

# Gracious Words

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[ 0 : 00 ] Ed, I'm really thankful for you stepping up and being an elder here at this church. I really appreciate you. Felicia, thank you for singing so beautifully.

I really appreciate it. And Donna's not here. But I was going to thank her because she has some really, really helpful kids.

I'm sure they're helping out with the bake sale and stuff this morning. Henry, where's Henry? There you go. Henry, I love your jacket. It is really fashionable.

I could not pull it off. Alicia, it's really good to see you here today. I know you've just got back in your shoes, and that's really great to have you. Justin, are you here?

Justin, you're a really, really dear friend. And I love you. Yeah. Words have an amazing power.

[ 1 : 01 ] They have this power that can encourage, that can uplift, that can bring life. I know this because growing up, whenever my dad came home from work, he would look at my mother and say, I love you.

And it doesn't matter the kind of day that she had had. It doesn't matter how miserable she had been because of what me and my siblings had been doing. She couldn't help but smile. God speaks these kinds of words.

He speaks gracious words, encouraging words, life-giving words. They're all over the Bible. He speaks in creation. He says, let there be light.

And where there's darkness now, we find light. He speaks them to Abraham. He gives him a blessing. And he says, I'm going to bless you and your children, and the whole world is going to be blessed because of you. He speaks it to people like Joshua.

And he says, do not be afraid because I am going to be with you always. I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. And he says these words to people like us.

[ 2 : 07 ] He says, come if you're weary, and I will give you rest. He tells us that his grace is enough for us when we are weak that he is made strong. Words, they fill every moment of our lives from the time that we wake up in the morning until we go to sleep.

There are words coming out of our mouths. We're hearing words. There are words in the TV. There are words in our phones. We're surrounded by words. And every moment of every day is an opportunity for these words to be used to uplift, to encourage, to give life.

Our words and our tongues can also be vicious weapons. Growing up, I don't know if you heard this. I heard this a lot.

Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never hurt me. Now, I wish someone had told me that that was a lie. Because, you know, a couple of weeks ago, I was playing rugby.

I took a knock on the head, and I couldn't preach that the next day. But, you know, a couple of days later, I was fine. I'm here today. I'm standing. Everything is working. But when I was about 14 years old, somebody called me a liar.

[ 3 : 26 ] When I was 14 years old, I got into trouble at school, and I tried to cover it up. So I told some lies. And then I told some more lies to smooth around the edges so that no one would know. What I didn't realize is that my parents and my teachers are on the same team.

So eventually, my lie wasn't covered. And my dad, he talked to me, and he said, you've been lying. He said, you are a liar. Please don't become a liar. And those words have stuck in me.

To this day, I speak, and especially when I talk about important things, I try to be very, very precise. I try to give lots of clarification and context and preamble because I don't want anybody to ever call me a liar.

Words can hurt. You know, sin corrupts the words that we speak. And so, so much of the things that we say hurt.

They hurt the people that we love. They hurt people that we don't really care that much about. It's everywhere. It's at home. It's in the office. It's in the street. You know, if you have children or if you've ever been a child, you probably know something of what bullying is like and the way that those words harm.

[ 4 : 43 ] But, you know, bullying still happens when you're an adult. And we use these, our words, as weapons to, you know, establish our power and our authority over other people.

You know, we turn and we say, you know, to our spouse, I can't believe you've done that again. Or, you know, we tell our child, you know, I just wish that you were like your brother.

We go to our employees and we say, is this really what I'm paying you for? We receive hurtful words from one person and we pass them on to somebody else.

And it's not just, you know, the bad words, the four-letter words that we teach our kids not to say. But even sweet things can be designed to hurt. In the American South, people will say stuff like, bless your heart.

And what they don't mean is that they want to bless your heart. And we all do this, not just Americans. All right, we use politically correct language to mock and disparage people.

[ 5 : 52 ] And our phones, too, are our accomplices in this. And our text messages and our WhatsApps, our Snapchats. You know, it's on Facebook, it's on Twitter. Where we receive and we send hurtful words.

You know, I was having a conversation this week as I was thinking about gracious words, you know, the topic of today's sermon. And I was made aware that it's not just the words that I say that hurt.

But the words I don't say. When I don't give a loving response. When I say I forgive someone.

But, you know, my terrible poker face tells the truth that actually I haven't really forgiven. And I realize, actually, there's so many words that go in and out of our lives that are hurtful.

That never even come out of our mouth. Now, I don't know about you, but for me, I wake up and I start thinking. And I'm usually thinking different thoughts during the day. And, you know, it's a commentary on what's going on.

[ 7 : 06 ] What I think about this person or that person. Or, you know, how I'm going to get to this, navigate this solution. But there are words going on in my head all the time. And as I'm talking and looking around, sometimes I look at people and, you know, encouraging things come to mind.

And other times there are hurtful words that build up. You know, the words that come out of our mouth are not perfectly clean.

But the words that are going on in my head, in my mind, they really show the real content of my heart. You know, James warns the Christians.

He says that the tongue is like a fire that can burn down a forest. That if it's not tamed, it will do wanton destruction.

The tongue carries this immense power for destruction that it was not created for. But this is the world that we live in. There's hurt, insult, and we're all each other's enemies.

[ 8 : 06 ] We're our own enemies. And Christian or not, we play part in this battle. And we're all offenders. We're all victims to each other's words.

And I think many times the difference between a Christian and non-Christian is more a matter of style. And the substance of our talk is pretty much the same.

Now, as Christian believers, we're supposed to be different, aren't we? We're supposed to show how our lives have been transformed by God's amazing grace.

You know, being Christian is not signing on the dotted line and coming to church every now and then to, you know, top up your hell insurance. All right, being a Christian is to be the subject of a massive identity change.

From being a slave and an orphan to being the son of our king. And that should change the way that we live. But very often, our lives don't look that different from the lives around us.

[ 9 : 19 ] Now, a Christian whose life tells a different story has amazing power. In 1994, Mother Teresa was invited to the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. at the White House.

And as she spoke there, she took aim at President Bush and Vice President Gore, who at the time were big supporters for abortion.

And she gave this rousing defense of the unborn. And she showed how we ought to. She gave Christ's example, respond and love and give.

And afterwards, it was very awkward when President Clinton came up to speak. Because Mother Teresa's words were very unpolitical. And he said, it is hard to argue with a life so well lived. That morning, her words carried a lot of weight. But far more weighty than what she said was the way that she lived her life. She lived a life well lived.

[ 10 : 28 ] What would it be like if for every single one of us, when we walked around and we went about our days, people looked at us and said, these are people who are living good lives.

And this is where our sermon series comes from. You'll see it in your bulletin. It says, a life will live. And over the next couple of weeks, we'll be talking about what it means to live our lives well. What it means for our lives to be transformed, to be changed by God's grace. How it is as Christians, we can live fully in our identity as Christ's children.

So, how are we? Are we living lives well lived? Do our words show that we live our lives well? We're talking about words, so I'm going to, three steps. Hopefully, you can follow along. We'll start with, where do our words go wrong? Why do we speak ungracious words?

[ 11 : 37 ] Then we're going to figure out what gracious words are, and then try and figure out how we make that transition from not speaking gracious words to speaking gracious words.

So, where do our words go wrong? Our words, like I said, they have this amazing power to bless and to create, but also this power to hurt and betray.

James 3 tells us that our gracious words ought not to be. You know, our, he asks in verse 10 of James 3, he says, how can you curse your brother one moment and the next moment be praising God?

That's not what they're made for. Remember, the Bible begins with words. And God uses his words to give life.

He creates the sun, moon, earth, sky, plants, animals, trees. And then with his hands, he creates human beings. And the first words he speaks to them are blessing.

[ 12 : 44 ] He says, you know, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, care for it, have dominion over it. And into this beautiful creation, we see this intruder coming in.

Satan comes into this beautiful, perfect world, and he uses words not to bless and not to create, but to lie and to deceive.

He introduces words that hurt and scar and change the face of humanity. In the garden, we see that not only do words create, but they destroy.

And because of that, man is separated from God. Because of that, man's relationship with God and actually each other is broken down.

And so we can't speak to God. We can't reach him. And we can't really speak to other people because we don't know if they always have our best interests at heart.

[ 13 : 48 ] But from that moment on, gracious words and blessing are very rarely seen from human mouths. Even God's messengers, his prophets and priests, the messages they bring are tainted by their own sin and frustration.

You know, in Luke chapter 6, Jesus uses this garden analogy to talk about words. He says that, you know, the type of tree you have will show the kind of fruit that you bear.

Right? Jesus says no good tree bears bad fruit. All right? I don't know a lot about trees. I know what a coconut tree looks like. All right? Every other tree basically looks the same.

So I know that if I want to know if a mango tree makes mangoes, I need to wait for it to make mangoes. Otherwise, I'm not sure. I can't look at the leaves and tell you what kind of plant it is. But I know that if I sit under a coconut tree, it will never grow lemons and it will never grow raspberries. All right? And so if there's this problem with a tree, right, then we know it because it turns out in its fruit.

[ 15 : 05 ] Say I have a mango tree. I decide to go to Victoria Park and uproot one of the trees and I plant a mango tree there. And it starts growing. And I notice that these aren't really nice mangoes.

They're small. The seeds are big. The flesh is stringy and bland. All right? There's something wrong there.

So, you know, I might do. I might go to my tree and remove all the mangoes. But that doesn't really do anything because the tree will continue producing these disgusting mangoes.

All right? What I could do also is I could go to the Yamate market and I could buy a crate of, you know, the freshest, juiciest mangoes from the Philippines. And I'll bring them along to my tree and I'll get some tape and I'll attach them to the tree.

And from a distance, it looks great. And, you know, and I can bring my friends and say, stand here, don't get too close. But, you know, look at that beautiful mango tree. Isn't that great? But when you get closer, you see that there's duct tape holding onto it.

[16:11] And you notice after a while there's this stink because the fruit is rotting and it's dying because it's not connected to the life of the fruit. But this is how many of us deal with our words.

One of my biggest responses is not to say anything. When I feel, hear bad words coming in my heart, I decide I'm just going to shut up.

I won't say anything. It's something that I picked up from my parents. And I love them. But very often I find that not saying anything can be as hurtful as saying something.

I've been working with Henrika in the university ministry for about three years now. And if you know either of us, you know that we're very different people. Right? We agree on some things, but there are lots of things that we disagree on.

And I don't disagree well. I'm very, very bad at disagreeing. And so when she says something that I disagree with, very often my response is just to shut up.

[17:28] But that doesn't do anything. That doesn't help the situation. It creates this toxic smoke that seeps into the rest of the university ministry.

It's not loving. It's prideful. It's selfish. I end up feeling bitter and she's hurt. And we have this rotten tree.

That's me. And no matter how hard I try to remove the fruit, the tree itself is still rotting.

You know, sometimes we try and cover up our words. We say different things that we don't really mean, that aren't really true. You know, it's like spraying some clay bricks, you know, spraying them with gold paint and taking them to the bank and trying to deposit them.

You know, they'll turn you away because those words are not real. They're not true. Like the untrue words of the snake in the garden.

[18:40] Those words destroy. In the video, we saw this family. And, you know, they had hurtful words going on in the morning as they were preparing to get to church.

And they got to church and the parents, they've been around for a while, so they know that at church you're supposed to smile and look perfect. Right? No, you're not supposed to. Right? But on the kid's face, you could see what was really going on.

While their father was there praising God, you know, the six-year-old was there grumpy. Right? The words that the parents had said with their smiling faces, they weren't true words.

They weren't reflecting what was really going on. And those words hurt. Jesus, in verse 45, says some very difficult words.

Some convicting words. He says, The good person, out of his good treasure in his heart, produces good. And the evil person, out of the evil treasure, produces evil.

[19:46] For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. These are difficult words for me because it means that the words that I'm not saying in my heart that are evil, they come from me because I'm evil.

The evil things that I say are because I am evil. What Jesus is saying here is that when I snap at my sister, it's a problem with my heart, not her.

It's because I want to be right. When I keep my mouth shut, when I disagree with Henrika, it's not because she's wrong, but because of the pride in my heart.

When things don't go your way and you're yelling at waiters or you're yelling at your children. That's something in your heart.

When we feel incompetent and we take our words out on our spouses. When we speak harsh words to our friends.

[20:59] Now, some are innocent mistakes, but more often than not, they're showing this deep darkness in our hearts. What Jesus is saying is that our bad words are not the result of faulty lips, but broken hearts.

Whatever the tree is made of, that will show up in its fruit. So, what are gracious words?

What are words that we're supposed to speak? You know, on the flip side, you'll see there's some verses there from Proverbs 15, and Solomon there writes some nice, you know, little proverbs about gracious words.

You know, he says, wise words instead of foolish ramblings. You know, giving a good answer at the right time. These are gracious words. But how do we get from these gracious words when we have

rotten hearts?

You know, if what we've been talking about these past couple of weeks is true, that Jesus has freed us from our slavery, then that means that we are free from our rotten hearts, that we are free from this sin that entangled us.

[ 22 : 15 ] We are free to speak life-giving words. Unfortunately, so many of us are like fleas. Right? If you want to collect fleas from experiment, you want to keep them in somewhere you can see them.

A glass jar, for example. Right? You collect fleas, you put them in the jar, but they jump out. Fleas are very good jumpers. But if you put a lid on the jar, they won't get out.

Fairly simple. But after a couple of days, the fleas will be jumping and jumping and jumping and trying to get out, but they'll learn that they'll jump and hit something. So they stop jumping so high. So in a couple of days, you can remove the lid, and the fleas will stay inside the jar because they'll keep jumping and jumping, they'll only jump as high as the lid went. They won't jump further.

And so many of us are like that. In our Christian walk, we've been freed. The lid has been taken off. Yet we live our lives chained to this bottom of this jar where we don't live out the grace that we've received.

[ 23 : 21 ] We don't live in the freedom that God gives us. If the gospel is true, then we have an amazing freedom to speak gracious words.

We have an amazing freedom to reject the hurtful things in our hearts and choose to say loving and caring things. In Galatians 5, Paul tells these people, he says, For freedom Christ has set you free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. He says that you are children of this promise that Abraham had, that David had, that Jesus fulfilled.

So you don't have to live in sin anymore. And he does one better. He gives them something to aim at. He says, in verse 13, he says, You are called to freedom, and don't use your freedom as an opportunity for your flesh and your sinful desires.

Instead, use them to serve other people. Gracious words are not serving our flesh, our desires, responding to our fears and our inadequacies, but gracious words serve other people.

[ 24 : 47 ] How different would our words be if they weren't about us and things going our way? If they weren't about me looking good or me being right?

What if they were about serving other people? How different would my words be to Enrica when we disagree? If I truly cared about lifting her up and encouraging her?

How would my words be different to my mother or my sister when they're running late? How different would my words be to people who frustrate me?

If the end, the direction, the trajectory of my words is not me, but encouraging them? If it's not serving Alfie, but serving other people?

Our words will never be gracious if they're about us. They actually won't be gracious if they're about our idols either, whether it's work or family, because the moment that those things disappoint us, then our ungracious words come back out.

[ 26 : 07 ] Gracious words means words that point people back to Christ, that point to His grace, that show His amazing love for us.

So we know words are powerful. We know that we have this heart problem that makes ungracious words, and we know that gracious words are encouraging and lifting other people up.

So how do we get from all that to speaking gracious words? I've got four steps for you, and I really, I hate steps, because that usually means that we're fixing the problem, and not us, but these steps are different.

Because these steps are not about what we can do to change our hearts, not how we can manage our tongues better. But it's how the gospel changes it. It's how the gospel gives a new life and a new direction.

All right? Number one, believe the gospel. Right? Now, it sounds very simple, but I realize that very often, I don't believe the gospel.

[ 27 : 16 ] When my words are hurtful, when they're spiteful, when I take aim at people who aren't doing things my way, I do that because I don't believe the gospel.

I don't believe that God would ever do, show me grace. I don't believe that I deserve it. So I put other people down, so I feel worthy. You know, I need to be proven right, so I say that I can earn his salvation.

That's not true. I need to believe that God is great, so I don't have to be in control, that he's able, so I don't have to rely on myself, that he is good.

So I don't have to look elsewhere for my comfort. My new heart does not come from my work, but it comes from the work of the gospel that Jesus does.

My new heart comes from believing that before time, God chose me, and he called me to be his child, and when I was born, knowing that I would be a sinner, God gave Jesus for me.

[ 28 : 27 ] If I don't believe this, then my words are always going to be about my comfort, and me being in control, and me having things my way.

You know, if you're here and you don't believe this gospel, I want you to believe it. I want you to believe it, not just because you'll have sweet, gracious words coming from your mouth, but because in this gospel, there's life, that there's hope, that you are part of a family, and you will live with God forever.

Number two is repent. That means to turn away. Turn away from, not just our hurtful words, but our hurtful silences, from the times that we stick rotten mangoes on our tree, from the idols that serve our broken words.

Now, there's a temptation here to blame our circumstances, that, you know, things, well, you know, if things went my way, I wouldn't have said those things, or, you know, if they were on time, or, you know, if, you know, well, he deserved it, so I gave it to him.

We tend to blame our circumstances, but repentance means laying down all, all of our hurtful words, all of our ungracious words, regardless of what calls them.

[ 29 : 58 ] Right? Number one, believe the gospel. Number two, repent. Number three, run to Jesus. Run to Jesus, because he has nothing but gracious words for you. You know, when you are weighted down by the weight of your sin, he says, come to me, and I will give you rest.

You know, when you're tired and you feel like you're all out of grace to give, he says that my strength is not for you. My grace is more than enough.

Run to Jesus in every conversation, because Jesus has promised his Holy Spirit to be with you.

Romans 8 says his Spirit reminds us that we're his children, and in Galatians 5, we see that the Spirit gives us new words to say.

It gives us words of love, of joy, of peace. The Spirit works into us goodness and faithfulness and kindness and self-control.

The good words and the gracious words you speak don't come from my effort, but it comes from the Spirit working out in my life. So run to Jesus, because he's given you the Spirit through which you speak gracious words.

[ 31 : 12 ] And the last thing is to fill up on gracious words. In Luke 6, Jesus said that whatever is bubbling up in our heart will spill out of our mouths.

And so we need to fill our lives, our words, our hearts with gracious words. There's nothing that is more powerful for changing the words that we speak than the Bible.

So if you don't have a Bible, get one. If you don't, if you have one, read it. Right? Our hearts are transformed when we are filled with these gracious words.

So find people that you can discuss them with. Find people you can talk with it, study through it, join a community group. That's a great place to do that. Because when we are filled by these words, when we are filled by the words of the Bible, when we are filled with God's Holy Spirit, when we have turned away from our hurtful words, when we believe our gospel, that Jesus died so I don't have to prove myself, then we can speak gracious words.

let's pray. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I confess that I am full of ungracious words.

[ 32 : 41 ] I thank you that you have more than enough grace for me. That you have grace to cover my sin and my hurtful words.

God, I thank you that you don't leave us to work out these words by ourselves, but you give us your Holy Spirit to work in us, to transform us, to give us a new heart, to give us new words to speak.

God, we thank you and I ask that you would help us to be people who live lives well lived because of the words that we speak in you.

Amen. Amen.