unseen world of spiritual realities in view and talk in a way that produces a harvest of spiritual fruit in those who hear us.

When we have focused on God's goal of grace (that is, spiritual benefit), we need to ask what the best way is to reach it. What is the best way, t the best place, and the best time to say what needs to be said so that this person will benefit as God has planned?

Often parents lecture their children in an attempt to get them to see the wrong they have done. The problem is that this is the wrong process. As the parents are lecturing, the child is doing two things: 1) silently defending, excusing, and arguing in his or her mind, and 2) anxiously waiting for the “conversation” to be over. Perhaps, you've even heard your child say at the end of one of your lectures, “Are you done yet?” These are not exactly words of repentance! If I have prepared myself by considering the best process of communication, I will enter the room knowing that what my teenager needs is the grace of conviction and confession. I want to speak to my child in a way that would lead him or her to confession. Perhaps this means it is better to ask open-ended questions that enable the child to examine the situation, his or her thoughts and motives, and his or her behaviour than it is to tell him or her what I think. I don't just want him or her to agree with me; I want him or her to see themselves accurately in the mirror of the word of God. I do not want him or her to do business with me, but with God.

In every situation I need to ask, What is the best way for my words to accomplish God's goal of grace? This answer will be different according to the various situations and people involved.

1. Number five, **don't let your speech hinder the Holy Spirit's work**. We see that in the words “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” What is the primary work of the Holy Spirit? To make us holy. This progressive, lifelong work of sanctification is ongoing in every situation and relationship. He **is** working in “all things” for our good, so that we would be conformed to the image of the Son. It is a terrible thing when our selfish, unwholesome talk gets in the way!

This is why Paul reminds us that God sealed us for the day of redemption. A seal is a sign of ownership. From the moment of our new birth, we no longer belong to ourselves. Neither do our words. Paul repeats this principle in 1 Corinthians 6:19: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honour God with your body.” And, I would add, with your talk.

God is saying, “I own you and I have chosen you to be part of my work of holiness in the lives of others. Don't get in the way!” To avoid this, we need to completely rid our talk of bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. These are all evidences of a heart controlled by personal desires and demands, of a heart that has taken ownership of our lives away from God. When we act this way, we need to remember that we have already been bought and sealed by God.

**Choosing Words of Forgiveness**

Next, **choosing words of forgiveness**. There is no call of Christ more difficult than the call to forgive others as he has forgiven us.

Would someone please **READ Ephesians 4:32 - 5:2**.

Words of forgiveness involve several things.

1. **Greet the sin of others with judicial forgiveness.** Judicial forgiveness is a step of heart preparation, whereby I covenant with God to let go of the offence the person has committed against me and I entrust him or her to the Lord's work of conviction and justice. Peter says 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” (that’s 1 Peter 2:23). Christ did not retaliate (verbally or otherwise) because he had a lively and practical trust in his Father. This teaches me that forgiving the people who have sinned against me is always the fruit of faith in God. Trust in God moves my heart from thoughts of vengeance to thoughts of reconciliation, from plans of judgment to purposes of love. All this prepares me for the next step of forgiveness.
2. **Greet the sin of others with relational forgiveness.** Relational forgiveness differs from judicial forgiveness in that it cannot be offered until the person asks for it. The problem for many of us is that because we have not dealt with the heart issue of judicial forgiveness, we are completely unprepared to offer relational forgiveness when someone comes seeking it. We are still angry and harboring thoughts of vengeance. The last thing we want to do is forgive the person we think needs to be punished.

These two aspects of forgiveness are so important in the Christian life! Sinners will surround us until we leave this world. There will seldom be a day when we are not sinned against in some way. From the surface wound of someone’s thoughtlessness toward us, to the deep, stabbing wounds of horrible abuse, sinners sin against one another. But there is another thing that is true. Sinners tend to respond sinfully to being sinned against. This is why forgiveness is so vitally important. It is not just for the other person, but for our good as well. Otherwise, our hearts will be controlled by anger, bitterness, and vengeance, giving the Devil an opportunity to do his cruel work.

Scripture is clear that it makes no sense to rejoice in the amazing forgiveness we have received in Christ if we refuse to forgive others (see Matthew 18:21-35). Scripture is clear that committing myself to forgive means being willing to do it over and over again – maybe even several times a day with the same person (see Luke 17:1-6)! Finally, God's word stresses that forgiveness should not be taken for granted, but that we must **speak** unmistakable words of forgiveness to one another. Our model of forgiveness is the Lord, who does not assume that we will understand that he has forgiven us. He declares it over and over again in his Word. Relational forgiveness always means **speaking** words of forgiveness to the offender.

It is not helpful to say, “That's okay” or “It's not a problem” to a person who has been convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit and has come to seek our forgiveness. The Lord has already convinced the person that what he or she did was **not** okay. What he or she needs is the gift of forgiveness from you to put his or her heart at rest. In this situation, we need to say, “I forgive you and I have already committed myself never to bring this issue up to myself, to you, or to others.” These words do two things: they block the work of the enemy and they promote the work of sanctification and reconciliation that the Holy Spirit has already begun.

Our failure to speak clear words of forgiveness to someone who has wronged us may be the most common way we hinder the Spirit's work and give the Devil an opportunity. Words of forgiveness do more than just heal human relationships; they promote God's work of conforming us to Christ.

1. Number three, **greet the sin of others with words of blessing**. To forgive doesn't mean that I am willing once again to barely tolerate your presence in my life. Forgiveness is active. It replaces hatred with love. It replaces malice with compassion, bitterness with joy, desires for vengeance with desires for blessing. When the Lord forgives, he doesn't merely tolerate us back into fellowship with him. No, he showers us with his blessing. He offers us new mercies every morning. He fills our cup to overflowing! Genuine words of forgiveness will always lead to words of blessing.

Here, once more, we are called to follow the example of the Lord. God does not only accept us into his family, but as he lovingly works in us and through us, he **motivates** us with lovingly and liberally spoken words of blessing. **He** blesses us with words that caress our souls like salve on a wound. When we are wronged, we need to look for opportunities to speak words of blessing to one another. These are words of love, comfort, grace, patience, gentleness, and kindness, words of peace and encouragement. They pour water on the fires of anger. They are used by God to quiet the storms of conflict. They submit to his call to bless those who have mistreated us, who have done evil to us (Luke 6:27). They recognize that we defeat evil by overcoming evil with good in action and words (see Romans 12:9-21). They bring us to our knees as we admit, once again, that only in this Lord's strength can we speak this way. Consider how many opportunities we have given the enemy by responding to the sins of others with irritation, impatience, accusations, and threats. No wonder we are unprepared to respond in a godly manner when more serious offences are laid at our feet!

Perhaps, we're talking about the “faithful in little, faithful in much” principle. Minor offences are God's training ground for us, so that we can learn to deal with sin God's way. Then we will be prepared to do and say what is right when a major offence comes. Our words will promote the work of the Spirit and give no room for the devil to do his deceitful, destructive work.

This brings us to the end of our 13-week series on the War of Words. It began with a lie in the Garden and it still rages on. The damage can be seen in our offices, kitchens, sitting rooms and cars, but the battle isn't really fought there. Battles of the tongue are really battles of the heart. What controls the heart will control the tongue. The tongue can set “the whole course of life on fire,” or it can be used to “give grace to the ones who hear.” It can viciously tear down or lovingly build up. It can condemn or give life. It can greet sin with love and forgiveness or with hatred and revenge. It can submit to the lordship of Christ or live under the control of the passions and desires of the sinful nature. It can pursue a lifestyle of ministry, or a lifestyle of self-love, manipulating others to meet personal desires and expectations. It can be a fount of truth or a polluted stream of falsehood. It can create peace or cause war. It can curse, or it can praise.

In it all, the tongue will serve the master to which the heart is already committed. It is time for us to submit to the Lord's claim on our tongues, as our King and Redeemer. More than ever before,

we need to be committed to speak for him.

As we do, we will learn to choose words of truth, love, restraint, grace and forgiveness, even in the face of provocation. We will get excited about the grandeur of our calling as children of God. It's amazing that God would choose us to be members of his family! It is beyond amazing that he would call us to be his ambassadors to represent him on earth, to communicate his loving appeal to a world enslaved to self.

The war of words is only won when God rules our hearts so that we gladly and consistently speak for him. May God help us, so that this world of evil will be transformed into a world of redemptive good. May he win the war for our hearts so that the battleground of words becomes a garden of good fruit, where the seeds of peace produce a lasting harvest of righteousness (James 3:18).

**A Final Assessment**

1. What have you learnt about the thoughts and motives of your heart?
2. What have you learnt about your communication struggles? (marital, parental, friendship, family, fellow church members, etc.)
3. Where is God calling you to repentance? What is he calling you to put off? What is he calling you to put on?
4. What specific opportunities is God giving you to be part of what he is doing in the lives of others?
5. What promises of the gospel encourage you as you answer God's call to change?