

Lord of Our Speech



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Psalm 9; Acts 1:8; 1 Cor. 2:1-5; Eph. 4:15, 29; Col. 4:6; James 3:5-13; 4:11.*

Memory Text: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (*Colossians 4:6, NKJV*).

Key Thought: We are called to use our speech for the glory of our Lord and the blessing of others.

The gift of speech can be a tremendous blessing or a terrible curse. When we enter into a newness of life under the lordship of Christ, Jesus invites us to let Him be the Lord of our speech. Used wisely, our speech can bring glory to God and blessing to those around us. Misused, our speech can wreak havoc. Corrupt communication causes pain to the heart of God and damage to the lives of those within our circle of influence.

Ellen White reminds us that “the faculty of speech is a precious gift, and if the noblest of our faculties, reason, is set to the task of knowing God, then the gift of speech may become a means of grace to others, a channel through which the knowledge of God may be communicated.”—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, p. 277.

In this week's study, we will explore some practical ways in which we can use our speech for the glory of God and the blessing of others. The same appeal that the apostle Paul gave to young Timothy is given to each one of us today: “[Be] an example in speech” (*1 Tim. 4:12, NRSV*).

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 30.*

Speaking Words of Praise to the Lord

It is the highest privilege for members of the human family to speak words of praise to the Lord. The psalms are full of exhortations to praise the Lord. In Psalm 9 the psalmist David declares, “I will praise You, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High” (*Ps. 9:1, 2, NKJV*).

As much as possible, read the last five psalms. What was it about the Lord that caused the psalmist to utter so much praise?

Throughout the Scriptures, we find the testimonies of individuals who used their gift of speech to express praises to God. For example, when the secret of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was revealed to Daniel, the young prophet was quick to offer praise to the Lord (*see Dan. 2:20-23*). This is seen over and over again in the Bible.

What spiritual advantages come to us by taking time to praise the Lord, whether verbally or in writing?

There’s power in words that impacts not only those who hear or read those words but those who speak or write them. Through our own acts of praising the Lord for His goodness, His mercy, His divine acts in our behalf, we only strengthen our faith and appreciation of the Lord’s goodness, mercy, and divine acts in our behalf. Thinking about these things is also important, but there’s something about expressing them, either through spoken or written words, that increases their impact on us. No wonder, then, that the Scriptures have whole sections praising the Lord.

Write your own psalm of praise to the Lord for whatever you feel impressed to praise Him for, and then read it aloud. See for yourself how such expressions can impact you only for the good.

Speaking With Grace *(Col. 4:6).*

Study the apostle Paul's counsel to the believers in Colosse, as recorded in Colossians 4:6. What does it mean to "let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt" (*NKJV*)? Keeping in mind, too, that salt back then was used as a preservative, what do you think "seasoned with salt" means in this context?

Nowhere in the Scriptures do we find the suggestion that grace can originate in the hearts of human beings. Grace always originates in the heart of God. Grace cannot be worked up. It must be prayed down from heaven. We can speak with grace only if our lives are filled with grace. How does that happen? Through a daily living connection with the Source of all grace, through understanding how grace has been poured out upon us. When we keep this great truth before us, that we have been recipients of grace, that we have received from God, through Christ, what we absolutely do not deserve—then we can begin to speak with grace to others.

Read the story in John 8:1-11 of the adulterous woman who was cast at the feet of Jesus. How does the interaction of Jesus with the woman and with her accusers illustrate one way by which one can speak with grace?

We often face situations where the natural tendency would be to speak sharp words, words that don't reflect grace but anger, judgment, or retaliation. Oftentimes, we might be in a position where a firm word is needed, but even then it's how we say it, the manner and the tone in which we say it, that can either reflect grace or our own selfish nature. Even when we have been mistreated, the Lord desires that we respond with words of grace rather than words of rebuke or retaliation. Christ's whole passion provides us with a perfect example of speaking words of grace, even to those who mistreat us.

Think about the last time your words were graceless. Though all you can do is ask for forgiveness for that past act, what can you do now to help prevent yourself from making a similar mistake next time?

Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph. 4:15).

As we suggested yesterday, there are times when we might need to speak words of rebuke, counsel, or admonition to others.

Read the following texts: **Matthew 16:23; 23:13-39; John 14:8, 9; John 18:19-23.** What kind of tone do you think Jesus used when speaking these words? How would that tone reflect the principles of love and grace He Himself embodied?

“Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul. He did not censure human weakness. He fearlessly denounced hypocrisy, unbelief, and iniquity, but tears were in His voice as He uttered His scathing rebukes. He wept over Jerusalem, the city He loved, that refused to receive Him, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. They rejected Him, the Saviour, but He regarded them with pitying tenderness, and sorrow so deep that it broke His heart. Every soul was precious in His eyes. While He always bore Himself with divine dignity, He bowed with tenderest regard to every member of the family of God. In all men He saw fallen souls whom it was His mission to save.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 353.

Read **Ephesians 4:15.** How do you understand what it means to speak the “truth” in love? Is “truth” still “truth” if spoken in any other way but love?

Unfortunately, there are times when we fail to speak the truth in love. We seem to easily fall into one of two traps. Some are quick to speak the truth but fail to speak it in love. Others replace love with a sentimentalism that hinders their ability to speak the truth at all.

So often it's not what we say but how we say it that can make all the difference in the world. Stand before a mirror, or before others, and practice saying the same words, once in a loving tone, once in a harsh, unkind tone. You will be shocked that, though the words themselves are the same, their meanings will seem so different. There's a powerful lesson here for us, if we will learn it.

Speaking in the Power of the Spirit

(Acts 1:8, 1 Cor. 2:1-5).

When someone refers to speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit, we generally think of preaching. The testimony of Scripture is clear: It is God's intention that all preaching be delivered in the power of the Spirit.

Study the promise of Jesus in Acts 1:8 and the testimony of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. What is the secret of powerful preaching?

Powerful preaching is not the product of human wisdom or eloquence. Rather, it is the testimony of one who has entered into a personal, intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The same Holy Spirit who placed His seal of approval upon the preaching of Paul will also enable humble servants of Christ in our generation to speak with a demonstration of divine power.

Speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit, however, is not limited to preaching. God intends that all our speech be delivered with a demonstration of divine power. Indeed, each one of us who lives in newness of life under the lordship of Christ is given the privilege and responsibility of speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit. Divine power, however, doesn't necessarily mean just eloquence (*see Exod. 4:10, 1 Cor. 2:1*). If we are speaking in the Spirit, our words, our tone, our message will reflect the attributes of the Spirit that are made manifest in lives touched by the Spirit. Our words will reflect the kind of people we are; they will reflect whether we are walking after the flesh or after the Spirit.

Also, we must never confuse grand elocution with speaking in the Spirit. Many of history's worst tyrants were men whose speech was very powerful and very effective; one, though, would hardly say they were speaking in the Spirit.

What principles do the following texts give us that help us know whether we, or someone else, is speaking under the influence of the Holy Spirit? 1 Cor. 12:1, 2; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 5:9, 10; 6:17-19. How can you apply these principles in your own life and speech?

Avoiding Corrupt Communication (Eph. 4:29).

The apostle Paul admonished the believers in Ephesus to avoid corrupt communication. Unfortunately, many of us live in a social environment where corrupt communication is considered normal. People frequently take the name of the Lord in vain, use profane language, and make rude or suggestive comments. Even as Christians, if we allow ourselves to be exposed continuously to this kind of language, sooner or later it will influence us to where we, ourselves, are more likely to use these words. We must constantly be on guard.

In the light of Paul's comment in Ephesians 4:29, how would you define "corrupt communication"? Why is it not limited only to what is known as profanity? Consider also Exod. 20:16, Prov. 10:18, Eph. 4:31, James 3:5-13, 4:11.

Corrupt communication tears down. The Greek word used in 1 Timothy 3:11, translated "slanderers" (KJV) or "malicious talkers" (NIV), is *diabolos*, one of the names used for the enemy, Satan. When people use corrupt communication, they are actually doing Satan's work. What a testimony to the power that is inherent in our words!

In contrast, the apostle Paul appeals to believers to use speech that is "good for necessary edification" (Eph. 4:29, NKJV). The word used here literally means "building up." One translation puts it this way: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen" (Eph. 4:29, NIV).

Our words, then, have a powerful influence, either for good or for evil, for either building up others in faith or for tearing them down. Who hasn't experienced themselves the power of words, either for good or for evil, either for edification or for creating doubt? How crucial that we watch not just our words but the tone and manner in which we express them. Indeed, even the right words in the wrong spirit also can be considered "corrupt communication."

How much "corrupt communication" emanates from your own lips? We're not talking just about curse words; we're talking about untruths, slander, exaggeration, being judgmental, and so forth. Take a hard look at yourself: What things might you need to change regarding your speech?

Further Study: The gift of silence. The wise man Solomon reminds us that there is a time to speak and also “a time to keep silence” (*Eccles. 3:7, NKJV*). When Jesus Christ is Lord of your speech, you will not only speak for the glory of God and the blessing of others; you will also discern when it is time to keep silent.

Note: In the light of this week’s study, consider to what extent you are allowing Jesus Christ to be Lord of your speech. Spend time reading Scripture with the intention to be more attentive to God’s words than to your own. Use a journal to record your thoughts. When you conclude your time of silence, you might find that you are more aware of the gift of speech.

“I wish we could have a pledge in our hearts that we would not utter one word against a brother or a sister. . . . Do not gossip about them and make remarks about their character, but go to them in the love of Jesus and the love of the truth and try to help them.”—Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 289.

Discussion Questions:

1 Jesus was described as a speaker of “gracious words” (*Luke 4:22, NKJV*). This may be a reference to both the content of His speech and also the way He spoke. What narratives in the Gospels illustrate the gracious speech of Jesus? What can we learn from these examples?

2 We tend to think of speech as only an individual thing. But what about us as a church? How do we, as a church, use the power of speech? Why, in many ways, is our responsibility as a church regarding our words more important than as individuals?

3 What counsel would you give to an individual who works in an environment where corrupt communication is considered normal? When should a person stay to be salt and light? When is it wise to leave?

One Small Miracle

Karen Glassford

I am a third-generation Adventist and a missionary kid. I had lived in the mission field, so when I accepted an invitation to go to India to conduct evangelism, I did not think that much in India could surprise me. I was prepared for the poverty I would find, but I wasn't prepared to witness the miracles God performed before my eyes and in my arms—miracles that overwhelmed me with gratitude to God, who can do anything.

Several hundred villagers came to our evangelistic meetings. They came to watch the video about the life of Jesus, to listen to the Bible stories, and to learn how to live healthier lives. I watched their faces as they realized that there is a God who loves them and wants to spend eternity with them; to learn of a future far different from the troubled world they knew. Their eyes filled with joy as they realized that life has a purpose, that hope is real.

One night as I waited to preach, someone pulled on my scarf. I turned to look into the desperate eyes of a woman holding a baby girl. The infant was clawing the air, struggling to breathe. I touched her fevered body and could hear her little chest rattling loudly. The baby's face was turning blue, and the mother's eyes begged me to help her. I placed my hand on the child and prayed, "Dear Lord, help this baby to breathe. Ease her suffering and save her!" The child seemed to calm down a little, but she still fought for every breath. I continued praying, "Lord, this little Hindu baby does not know You, but she needs Your healing touch."

The child's life hung in the balance. My faith seemed so small, but again I prayed, "Lord, for the sake of this child, her family, her village, please heal her now, so that all will know that You are all powerful and that You care about them."

Instantly the baby stopped struggling and fell into a peaceful sleep. Her hot little body cooled, and the rattle in her chest quieted as air flowed freely into her lungs.

I stood transfixed, overwhelmed at what I had just witnessed. As I had held that tiny child, the great God of the universe who had parted seas and calmed storms, had stepped down into that dusty place and touched her. I was holding a miracle in my arms.

Many other miracles marked the meetings that we held in India. Hearts were changed, souls were gathered into God's kingdom. But this one small life will forever stand as a testimony to the compassion of our mighty God.

Karen Glassford is a homemaker and mother living in California.