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# [Week 1] War of Words - When God Speaks Manuscript

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# Introduction

This content for this AM Seminar is adapted from the book *War of Words* by Paul Tripp, helping us examine something that sets us apart from the rest of creation, something we do repeatedly every day. We talk. "Talk" seems so normal, so ordinary, so harmless. Yet there are a few things we do that are more important. Underneath the normality of our talking is a great struggle, a war of words that we fight every day. Who hasn't been hurt by the words of another? Who hasn't regretted something they said? The purpose of this seminar:

1. Is NOT to teach us new techniques and skills for effective communication; there are many courses that you can take for that. Neither is it about how we can be politically correct, or how we can use words to be on the right side of people and win their favor; Rather, the purpose of this seminar is to address the root from which our words find their source: the human heart. There is a battle for our hearts and we will look at how this great battle is the reason for our struggle with words.
2. Not only will we examine this battle, we’ll also look at God’s plan for our talk and his grace that enables it.
3. We will be considering how the gospel transforms the way we communicate. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word, is the only hope for our words. In our war of words, he is the one who gives us the victory.

Notice the Outline of the course at the back of the handout. (It is divided into three sections)

# Theme (Weeks 1-4): Talk is not Cheap

And so, for the next 4 weeks of this seminar, we will get to address the first objective of the course. The aim is to have a vivid picture of the battle for our hearts in the war of words. Therefore the lenses/ glasses through which we will consider the magnitude of this battle is by examining the importance of talk or speech, hence the theme that is highlighted as the second point in the handout, *Talk is Not Cheap.* The key verse to underscore this theme is Proverbs 18:21 which you see in your handout: **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”** I know some of us have heard this verse misused as a proof text that we can speak things into existence; we can declare “life” into existence just like God. No, far from it! The principle here is that speech has the power to do good or harm. Words are consequential. They are consequential to the point that they can be fashioned as a weapon to kill or as an instrument to bring healing and give life.

For those of you who are just joining us, we’ve said in the introduction that no matter where you live, no matter what you do every day, there is one thing that you do all day long. You talk. From the first *“Is it time to get up already?”* to the final *“Good night, I gotta get some sleep,”* you talk. In the bedroom, in the bathroom, in the corridor, in the kitchen, in the car, at the shop, in the office, at your place of work, you talk.

To your spouse, to your children, to your friends, to your family, to your neighbours, to your fellow workers. You talk. It is what human beings do almost without interruption and often without a thought about how important it is to human life. The ability to communicate is one of the things that separates us from the rest of creation.

We are people and we talk. We need to recognise how wordy our lives actually are. Talk seems so normal. So ordinary so unimportant, so harmless. Yet underneath the “ordinaryness” of speech is a great struggle within our hearts. A war of words that we fight every day.

To bring this struggle closer home, listen to some familiar ways we talk about our struggle with words:

“I never thought when we were getting together that he would talk to me the way he does now!”

“I can't believe what I'm hearing when my son talks to me.”

“She hung up on me right in the middle of a sentence.”

“My parents never talk to me unless I'm in trouble.”

“He only talks to me nicely when he wants something.”

“He talks so much, it's hard to get a word in.”

“I'm not comfortable with the way she talks to me about other people.”

“It seems like we never have enough time to talk.”

“He talked for a long time but I don't have a clue what he was trying to say.”

“Why do we always end up in an argument?”

“What happened? We seemed to be so close and now we hardly ever talk.”

“I feel like I spend all my time breaking up my kids' arguments!”

“Yes, he asked for my forgiveness but I'm having a hard time letting go of the hurt. What he said was so cruel.”

“I wish our family could go through an entire day without someone yelling.”

“I don't know why I waste my time talking. It doesn't seem to make any difference.”

“We'll never get to the bottom of things if everyone keeps talking at once!”

“She always has to have the last word.”

“He talks so sweetly to me when we're in public.”

“Sometimes I think it would be better if we quit talking all together.”

We’ve all heard sentiments along these lines. They capture the struggle with words that all of us have. We have all been hurt by the words of another. We have all regretted something we said. We have all had to referee an argument at some point in our lives. Some of us have never been in a fist fight in their entire lives and yet the words we have spoken strike a harder blow to those around us than a jab to the face. Sometimes we prefer to be slapped rather than to be slandered. And so none of us can claim that their words are *always* appropriate to the situation and they are *always* kindly spoken.

It is this world of talk – this world of struggle with speech that this seminar is about. If you're able to say, “I have no problem with my words,” then you don't need to attend this seminar any longer. But if you recognise that there is still a war of words going on in your heart and you recognise that there is still room for growth in your world of talk, then this seminar is for you.

The purpose of this seminar is not just to hold out the lofty standard God has set for us and then remind us how far we all fall short of it. No, this seminar is meant to be one of **hope**. It's about hope for **change**, change that is possible because of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the Word who is the only hope for our words! In him alone do we find victory in our own war of words.

So do not be discouraged by the distance you see between where God wants you to be and where you are. **The gospel can radically change the way we understand and solve our communication problems**. And so, you are not stuck in this war. There is a way out. There is hope. A gospel-shaped hope: God, our (man’s) sin, Christ, Response.

This seminar more specifically will focus on how the gospel impacts our words in the following ways:

1. The gospel highlights how God has a wonderful plan for our words that is far better than any plan we could come up with on our own.
2. The gospel shows how sin has radically altered our agenda for our words, resulting in much hurt, confusion and chaos.
3. The gospel affirms that it is only in Christ that we find the grace that provides all we need to speak as God intended us to speak.
4. The gospel testifies how the Word of God (Bible) plainly and simply teaches us how to get from where we are to where God wants us to be.

Throughout this seminar, we will consider God's plan, our sin, his grace, and Scripture's map. My prayer is that this will lead each one of us to:

* a new awareness of God's design for us as his children.
* new insight into our personal struggle with sin.
* renewed reliance on God's abundant grace
* a practical biblical wisdom that results in a more God-honoring people-benefiting life of talk.

***[ANY QUESTIONS on this struggle in our hearts?]***

Now having considered in general terms how talk is not cheap, we will consider positively how valuable they are. Our third point on the handout…

# Words Have Value

## God Speaks

So where do words find their primary value? Let us consider **Genesis 1:1-3** (have someone read)

Did you notice something significant in verse 3? God speaks! Herein is the answer to the question. Words find their value simply in the fact that God speaks. The other two points on our hand out, (*People Speak* and *Words Interpret*) find their relevance in this first point. God has given significance to speech… The fact that God chose to break the void of darkness by uttering words rather than snapping His fingers demonstrates the value He has given to words. The fact that the Second Person of the Trinity, The Son of God, is referred to as the Word in the beginning goes to point out the origin of the worth of words. There in the beginning, in Genesis 1:3 was not just the beginning of the world, it was the beginning of words. And so words are powerful, important and significant. It was meant to be that way.

In addition to this, God designed for communication to have a specific purpose and plan. Sin distorts this plan and this is why God’s people struggle with speech. We live in a time where God is progressively redeeming us from sin and its effects. And so, we who have known the Lord and have been made alive with Him find ourselves in between a growing knowledge of the purpose and plan of God in our communication and the sin in our heart that actively opposes it. Most communication books focus on techniques and skills without any recognition that our struggle with words goes much deeper. The war of words has its roots in the Garden of Eden where sin first entered and corrupted the heart of man against God.

And so what purpose and plan did God attach to words in the Garden?

1. Words are a conduit of communicating His sovereign will. Notice the commands of creation that God gives in Genesis 1. God uses words to bring into existence that which He desires. This is a prerogative of God alone. This is not something we should aspire to. It is something to be in awe of about God. What makes the words of God this powerful is not the words in and of themselves. Rather it is His sovereignty behind the words that give power to His words. Therefore, anyone who imagines that Prov 18:21 (power of the tongue verse) means that they are able to decree into existence their own desires should think again. 2025 will not be “your year” because you said so. Neither will you secure that job through the power of your confession. No. God alone reserves the right to have His words come to pass, for even words were created do His bidding.
2. The second thing we notice in Genesis 1 concerning words is that God used words to communicate to man. Notice **Gen 1 verse 28 - 30** (have someone read)... What you just heard are the first words ever heard by human beings. God chose to reveal Himself to man through words they could understand! Let the wonder of this grip you. The infinite and almighty One makes himself knowable and understandable through human language! From the moment of creation, God is not distant and aloof. He is not hiding in silence. He comes near and uses words to reveal himself and explain everything else. God is not just a God who *does*, he is a God who *speaks* – powerfully, elaborately, consistently, comprehensively, and clearly to his people. Each phase of his work is marked by his words. He does not leave his people without a witness.

Notice also that God did not only reveal Himself and His will to Adam and Eve, He gave them their identity and purpose through words they could understand. Therefore, not only do we get to know God through His words, we get to know ourselves through His Word.

And so what can we take away from the fact that words are first and foremost a conduit of communicating God’s will and secondly how God has chosen to communicate with human beings? We can take away the reality that God’s Word (the Bible) ought to be revered. It ought to be hallowed. It ought to be respected. It ought to be obeyed. God’s words are absolute.

We can also take away that we can expect God’s Word to be understood. This is why we gather every Sunday to hear His Word preached. The height of God’s majesty and grandeur is brought down to us through the ladder of Words. This is why we are gathering this coming Saturday to hear the entire Gospel of Mark read to us. His word is essential for purpose, direction and meaning; His words are Life. Jesus said that man lives not by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Therefore, winning the war of words begins by acknowledging that God’s Word is Supreme over all creation including ourselves.

Isaiah 40 is just a great example of how God’s greatness is made known to us through Words. (read verse 9 -31)

Here is human language at its highest, functioning as the window through which God is seen. God's words, not only define him, they define his creation as well. They give identity, meaning and purpose to all God has created. We only know *ourselves* when we listen to the words he has spoken about us. God tells us who we are, defines what we are to do and the way we are to do it. We could not discover any of these things on our own. The only hope for Adam and Eve was that God would speak to them, giving them identity and purpose, and making sense out of the world in which they had been placed.

God's words set boundaries and give freedom. His words create life and bring death. God created talk and his first words to Adam and Eve demonstrate its significance. Words are not cheap. Words reveal, define, explain and shape.

Not only does God speak…

## People Speak

As we look at communication from the vantage point of creation, we also need to notice that Adam and Eve talk. Perhaps this point seems too obvious to bear mentioning, but we should not let its significance slip by us. Adam and Eve's ability to communicate in words made them **(1) unique in all creation**. They could take their thoughts, desires, and emotions and share them with each other. They were like God in that sense; they could talk! By giving them this ability, God was setting the shape of their lives.

There's nothing we depend on more than our ability to give and receive communication. Whether it's a quiet conversation over coffee, or an anxious conversation in a busy airport; whether it is defending why we are late for a curfew, or explaining why we didn't complete the task at work, we talk. In teaching our children or intervening in an argument, in a lengthy parliamentary debate or an intense discussion with a friend, people talk. In a quiet “good night,” in words of challenging another in sports, in romantic words of love, in words of correction and rebuke, in words of anger and irritation, people talk. In the confusing noise of a bus station in Nairobi, with the voices of children walking home from school in Kiambu, people talk.

**(2) Words direct our existence and our relationships.** They shape our observations and define our experiences. We really come to know other people through conversation. We want to be alone when we have had too many words and we feel alone when it has been a while since anyone has spoken to us.

In creating us with the ability to talk, God has not only set us apart from the rest of creation, but he has determined the nature of our lives and relationships. Want to learn? Listen and talk. Want to have a relationship? Listen and talk. Want to get a job? Listen and talk. Want to worship? Listen and talk. Want to parent your children? Listen and talk. Want to contribute to the body of Christ? Listen and talk. People communicate; it's the nature of our existence. Words affect all the other things we do as human beings. God created our talk and gave it its value.

In Genesis 1, there was a simplicity and beauty to the world of human communication. There was no communication struggle, no war of words. Everything that was spoken reflected the glory of God. There were no arguments and lies, no words of hate, no impatient, irritated retorts. There was no yelling, cursing or condemnation. There were no words spoken in pride, no deceptive, manipulative words, no selfish words. There were only true words, kindly and lovingly spoken, and thus no need for a seminar like this. Every word met the standard of God's example and design.

Sadly, the world of Genesis 1 is long gone. The wonderful gift of communication has become the source of much sin and suffering. Too often, human beings speak and ignore God's design, destroying what he has made. As we look back with wonder at Genesis 1, we need to look forward to the day when the war of words will be over, when we will be with God and be like him, speaking, only as he has designed, forever.

## Words Interpret

There's one more thing we can learn from Genesis 1 about words, and that is that *words define, explain, and interpret.* Even though Adam and Eve were perfect people living in a perfect world in a perfect relationship with God, they still needed God to talk to them. Their world needed definition. They needed to understand themselves and to understand life. Everything needed to be interpreted, and for this Adam and Eve were dependent on God. They could not figure things out on their own. **Whatever discoveries they would make about the world and their lives would need to be explained and defined by the words of God. Words interpret. Human communication, like God’s, is all about organising, interpreting and explaining the world around us.**

From the silly little explanations that come from the mouths of children (“Mommy, I know how balloons work.”) to the searching questions of teenagers (“Why is it so important to be celibate before marriage?”) to the frustrated questions of the adult (“Why does it seem as if I work constantly, yet there is never enough money to make ends meet?”), people use words to communicate the meaning they have assigned to things.

Little children exhaust their parents with a thousand “whys” a week because they want to understand their world. Teenagers spend endless hours on the phone discussing the events of the day with their friends. The old man sits in the park with his friend looking back at life, wondering aloud what it was all about. We talk because we want to know; in order to know, we must talk. Talk is not cheap because interpretation is not cheap. The way we interpret life determines how we will respond to it.

# (Conclusion) Genesis 1 and Our Talk

What then should we take away from our consideration of communication in Genesis 1?

1. First, our words belong to the Lord. He is the Great Speaker. He is the creator of words and therefore we do not own them. The wonder, the significance, the glory of human communication has its roots in *his* glory and in his decision to talk with us and allow us to talk with him and others. Through speech God has unlocked the doors of truth about Himself and His creation to us. The only reason we understand anything is because he has spoken. Words belong to God. But he has lent them to us so that we might know him and be used by him.
2. Secondly, because words do not belong to us, Every word we speak must be up to God's standard and according to his design. They should echo the Great Speaker and reflect his glory. When we lose sight of this, our words lose their only shelter from difficulty. Talk was created by God for *his* purpose. Our words belong to him and we will be judged for carelessly speaking. *Matthew 12:36 [36] I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, (ESV)*
3. Words, therefore, have value. Though ordinary, they are not!

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## Self-Evaluation

On your handout, you’ll find questions for us to evaluate ourselves as we embark on this study:

1. Does your talk with others lead to biblical problem solving?
2. Does your talk have a “stand together” or a “me against him/her” posture?
3. Do your words encourage others to be open/honest about their thoughts and feelings?
4. Are you approachable and teachable or are you defensive and self-protective when talking with others?
5. Is your communication healthy in the principal relationships in your life?
   * parent-child
   * husband-wife
   * extended family
   * sibling relationships
   * employer-employee
   * Friend-friend
   * body of Christ
   * neighbour-neighbour
6. Does your talk encourage faith and personal spiritual growth in those around you?
7. Do you talk with others to develop relationships with them, or do you only talk to solve problems during times of trouble?
8. Do you speak humble and honest words of confession when you sin and words of sincere forgiveness when others sin against you?
9. Do your words reflect a willingness to serve others or a demand that they serve you?
10. As you face the struggles in your talk, do you do so with a recognition of the gospel – God's forgiveness, his enabling grace and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit?

Let me encourage each of us to spend some time today or this week in honest self-examination, using these questions as a starting point. As you identify sin in your life, confess it to God and to others, and commit yourself to the work of change as we continue working through this study. Spend some time in prayer, that the Lord would be kind to us as a church, to use this study to equip us in this battle. Next week, we'll be looking at Lesson 2: When Satan Speaks

**Q&A**