



When Talking to God and Others

3 Ways to Use Your Words

Colossians 4:2-6

Aaron Lee | Youth Worship | December 17, 2023

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Introduction

How does God want us to use our words? One of my resolutions in the new year is to be more careful with my words. I use my words as weapons. They are quick and calculating. They can also be blunt and give a beating. They can break a spirit, they cut and kill, they bring death. There must be a better way to use my words.

One temptation is to just not say anything at all. I can just keep my mouth shut. But I don't think that's God's calling for the Christian. The Psalmist talks about how even the sky has something to say:

*The heavens **declare** the glory of God, and the expanse **proclaims** the work of his hands. Day after day they pour out **speech**; night after night they **communicate** knowledge. (Psalm 19:1-2)*

The sky has speech. Creation communicates. So if the Psalmist says the world has words, surely those who are new creations in Christ should speak. How does God want us to use our words?

Context

As we come near the end of Colossians, Paul continues the theme of Christ reigning supreme — and he applies it to our tongues. There's a way to use our words that shows Christ as King. After a somewhat difficult letter, Paul leaves encouraging instructions for living as a Christian.



1. Prayer

The first way to use your words is through prayer.

*Continue steadfastly in **prayer**, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.
(Colossians 4:2)*

Faithful, Watchful, Thankful

Paul gives us a general call to pray. He tells us to continue steadfastly. This means that we should always be praying. We should be in constant communication with the Lord. Being watchful is to remain alert. It means to stay awake. It means to be aware so you can ask of God. The word thankful appeared in Colossians before, when Paul was talking about receiving Christ and being rooted in him. The disposition of the Christian is to be thankful because of Christ. It is to be cognizant of what he has done for you on the cross, it is to be sure of his sovereign sustaining grace, and it is to remember that your reward is in Heaven. John Piper helpfully summarizes this type of praying as being faithful, watchful, and thankful.

Practice Purposeful Prayer

So, will you resolve to practice purposeful prayer? You might find it challenging to pray. You rush through praying before meals. You try to pray in bed but you end up falling asleep. Your prayer life doesn't have to be stale. You can change it up. There are many ways to pray. You can try posturing yourself, so you're actually on your knees. You can try praying out loud. You can time yourself as you pray, giving yourself a goal and a limit. You can write out your prayers. The thing about writing your prayers is that it does take practice – it is a discipline. And it helps you focus on what you're actually saying to God. You won't repeat yourself or run around in circles. I like to write prayer poems. They give clarity to my thoughts and help me direct my heart towards God. Use your words to pray, and resolve to practice purposeful prayer.



2. Proclamation

The second way to use your words is through proclamation.

*At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, **to declare the mystery of Christ**, on account of which I am in prison—that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. (Colossians 4:3-4)*

Declaring Christ, Direct and Clear

The proclamation we're talking about is declaring the Gospel. Preaching is proclamation. It's proclaiming the Good News. In this instance, and particularly for Paul, he asks that God may open a door for the word. Paul was put in prison for doing this. He wants to take the Gospel to people who haven't heard it before. The door is closed, and he's asking that God would open the door. He's asking for specific opportunities. And he also asks that Christians in the church would pray for him to make the message clear. The message cannot be muddy. It needs to be plain. It needs to be direct. The way I would summarize this is that we can use our words by directly and clearly declaring Christ. And before we move on to our application, notice that Paul is actually asking his readers to pray for him — the one who is putting himself out there to preach and far away from home. For us today, that would mean you praying for those who go out of their way, for those who go out to share the Gospel.

Praying for Preachers and Missionaries

So, will you resolve to pray for preachers and missionaries? I've told you before that I like to pray for our church leaders on Tuesdays. Let me give you some specific praying points, especially when you pray for preachers. Pray that your preachers would be accurate. We want to get the Biblical text right. Pray that they would be bold. We don't want to be timid or shy when it comes to the truths of Scripture. Pray that they will be clear. We don't want to be confusing. Pray that they would be direct. We don't want to walk around the hard topics of sin or God's sovereignty. Pray that they would be engaging. We want to connect with your head as well as your heart. Pray that they will be faithful. Not just in learning the text, but in living it out. Pray that they would be God-focused. We don't want to be distracted or even captured by the world. Pray that they would be hopeful. We want to remember that God is good at all times. Pray that they would be inspired by the Holy Spirit. We want to speak and serve in the strength that God supplies. Pray that they would be Jesus-centered. We preach Christ crucified, and we don't want to platform or promote ourselves. Use your words to proclaim, and resolve to pray for preachers and missionaries.



3. Personal Conversation

The third way to use your words is through personal conversation.

*Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may **know how you ought to answer each person.** (Colossians 4:5-6)*

Wise, Gracious, Seasoned

The phrase “each person” is why I label this as personal conversation. These are people who are outsiders to the Gospel. They are non-Christians. Unbelievers. Like how Paul seeks specific opportunities to share the Good News, he wants us to make the best use of the time we have in our daily interactions with others. Walking in wisdom means to see that God gives us moments to share his message. Our speech should be gracious, not cruel and unkind, and it should be seasoned with salt. It should be tasty. It should be flavorful. Your testimony and the way you talk should be attractive and appetizing to outsiders of the Gospel.

Steward Your Speech

So, will you resolve to steward your speech? To steward means to take care, to be responsible, and to look after something that is not yours. I would argue that if we as Christians belong to Christ — so must our words. *War of Words* by Paul Tripp is a book about how our words must belong to Christ. Tripp says that there is a war going on between two kingdoms – the kingdom of self and the kingdom of Christ. He gives an illustration about what we would hear if we recorded your speech throughout the day. Would it be representative of Christ? Tripp calls us to be ambassadors – to represent Christ with our words. When I thought about this, I thought that being an ambassador means I need a crowd. I need followers, as if I’m sort of brand ambassador for Christ. But that’s not true. An ambassador, in Biblical terms, is a messenger. And when I think about it, some of the most impactful words that have been said to me have been through one-on-one conversations, quiet and calm. Use your words through personal conversation, and resolve to steward your speech.

The Gospel

I want us to zoom out for a second. These are very specific instructions on how to use our words. But the point is not to give you a list of rules to follow. The motivation needs to come from Christ. Jesus is the reason for the way we use our words. And the big issue is not really what comes out of our mouths, but what's inside of our hearts. The Lord said so himself that our words reveal what's inside of us:

*And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. **All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.**" (Mark 7:20-23)*

Even though you might not say it or act upon it, we all have evil thoughts. We are all sinners. We might try to make ourselves look like good people on the outside, but inside we are unclean. We sin with our speech, we go against God with our actions, and we all fall short of his glory. But God sent his Son, the Word of God, to earth — and this is what we celebrate during the Christmas season. It's interesting to note that the Gospel of John does not contain a traditional Christmas story. It doesn't begin with the birth of Jesus. Instead, it echoes Genesis 1:1 — "In the beginning God..." — and John 1:1 says "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God." John highlights Jesus being the Son of God, and he makes it explicit:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.
(John 1:14)

Jesus, the Word of God, came to earth as a baby boy. He lived a life that obeyed and pleased God perfectly. When he died on the cross, he took the punishment of God's wrath and anger towards those who have sinned against him. He resurrected, coming back to life again, proving that he has defeated Satan, sin, and death. If you believe this, you can have life with God here on earth and forever in Heaven. Christmas is good, but it is incomplete. We wait for Christ to come again. And until he does, those of us who already believe must continue to share the Good News that God forgives sinners if you would come to him. This is the free gift of God, and I offer it to you if you would accept it today.

Big Idea

The first way to use your words is through prayer. So, will you resolve to practice purposeful prayer? The second way to use your words is through proclamation. So, will you resolve to pray for preachers and missionaries? The third way to use your words is through personal conversation. So, will you resolve to steward your speech?

Here is our big idea: Christ must reign supreme over our words as we talk to God and others.

Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning again for our conclusion. I asked you: How does God want us to use our words? Let's revisit that Psalm again:

*The heavens **declare** the glory of God, and the expanse **proclaims** the work of his hands. Day after day they pour out **speech**; night after night they **communicate** knowledge. (Psalm 19:1-2)*

The sky is speaking. But at the end of the Psalm, the Psalmist moves from looking at the heavens to looking at his own heart:

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be **acceptable** to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)*

The Psalmist knows that while the heavens declare the glory of God, his own heart falls short of this. His own heart falls short of God's glory. So he asks that both his mouth and his heart be acceptable. Acceptable. This is a word of worship. He's saying: God, would you please accept the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart as worship to you. The heavens have always given God glory, and he wants to do the same.

My words are often used as weapons, but I hope to use them more for worship. Christ must reign supreme over our words as we talk to God and others. I know I won't be perfect. But when my words fail, when they break a spirit, when they cut and kill, when they bring death — Christ has the words of eternal life. Jesus just has to say the word and people are healed. We have a Rock and Redeemer who can resurrect with his word. And his word will not return empty.



When Talking to God and Others

With humble happy hearts
We come to you in prayer
A father who is kind and true
And comforts us with care
We ask for open doors
For strength in those that preach
And missionaries overseas
To people groups unreached
With wise and gracious words
Lord help us as we talk
To share and speak of Christ the King
The word made flesh — our God

References

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 - Look at the Book: Colossians by John Piper
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